The Sense of a Middle

A Study of *Tristram Shandy*

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I

"It is a history-book, Sir, . . . of what passes in a man's own mind," this is how Tristram describes John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke himself specifies his method in the Essay as a "historical, plain method." Locke's method is "historical" in the sense that its focus is exclusively on the gradual temporal process of man's acquisition of knowledge: it proposes to give an "account of the ways whereby our understandings come to attain those notions of things we have" (ibid., italics mine). Indeed, his "history-book" of human understanding abounds with ideas of "progress": man's progress from simple ideas to complex ideas, from the particular to the general, from sensory perceptions to abstract concepts, as well as from infancy to adulthood, from savage tribes to civilized nations; in a word, from ignorance to knowledge. However, this apostle of man's ascent toward knowledge also confesses that the treatise has been written so that "we may learn to content ourselves with what is attainable by us in this state" (I, 29). Man's progressive history is suddenly halted and circumscribed by man's eternal state; the "historical, plain method" has secretly yielded to an ahistorical doctrine of human nature. Locke confidently asserts at the very beginning of the Essay that "it is the understanding that sets
man above the rest of sensible beings, and gives him all the advantage and dominion which he has over them* (I. 25). Yet, he hastens to add that man’s understanding ought

to stop when it is at the utmost extent of its tether; and to sit down in a quiet ignorance of those things which, upon examination, are found to be beyond the reach of our capacities. We should not then perhaps be so forward, out of an affectation of an universal knowledge, to raise questions, and perplex ourselves and others with disputes about things to which our understandings are not suited (I. 28-9).

This is not a temporary and amendable state of things in the world; any rational “examination” shows that some things are perpetually “beyond the reach of our capacities,” to which, it is categorically asserted, “our understandings are not suited” by nature. Thus, what is at question is an inalterable state inherent in man’s nature, part of an eternal cosmic order, in which, as the epigraph to the Essay quotes from the Scripture, man is told again and again, “thou knowest not the works of God, who maketh all things.” In other words, history belongs only to man as an individual, and not as a species; it is a product of ontogeny, not phylogeny, of man. The human race remains the same in its inalienable and inalterable state for ever, against which history is at best a mere illusion or, to be more exact, a self-delusion.

The same concept of man’s eternal state is given a concise, and beautiful, expression by Alexander Pope:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of Mankind is Man.
Plac’d on this isthmus of a middle state.
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the Sceptic side,
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest,
In doubt to deem himself a God, or Beast;
In doubt his Mind or Body to prefer,
Born but to die, and reason but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
Chaos of Thought and Passion, all confus'd;
Still by himself abus'd, or disabus'd;
Created half to rise, and half to fall:
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurl'd:
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

Man is situated in a middle state between God and beast, mind and body, thought and passion, knowledge and ignorance. The fixity of man's allotted state is essential for the stability of the whole structure. Vanity and despair, then, preaches this Augustan moralist, or, in other words, a heroic aspiration toward the superior state and a voluntary degeneration toward the inferior, are but a deadly sin of desertion of one's proper place, which would inevitably create a void in the Chain of Being, thus putting the whole cosmic order in jeopardy. Locke the philosopher inhabits the same moral universe as Pope, in which now human understanding hangs in a middle state between the omniscience of God and the nescience of matter, in an epistemological middle region marked off at the lower limit by sensory perception as distinct from direct, extra-sensory comprehension, and at the upper limit by nominal as dis-
tinct from real essence. A sin in philosophy is to refuse to accept this eternal middle state of human understanding, either in the form of the philosophical vanity of scholasticism which lays claims to an unattainable universal knowledge of substance, or in the form of the philosophical despair of scepticism which fails to acknowledge the foundation of an attainable knowledge in perception and experience. Pope’s moral teaching of humble contentment in one’s allotted state in the universe, his belief that “whatever is, is right,” is a moral lesson for the philosopher as well, who should learn to “content [himself] with what is attainable by us in this state.”

However, the conflict between history and state, progress and stability, is far from being solved. Rather it gets more and more emotionally intensified as the tripartite structure of the moral universe with man in the middle converges and crystallizes into a radical, bipolar ambivalence within man himself, who is seen as a composite—a link—partaking of both superior and inferior natures at the same time. And whether man’s progress is a sacred obligation or a futile dream, there remains the fact that man is already moving in time. The history tells us that man is progressing toward a goal in knowledge, and the state reminds us that that goal is far beyond man’s reach. Within Locke himself, the philosopher’s idea of man’s perpetual progress and the moralist’s idea of man’s eternal state come closer and closer to finally merge in as another idea, reconcilable but still ambivalent: the idea of pilgrimage:

Therefore, as God has set some things in broad daylight: as he has given us some certain knowledge, though limited to a few things in comparison, probably as a taste of what [other superior]
intellectual creatures are capable of to excite in us a desire and endeavour after a better state: so, in the greatest part of our concerns, he has afforded us only the twilight, as I may so say, of probability: suitable, I presume, to that state of mediocrity and probationership he has been pleased to place us in here; wherein, to check our over-confidence and presumption, we might, by every day's experience, be made sensible of our short-sightedness and liableness to error; the sense whereof might be a constant admonition to us, to spend the days of this our pilgrimage with industry and care, in the search of greater perfection. It being highly rational to think, even were revelation silent in the case, that, as men employ those talents God has given them here, they shall accordingly receive their rewards at the close of the day, when their sun shall set, and night shall put an end to their labours (II. 360-1).

The spatial middle is now converted into a temporal middle: the "isthmus of a middle state" in the static cosmic order is now a middle state on a pilgrimage in time toward an end in "a better state" and "greater perfection." The prospect of the end? "It [is] highly rational to think" that it is near, that in the end all faithful pilgrims shall "receive their rewards" and rest in peace. The new concept of pilgrimage, however, never resolves, but only intensifies the conflict, for it does no more than transform the static ambivalence of an immobile man into the dynamic anxiety of a pilgrim forever on the way. The problem persists as before: how can man live in time his eternal state?

II

Lock's philosophy provides a structural principle for *Tristram Shandy*. The novel reflects and embodies the structure of the Lockean episte-
mological and moral universe in the framework of which human nature is conceived by Sterne. Within such a static moral universe, Sterne's characters do not overcome history, as modernist critics claim: rather, they fail to achieve it. Locke's "history-book" of the mind has turned out, paradoxically, to be an ahistorical discourse on man's eternal state. For the very same reason the "history-book" of Tristram Shandy fails to have a history, a plot. If the result of the two failed attempts is nonetheless a structure, the structure "transcends" history and presents an "eternal reality" of the mind as being *eternally conditioned* to be incapable of producing any meaningful history. Man can and must gradually raise an edifice of knowledge in time, but, however high may it be raised, it is always walled in by a cosmic architecture divinely laid down. It is this tension, philosophical and moral, between human artifacts and the divine Architecture that underlies the structure of *Tristram Shandy*.

At the center of the book is constructed a triad of human architects: Walter the intellectual, Toby the logistic, and Tristram the verbal.

Walter Shandy is a zealous system-builder, an architect of an edifice of knowledge firmly based on the foundation of reason. This rationalist maintains the traditional dichotomy between mind and body, reason and passion, and crowns the former, denouncing the latter: "the first [kind of love], which is the golden chain let down from heaven, excites to love heroic, which comprehends in it, and excites to the desire of philosophy and truth—the second, excites to desire, simply" (VIII, xxxiii); more explicitly, "a passion . . . bends down the faculties, turns all the wisdom, contemplations, operations of the soul backwards . . . which couples and equals wise men with fools, and makes us come out of our
caverns and hiding-places more like satyrs and four-footed beasts than men" (IX, xxxiii). The ideal time for him is a progressive time which ascends to knowledge, culminating into perfection: Tristram proves himself to be a legitimate heir to Walter when he says:

Thus,—thus my fellow labourers and associates in this great harvest of our learning, now ripening before our eyes; thus it is, by slow steps of casual increase, that our knowledge physical, metaphysical, physiological, polemical, nautical, mathematical, ænigmati-
cal, technical, biographical, romartical, chemical and obstercial, with fifty other branches of it, (most of 'em ending, as these do, in ical) have, for these two last centuries and more, gradually been creeping upwards towards that Akroדר of their perfections, from which, if we may form a conjecture from the advances of these last seven years, we cannot possibly be far off (I, xxii).

However, this is an ideal not to be attained in this world. Time simply does not ascend to anything, it simply does not culminate into anything. Witness the rubbles of Walter's edifices of knowledge, his systems unfinished and unfinishable, lost even before ever constructed: his lecture on the Lockean succession of ideas begun under the best possible circumstances is interrupted and "no coalition of great occasions and great men, are ever likely to restore" it again (III. xix); his promised lecture on trade is never resumed—" to the loss of much sound knowledge" (II. xiv); he fails to arrive in time to prevent an irreparable mistake in the christening of his son, even though he has tried so hard that he arrives on the scene "with nothing more than his breeches on, fastened through haste with but a single button, and that button through haste thrust only half into the button-hole" (IV. xiv);
he never manages to fix the squeaking "door-hinges" in the parlor, as those in his intellectual system, to which "his philosophy or his principles [fall] a victim" whenever the door opens (III, xxi); and finally as its crowning example, there is his Tristram-paedica, a project for a complete system of education for his son, whose usefulness, even whose reason of existence itself is ever being outlived by the growing Tristram,—a reminder that "certainly it was ordained as a scourge upon the pride of human wisdom, that the wisest of us should thus outwit ourselves, and eternally forego our purposes in the intemperate act of pursuing them" (V, xvi).

That "truth...should shut herself up in such impregnable fastness, and be so obstinate as not to surrender herself sometimes up upon the closest siege" (III, xli) is at once the cause and effect of the ruinous state Walter finds his inaccomplishable systems in. Man's artifacts, the whole edifice of man's civilization, which are to proceed gradually but steadily "upwards towards that Aevum of perfections," stand apexless among the ruins in time:

the proudest pyramid of them all, which wealth and science have erected, has lost its apex, and stands ommoltruncated in the traveller's horizon...The fairest towns that ever the sun rose upon, are now no more: the names only are left, and those (....) are falling themselves by piece-meals to decay, and in length of time will be forgotten, and involved with every thing in a perpetual night: the world itself, brother Toby, must—must come to an end (V, iii).

All which repeats the same old lesson: "remember thou art a man" (ibid.). Recall here Locke's pilgrim in his twilight region of an eternal middle state, anxious to reach an unreachable end, believing it "highly
rational" that God should reward *in the end* his unfinishable toils on his way. Or note Tristram's penetrating understanding of Walter's and Locke's plight when he says that there is just barely enough light "to serve to light us on our way in this night of our obscurity," and confesses that

I tremble to think how many thousands . . . of benighted travellers (in the learned sciences at least) must have groped and blundered on in the dark, all the night of their lives,—running their heads against posts, and knocking out their brains without ever getting to their journeys[?] end (III, the Author's Preface).

"Is it not better," Walter sometimes has to ask himself, "to be freed from cares and agues, from love and melancholy, and the other hot and cold fits of life, than like a galled traveller, who comes weary to his inn, to be bound to begin his journey afresh" again and again, endlessly? (V, iii). His ill-concealed despair even leads him to the point of denouncing humanity altogether: "The act of killing and destroying a man . . . is glorious—and the weapons by which we do it are honourable" (IX, xxxiii).

Now, Walter's discourse on the futility of man's endeavors may only be a piece of rhetoric occasioned by Bobby's death, and his denunciation of humanity is perhaps meant to be a warning against the snares of passion and lust which Toby seems on the verge of falling prey to. Yet, the fact that he is moved so violently out of his habitual calm and rationality by his son's death, and that he understands so well the dangers for Toby, is a clear indication that he himself is not immune to the maladies caused by man's sensibility and physicality, and that his beloved dichotomy between reason and passion, mind and body, is
contradicted by his own life and being. In spite of his deep awareness of the dangers of passion, "a fixed, inflexible sorrow [taketh] possession of every line of his face" (III. xxix) when he hears the news of Tristram's nose being crushed by mistake. The inflexibility of his sorrow is not, as is sometimes supposed, an ironic pointer to the inflexibility of his inhumane system-building mind: rather, it is the "inflexibility" of the natural reactions of man's heart which poses a great threat to the progressive construction of a system of knowledge. By being assailed by the disease of the mind he unintentionally refutes his own rationalism, and betrays his undeniable humanity. And yet it may be hoped that even if Walter himself as an individual is continually baffled and overthrown in his little systems and schemes, a worthy heir might take over his efforts and realize his dreams: a progress toward perfection and knowledge might be achieved, if not by an individual man, then over the generations. This possibility, however, has already been denied at the very beginning of the book. The only point of contact in intellectual inheritance—the meeting of the end of a father's journey and the beginning of a son's—is deeply buried in the physicality of man:

Now, dear Sir, what if any accident had befallen him [i.e. Walter's "Hominculus"] 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 (I,
ii).

Moreover, the physicality of human existence inevitably points toward
another human condition: time. When Mrs. Shandy asks her husband
in the bed of Tristram's conception, "Pray, my dear, . . . , have you not
forgotten to wind up the clock?" (I, i), she is pointing out the fundamental
fact that human time knows no other form of progress than a "progress"
from birth to death.

Out of the unresolved tension in the notion of human knowledge,
which is on the whole under calm control with Locke, but with Walter
is getting an emotionally charged one, a possibility of a radical shift
of viewpoint—a transvaluation—emerges. The problem remains the
same: how to live in time an eternal state. The time of progress from
ignorance to knowledge never coincides with the time of "progress"
man lives from birth to death. The vision of a goal other than death,
for instance, the perfection of knowledge or the acme of progress, is
necessary for humanizing "natural" time into a meaningful, teleological
time. But the possibility of man's actually arriving at such a goal is
categorically denied by the ahistorical, eternal cosmic order. In order
to reconcile man's progressive time with his unchangeable state, the
notion of progress is transformed, or made to degenerate, into a pilgri-
mage, in which the vision of a goal is retained but only as eternally
unattainable. The ardor of progress and the lethargy of despair are
reconciled into the anxiety of pilgrimage. However, if the end is
everally unreachable, it becomes in the end irrelevant for man. The
only life man knows is a life he lives endlessly—without the hope of
ever attaining any end other than death. And if this unfinishable process of living in time as unfinishable is the ultimate reality of human existence, any end to it, either in death or in the perfection of knowledge, would be a negation of humanity itself. Man remains himself as long as he is moving and groping in time, in his middle state between God and matter, in his twilight region between the light of omniscience and the darkness of nescience: the Αἰσχρός of perfection would be a death to man. In fact, after his distress at the “impenetrable fastness” of truth, Walter adds that “‘Tis a pity . . . that truth can only be on one side, brother Toby,—considering what ingenuity these learned men have all shewn in their solutions of [the philosophical problem of] noses” (II, xli). When the invention of a perpetual machine which unlike horses would cost and eat nothing is mooted, he says, “If I was a Prince, I would generously recom pense the scientific head which brought forth such contrivances.” but unexpectedly adds, “yet I would as peremptorily suppress the use of them” (II, xiv). And Tristram, immediately after his glorification of man’s ascent to the Αἰσχρός of knowledge, concludes by saying that

When that happens, it is so be hoped, it will put an end to all kind of writings whatsoever;—the want of all kind of writing will put an end to all kind of reading;—and that in time, As war begels poverty, poverty peace,—must in course, put an end to all kind of knowledge, - - - and then—we shall have all to begin over again; or, in other words, be exactly where we started (L, xxi).

A transvaluation has taken place. Man’s sacred obligation to proceed straight toward an end yields to the authority of the truth of man in his inability ever to arrive at his end, as he is forever moving onward
in round and round. A wheel triumphs over a straight line, over the “right line,—the path-way for Christians to walk in! . . . The emblem of moral rectitude!” (VI, xl). Tristram turns David’s malediction in the Psalms, “Make them like unto a wheel,” into a benediction:

So much motion, continues he [David], (for he was very corpulent)—is so much unquietness; and so much of rest, by the same analogy, is so much of heaven.

Now, I (being very thin) think differently; and that so much of motion, is so much of life, and so much of joy—and that to stand still, or get on but slowly, is death and the devil (VII, xiii).

Just as Walter’s abstract dichotomy of mind and body, reason and passion, is contradicted by the totality of his being, so the book’s alleged “dichotomy” and antagonism between Walter as reason and Toby as sense turns out in the end to be unreal. Locke’s notion of sense as well as reason is equally ambiguous and ambivalent, and Sterne’s characters are placed right in the middle of the philosopher’s ambivalence, now made explicit by the novelist. Walter hangs between Locke’s belief in the possibility of man’s intellectual progress and his awareness of its radical limitations; Toby hangs likewise between Locke’s conviction of the supremacy of sense as a foundation of all knowledge and his suspicion of its obfuscating irrationalities. Toby’s deviation, or freedom, from reason might enable him to explore the other modes of knowledge left unnoticed by his brother. However, this designer of a new system of knowledge has to face the same predicament as Walter has faced in trying to construct a system of knowledge. It is when Toby confronts the impossibility of constructing any system at all, and acknowledges his radical ignorance that he
finally differentiates himself from his brother, and not as a physicalist as opposed to an idealist, but as a moralist as opposed to a philosopher.

That Toby is not directly quotable as Walter seems to be a clear indication that he stands for sense as Walter for reason. The significance of his presence gradually emerges as Walter’s rationalistic system reveals itself in its humanely disastrous state, and as other characters’ new understanding turns the negative signs of the limitation of reason into a positive defence of sense. Tristram, who has vehemently defended his father’s reason, is also a consistent defender of sense: he says that “A man’s body and his mind, with the utmost reverence to both I speak it, are exactly like a jerkin, and a jerkin’s lining;—rumple the one—you rumple rumple the other” (III, iv), and that “the soul and body are joint-sharers in every thing they get: A man cannot dress, but his ideas get cloth’d at the same time” (IX, xiii). The imagery of dressing and clothing may seem to imply a negative view of the body as a necessary evil, fetters to pure reason. But Tristram’s defence of the body is elsewhere quite positive: he declares, not unlike Locke when he describes the “window” of sensation as the only path to knowledge, that “REASON, is half of it. SENSE; and the measure of heaven itself is but the measure of our present appetites and concussions” (VII, xiii). Walter himself virtually acknowledges the priority of sense over reason when he paraphrases Locke, saying that

whilst we receive successively ideas in our minds, we know that we do exist, and so we estimate the existence, or the continuation of the existence of ourselves, or anything else commensurate to the succession of any ideas in our minds, the duration of ourselves, or any such other thing co-existing with our thinking (III, xviii).
In fact, Locke persistently maintains that sensation is the only true foundation of all human knowledge,—"reflection." the other of the two paths to knowledge, being described as "internal sensation." The internal sensation, or a self-consciousness of the mind at work, is the basis of our certain knowledge of our own existence, and also of our identity in ever-flowing time: "it being the same consciousness that makes a man be himself to himself, personal identity depends on that only, whether it be annexed solely to one individual substance, or can be continued in a succession of several substances." That is to say, personal identity "is preserved in identity of life [the self-consciousness of the mind], and not of substance [the physical sameness of the body]" (Essay, I, 450-1, 453). As for the knowledge of external things through sensory perception, sensation is its sole foundation, because presupposed real essence is unknowable, and therefore irrelevant to man's knowledge.

The notion of time and space is also subjectified and "humanized." Being unable to directly perceive eternity or infinity, man comes to the knowledge of them by endless mechanical multiplication of their perceivable units, i.e. duration and expansion, whose notions in their turn are formed within the train of ideas by measuring the distance between two ideas, time being perceived as a "perishing distance," and space as a "lasting distance" (I, 239-269). In particular, Locke specifically underlines the mental origin of the temporal unit:

The notion of an hour, day, or year, being only the idea I have of the length of certain periodical regular motions, neither of which notions do ever all at once exist, but only in the ideas I have of them in my memory derived from my senses or reflections (I, 254).
Hence, as Tristram has said, "the measure of heaven itself is but the measure of our present appetites and concoctions." Sense is the origin and foundation of all human knowledge: it is "at the very foot of the great stair-case of the Alexandrian library" (V, xii).

The restitution of sense in epistemology has a liberating effect on our servitude to the monarchy of pure reason and words. It relativizes their absolute authority, and liberates other possible modes of experience and expression, thus expanding the domain of human nature beyond its traditional confinement. It is in such a newly-recovered republic of total human existence, that each branch of knowledge and activity re-asserts its equal validity, and restores long-denied relations—"correspondences"—among themselves. Compare, for instance, Walter's rhetorical lamentation over the death of Bobby with Trim's no less eloquent expression of his grief in gestures: "Are we not here now, continued the corporal, (striking the end of his stick perpendicularly upon the floor, so as to give an idea of health and stability)—and are we not—(dropping his hat upon the ground) gone! in a moment!" (V, vii). Without any knowledge of "wit or antithesis, or point, or turn" or a thousand other rhetorical devices, Trim goes "straight forwards as nature could lead him, to the heart," and that is enough to move Susannah, whose natural reactions have been so far arrested by a ridiculous and inopportune association resulting from "the imperfections of words," to naturally "burst into a flood of tears" (V, vi, vii).

As Tristram concludes, "the engines of eloquence" are not restricted to verbal expression, and more than anything else "the eye... has the quickest commerce with the soul,—gives a smarter stroke, and leaves something more inexpressible upon the fancy, than words can either
convey—or sometimes get rid of” (V, vii). Following the awareness of the limitation of words, other possible modes of perception and expression of the reality of the mind—pre- and non-verbal communications of the verbally inexpressible—present themselves: music, gesture, painting. A melody played on a finely-tuned fiddle “puts the most hidden springs of [the] heart into motion” (V, xv). The total sensible effects of Garrick on the stage rise far above finicky censurings of the solecisms of his speech: “But in suspending his voice—was the sense suspended likewise? Did no expression of attitude or countenance fill up the chasm?—Was the eye silent?” (III, xii). Hogarth’s “line of beauty” is neither describable in words nor prescribable by rules, but is something to be defined and appreciated in its total organic unity, in a synesthesia of the heart: “How do the slight touches of the chisel, the pencil, the pen, the fiddle-stick, et cetera.—give the true swell, which gives the true pleasure!—O my countrymen!—be nice: —be cautious of your language: —and never, O! never let it be forgotten upon what small particles your eloquence and your fame depend” (II, vi). As rational abstract knowledge is brought back into a revitalizing contact with its origin in senses, and as words are re-incorporated in their proper place in a synesthesiac sensibility, the old dichotomies of mind and body, reason and passion, head and heart, as well as traditional division of arts, are overcome. The image of man’s existence is no longer that of the noble rational mind assailed from all sides by bodily weaknesses and irrational passions. Rather it is now that of an intricate organic “system” unified in the totality of sensibility: it is a “delicate and fine-spun web” placed in the “incomprehensible contexture in which wit, memory, fancy, eloquence, and what is usually meant by the name of
good natural parts, do consist" (II, xix); the brain is no longer a mechanical device for abstractions and calculations, but rather a living organ made of an "infinitely fine and tender texture of the cerebellum" (ibid.), which is "tender and fibrillous, and more like pap than any thing else" (VII, xxxi).

Such, for Toby, is the region of human nature in its totality, and the soil upon which man’s artifacts of knowledge are to be built. The prospect, however, is not promising. The materials of knowledge are all supplied by the senses, but they can only be used for a construction of knowledge by means of language. Severe a critic of the dangers of language as he is, Locke warns not against its use, but only against its abuse. He is perfectly aware of the essential role language plays in the construction of a system of knowledge. It is by means of the generality and abstractness of language that we can retain, stabilize, and process ideas derived from the senses, and build therewith a universal intellectual system. Through the generality of common nouns we rise from the particular toward the general, and through the universality of abstract nouns we reach the nominal essence of things which marks the utmost height of human knowledge (cf. II. Book III, 3-164). Toby’s suspicion and distrust of language—which he expresses with his simple and habitual "Lillabulleroings"—may free him from such ludicrous yet pernicious abuses of words as Walter’s system of “auxiliary verbs” (V, xlii-xliii), and the self-serving and narcissistic formality of a legal document (I, xv) or of an official excommunication (III, xi). Yet, more significantly, it also deprives him of the possibility to construct any system of knowledge at all. He is unable to build; he sits among heaps of construction materials, alone in the prison-like store-house of
his ineffable and incommunicable sensibilities. "His life was put in jeopardy by words" (II, ii), not only by the others' abuse of them, but also by his own excessive distrust of them, which Locke would say is in fact another form of abuse. Unchecked by the corrective use of words, he constantly falls victim to his uncontrolled "associations of ideas" as is seen in his mis-directed reactions to the words "bridge" or "nose." He undertakes research into the art of fortification—his obsessive hobby-horse and the nucleus of his association-clusters—only to give it up as impossible: "Endless is the Search of Truth!" (II, iii). Tristram notes that "the desire of knowledge, like the thirst of riches, increases ever with the acquisition of it," and advises Toby to "stop!—go not one foot further into this thorny and bewilder'd track,—intricate are the steps! intricate are the mazes [sic] of this labyrinth! intricate are the troubles which the pursuit of this bewitching phantom, KNOWLEDGE, will bring upon thee.—O my uncle! fly - - fly - - fly from it as from a serpent" (ibid.). This may be to remind him of the danger of following Walter's doomed path. Walter himself is alerted by Toby's misoriented attempt, and reassures him that "there is a worth in thy ignorance. brother Toby,—'twere almost a pity to exchange it for a knowledge" (III, xviii). Yet it only means, as Walter is fully aware, that Toby's honesty and bliss will always remain in the darkness of his ignorance.

The authority and limitation of the senses are epitomized in Toby's "smoak-jack." The "smoak-jack," defined in O. E. D., as "an apparatus for turning a roasting-spit, fixed in a chimney and set in motion by the current of air passing up this," is not unlike "a lanthorn" inside of which "the images . . . [are] turned round by the heat of a candle"
—a "lanthorn" of humanity whose "candle" of the body-mind complex receives and processes "images" and ideas to light the way with the feeble rays of human understanding. The images move in "a regular succession [as] of ideas of one sort or other, which follow each other in train" (ibid.), but their succession is "regular" merely in the sense that they move round and round, never amounting to anything, never attaining anything: the axis is fixed just like a "roasting-spit." This, nevertheless, is the truth for man in his middle state, the ultimate reality of his life actually being lived in this world. Neither ascent nor progress, but this eternal cyclical movement is the only correct course of man, the only genuine "system" of life he is capable of constructing.

Even this "system," however, is not absolute: time may be eternal, but man is not, and therefore he cannot complete any system at all. If Walter's straight line of progress and ascent penitently curves itself into a quasi-circle because of the limitations of man's knowledge, Toby's ideal circle of human nature is broken by the inescapable facts of man's birth and death in time. Walter's journey is end-less; Toby's circle is open-ended. The impossibility of closure in Toby's system is a logical corollary of aperture in man's physicality—and, in particular, sexual "openings" in the body. The book's often-criticized "indecencies" are in reality an indecency inherent in human existence itself. As Yorick reflects, the head may be "a wrong end" for creation ("I have undergone such unspeakable torments, in bringing forth this sermon . . . . I was delivered of it at the wrong end of me—it came from my head instead of my heart" [W, xxvi]); and the heart may be the "last citadel" of man's "blood and spirits" (W, x). But the heart
as a central receptor of man's immediate experience through the
senses is necessarily bound to his physicality, which in turn is not
closed and self-sufficient, but open both ways toward the mother's body
as its origin and toward the female body as an object of its sexual
drives. Man's "system" is inevitably open toward the female principle,
toward the eternally unknowable Other for man. Toby exclaims,
"Right end of a woman!—I declare, quite my uncle, I know no more
which it is, than the man in the moon: -- and if I was to think ...
this month altogether, I am sure I should not be able to find it out"
(II, vii). The heat of a chestnut misplaced in "the hiatus" or "that
particular aperture" in Phutatorius[i.e. "copulator"]'s breeches (IV,
xxvii) and the wound in Toby's groin which gives him "intolerable
anguish" (VII, xix) both cause the pain of "opening" of the masculine
mental system. See how the destruction of the mental system of Phu-
tatorius is described in Toby's favorite logistic imagery:

the soul of Phutatorius, together with all his ideas, his thoughts,
his attention, his imagination, judgment, resolution, deliberation,
ratioception, memory, fancy, with ten battalions [sic] of animal
spirits, all tumultuously crowded [sic] down through different
defiles and circuits, to the place in danger, leaving all his upper
regions, as you may imagine, as empty as my purse (V, xxvii)

The absence of closure in man's artifacts is presented in its two
aspects: the mental fortifications are either broken down from outside
or opened up from inside. "The door of Fortune stands open" (IV,
xix); "error, Sir, creeps in thro' the minute-holes, and small crevices,
which human nature leaves unguarded" (II, xix); "keyholes are the
occasions of more sin and wickedness, than all other holes in this world
put together. /—which leads me to my uncle Toby’s amours” (X, i); “the flood-gates of the brain . . . give way” because of “the weakness and imbecility of human reason” to “impetuous fluid,” which frenetically turns “this world about like a mill-wheel” (III, v); “the passions in these tides ebb and flow ten times in a minute,” and therefore inevitably “here my philosophy is shipwreck’d again” (III, xi). Or, during Trim’s flirtation with Mrs. Bridget in Toby’s fortifications, “the bridge, which your honour knows was a very slight one, was broke down betwixt us, and splintered all to pieces” (III, xxiv); the cow has broken into the fortifications (V, xviii); and they are finally “quite destroyed” (VII, xviii).

It is important to notice here that so far the implications of the two failling systems of Walter and Toby overlap almost completely. Walter’s system, which fails to attain the journey’s end, marks the upper limit of man’s ascent and progress; Toby’s system, which fails to complete itself, marks the lower limit of human nature: the interrupted straight line and the broken circle come to resemble each other indistinguishably in a curvilinear line of humanity in time. It is the difference in their attitudes toward this same human condition in the middle state that finally differentiates Toby from his brother. Walter chooses to remain a frustrated philosopher, a thwarted rationalist, whereas Toby chooses to be a self-content moralist, a pious humanist. Toby modifies Walter’s rigid separation between the rational and the irrational, the “love heroic” and the love carnal, into one between the natural and the unnatural (V, xxxii). During Walter’s impassioned discourse upon the futility and meaninglessness of man’s existence, Toby calmly says to himself, “Labour, sorrow, grief, sickness, want, and
woe, are the sauces of life” (V, iii). Walter’s exalted vision of man’s upward movement toward knowledge only hurts him downward as violently into despair, whereas Toby would agree whole-heartedly with Tristram who soberly comments that “there must be ups and downs, or how the deuce should we get into vallies where Nature spreads so many tables of entertainment” (X, The Invocation). While the philosopher, searching for the “solution of nose”, finds himself in an insoluble dilemma between the admission of the unknowability of absolute truth and the admiration for a variety of ingenious solutions proposed by his fellow learned men, the moralist with no difficulty finds an absolute solution: “because that God pleases to have it so... ’Tis he... who makes us all, and frames and puts us together in such forms and proportions, and for such ends, as is agreeable to his infinite wisdom” (II, xlii). Likewise, when his brother is inextricably entangled and lost in the mystery of man’s existence, Toby tenders an ultimate answer: “We are upheld by the grace and the assistance of the best of Beings” (V, vii). “’Tis a pious account.” Walter retorts, “but not philosophical”: “That is cutting the knot... instead of untying it” (III, xli: IV, vii).

Toby’s may seem to be nothing more than a groundless faith, an unproveable opinion. Yet, while any human philosophy is in truth merely a presumption to knowledge or confession of ignorance, such faith does solve the mystery, and cut the knot, and infallibly. It does so under the authority of Yorick’s sermon on “conscience.” The parson derives his notion of conscience from Locke’s conviction of the superiority in certainty of moral philosophy over natural philosophy. Locke maintains that man’s knowledge of external things can never gain absolute certainty because he perceives their sensory manifestations
only, while his self-knowledge—the knowledge of the operations of his own mind—is capable of attaining absolute certainty because its ideas are immediately and completely knowable. In Yorick's words,

In other matters we may be deceived by false appearances; and, as the Wise Man complains, *hardly do we guess aright at the things that are upon the earth, and with labour do we find the things that are before us*. But here the mind has all the evidence and facts within herself; -- is conscious of the web she has wove;—knows its texture and fineness, and the exact share which every passion has had in working upon the several designs which virtue or vice has plann'd before her (II, xvii).

This absolutely certain self-knowledge of the mind is what Yorick calls “conscience”: “conscience is nothing else but the knowledge which the mind has within herself of this” (*ibid.*). It is for his conscience conceived as such that Toby presents himself as a moralist, and acts like one. His "*hillaulleroing*" against any claim of “true philosophy” (X, xvii) is a frank admission of his utter ignorance in natural philosophy. Yet it never undermines the validity of his “lesson of universal good-will” (II, xii) because it is founded upon the absolute certainty in moral philosophy. His act of letting a fly go, with the words that “I'll not hurt a hair of thy head . . . go poor Devil, get thee gone, why should I hurt thee? - - - - This world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me” (II, xii: III, iv),—told twice, immediately before and after the sermon, as if it is a humble application of the pious teaching or the silent practice sometimes needs articulate vindication—, is in fact a victory of the last fortification of human knowledge Toby has found among the obscurities and ruins of
man's middle state in the universe.

III

Tristram's verbal artifact bears exactly the same impress as Walter's intellectual artifact and Toby's logistic one, and is placed in the same human condition. Even if Walter and Toby are after all only characters in his autobiography, Tristram as author does not and will not transcend his characters as he might easily have done. He proposes neither to remedy their plights nor solace their miseries. The idea of a fictional space in which the author overcomes and redeems the reality of humanity by somehow "discovering" a meaning unknowable to man, or by creating an order not found in the world, is simply a Utopia for him, and a Utopia by definition is no place for man, unlivable. It is not even a question of descending from the throne of authorship: he simply admits that from the beginning he has never risen above the same fate men suffer in the world. Denying the illusion of sanctuary for anybody and especially for himself, he lives, and wills to live, a life that has been lived by all men from the beginning of time, in the only way it is livable at all, that is anxiously and endlessly in time. The act of writing a paragraph in a book and the act of spending an hour of one's life are the same act of living. They share the same human fate. In recognizing the identity of writing and living, a book becomes, through "correspondence," a genuine microcosm, an image of the universe. Tristram says, though as casually as ever in parentheses, "I live or write (which in my case means the same thing)" (III. iv): one has to write as one lives; one should not write as one does not and cannot live. This is Tristram's
dictum on the ultimate sincerity and decency of the vocation of writing. Indeed, for Tristram as for philosopher writing is a sacred vocation involving the pursuit of knowledge. The object of his pursuit, however, is paradoxically man’s ignorance, as in Socratic self-knowledge. Just as Locke’s Essay is in its negative aspect a persistent reminder of the limitations of human understanding, so Tristram Shandy defines the scope of authorial knowledge negatively by depicting what the author cannot do or know. Locke describes a region of human understanding marked off by the omniscience of God and the nescience of matter; Tristram Shandy embodies that region, and it is in this sense that the book is basically, as Tristram describes it, a “dramatic work” (I, X). Now, any writing may be considered to be a form of knowledge in one way or another, and as its founder and origin the author is to exercise his omniscience both as a privilege and a duty. He may not know everything under the sun, but he ought to know what he is creating, what he is doing out of his own omnipotent and free will. The privilege of and responsibility for omniscience itself becomes a problem when such knowledge is precisely a knowledge of ignorance. The question that poses itself is whether art cannot be anything but a form of knowledge, and whether ignorance is by definition incompatible with any artistic forms. Is Tristram proposing a revolution here, or is he simply attempting the impossible? This is the kernel, perhaps crux, of the book, which spells out the fate of his exuberant and impressive verbal artifact.

Since a novel is a temporal art form which develops along a linear succession of words, the problem can be re-stated with the imagery of lines. The course of man’s journey in time in the world runs perfectly
parallel to the author's and the reader's journey in time in the book. The itinerary of the one—history—becomes the plot line—story—of the other. A straight line in the world—the Christians' "right line," Cicero's "emblem of moral rectitude," or Archimedes's "best line"—is also and inevitably a straight line in the book drawn by the "writing-master's ruler" (V, xi). Walter's straight line of man's ascent toward the apex of knowledge is unfinishable for mortals, and it wavers and finally bends down into a more humane curve. For the very same reason the straight line of a well-ordered plot of the book toward the omniscience of the author is no less unfinishable both for mortal writer and reader. Absent or unreachable is omniscience which should have led man's journey straightforward toward itself with the authority of an ultimate end and goal for man, that is to say, an end that could have made man's motion in time a meaningful telological progression toward something. Locke has criticized scholastic axioms as mere pretension to absolute knowledge, and now Tristram criticizes classical canons and rules just as fiercely and on the same ground.

To admit that man is incapable of absolute knowledge is to stand for an aesthetic as well as philosophical revolution. That a plot is or should be an orderly progression through fictional time toward a denouement has always been a prime rubric in literary classicism. Aristotle, for instance, explicitly states that

the structure of the events [i.e. the plot] . . . is both the basic and most important element in the tragic art. We have established, then, that tragedy is an imitation of an action which is complete and whole and has some magnitude (for there is also such a thing as a whole that has no magnitude). "Whole" is that
which has beginning, middle, and end. “Beginning” is that which
does not necessarily follow on something else, but after it some-
thing else naturally is or happens; “end.” the other way round, is
that which naturally follows on something else, either necessarily
or for the most part, but nothing else after it; and “middle” that
which naturally follows on something else and something else on
it. So, then, well-constructed plot should neither begin nor end at
any chance point but follow guidelines just laid down.20

For Aristotle, the essence of a plot consists in the logicality of the
sequence of events. A middle can be a middle only by virtue of the
necessity, or “naturalness,” of its logical connections with what comes
before and after it. It might seem contradictory of Aristotle to say
that neither beginning nor end should be given “at any chance point,”
and at the same time that a beginning does not follow necessarily
anything else, nor an end precede necessarily anything else. But only
apparently so. For a beginning and an end are given necessarily in
their relations not with anything in the same chain of sequence, but
with the omniscience of a creator of that logical sequence itself. If a
middle fills a sequence from inside the whole by connecting itself with
a beginning and an end, the omniscient author creates a sequence as
a whole from outside by arbitrarily designating its limits as a begin-
nning and an end. In any event, the author’s omniscience is the origin
of all logical necessities in the sequence, which will also conclude
with it. Horace’s doctrine of “in medias res” is nothing more than a
technical modification of the Aristotelian concept of plot. He com-
mends Homer’s artistry as follows:

Ever he hastens to the issue, and hurries his hearer into the
story's midst, as if already known, and what he fears he cannot make attractive with his touch he abandons: and so skilfully does he invent, so closely does he blend facts and fiction, that the middle is not discordant with the beginning nor the end with the middle.\footnote{11}

What he does here is to distinguish the presence on one hand and the presentation on the other of a logical sequence in the narrative, and to prescribe the most effective method for the latter. The former is already assumed by the latter. It is because there is a logical sequence already established, in the creator's mind, in which "the middle is not discordant with the beginning, nor the end with the middle," that he can choose to present it from "the story's midst" in any meaningful or effective way at all.

Tristram flatly rejects the classical canons set up by these two literary theorists. Aristotle's theory of catastrophe demands that the plot should end as it "terminates in unwinding the labyrinth and bringing the hero out of a state of agitation (as Aristotle calls it) to a state of rest and quietness" (N, Slawkenbergius's Tale)—the rest and quietness in the knowledge of truth whose presence is guaranteed from the beginning, and generously revealed in the end. But Slawkenbergius, and Tristram, cannot "unwind the labyrinth": they simply do not know any truth which they can later reveal. David's rest and quietness in the "heaven" of absolute knowledge (VI, xiii) are beyond the reach of mortals: man is forever groping and foundering in unquietness and agitation in time. If it is "curiosity" which "pushed . . . open" the gates of the city of Strasburg, thus preventing a closure of Slawkenbergius's tale, man nevertheless cannot suppress it because it
is one of the many symptoms of his eternal agitation and motion in ignorance. By rejecting Aristotle, Tristram also rejects Horace: by denying the theory, he denies its application as well. In a conscious defiance of Horace’s doctrine of “in medias res,” Tristram chooses to begin his story from the beginning: “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” (1, N). This beginning can never coincide with a “beginning” in the author’s omniscience regulating a logically connected sequence. The only point where man can begin his history-story is a beginning in “the Egg,” the body as a foundation of human existence, which binds him indissolubly to time. Human history-story is conceived not in anybody’s mind, as Walter comes to know in distress, but always, as the sagacious Mrs. Shandy points out to her husband in bed, in the body in time. Its plot is not a logically, that is, intelligibly and meaningfully, connected sequence running orderly and serenely from a beginning to an end: the beginning can only be a birth into body and time, and the end out of them. And if that is the only course of history known to mortals, it must also be the only story-plot knowable to a mortal author.

Nevertheless, persistent is the illusion of man’s omniscience and omnipotence over his own creation, if not God’s creation,—or precisely because of its denial within the creation—. It has been long institutionalized in the world of writing. The illusion breeds two expectations: the possibility of codification of “secret paths” to omniscience and omnipotence, and the possibility of their self-conscious “use.” The first has produced rules, manuals, principles, guidelines—
The Sense of a Middle: a Study of Tristram Shandy

canons, in a word. The second has consciously divided for the first time an undifferentiated mass in the literary world into author and reader in order to install a relationship between the two of production and consumption of literature. Instruction and entertainment—high and low "usefulness"—are the two aspects of a book as commercial exchange between author and reader. The author entertains his reader in order to instruct him, and the reader agrees to be instructed through entertainment. Such is the proper "usage" of art, and the omniscience and omnipotence of the author enable as well as oblige him to achieve that goal, to help which there is no shortage of rules. Tristram defies the whole institution of writing, challenging critics and ridiculing readers. Art cannot be codified into a set of rules and principles: "what nonsense it is, either in fighting, or writing, or anything else (whether in rhyme to it, or not) which a man has occasion to do—to act by plan" (III, xxiii). Among "the chant[s] of hypocrites" "the most tormenting" is "the chant of criticism," as one critic quarrels with the slightest solecism in a soliloquy of Garrick's, while another measures his discourse with a stopwatch, another his postures with rulers and compasses, and yet another takes "the length, breadth, height, and depth" of a poem "upon an exact scale of Bossu's" (III, xii). The authority of established canons is groundless, except in "the Magna Charta of stupidity" (III, The Author's Preface), which sanctions false impostures and stipulates blind observance to them in order to mask ignorance in gravity. This specious edifice of knowledge, constructed with inflexible dogmas and mechanical rules, is formed, inevitably, out of straight lines. Aristotle's and Horace's "writing-master's ruler" would produce a straight plot line, without realizing
that “the best plain narrative in the world . . . would have felt both cold and vapid upon the reader’s palate” (II, iv), and “the best cabbage planter” and writer, loyal to his ancient masters, would perpetually like a machine “go on cooly, critically, and canonically, planting his cabbages [and chapters] one by one, in straight lines, and stoical distances, especially if slits in petticoats are unsew’d up—without ever and anon straddling out, or sullying into some bastardly digression” (IV, i). (Notice here again the problem of sexuality in relation to the general problem of knowledge hinted at in “slits in petticoats” and “bastardly digression.”) The expectation of a straight line of progression supervised by an omniscient author toward a final revelation of truth is ingrained in the reader’s mind as well. The reading public “find themselves ill at ease, unless they are let into the whole secret from first to last, of every thing which concerns” the hero of a story (I, iv); they have acquired “a vicious taste which has crept into thousands besides herself [i.e. madam the reader Tristram addresses],—of reading straight forwards, more in quest of the adventures [and entertainments], than of the deep erudition and knowledge which a book of this cast [i.e., Tristram Shandy], if read over as it should be, would infallibly impart with them” (I, xx). Tristram is determined to keep the reader’s desires frustrated, refusing to enlighten him in the darkness of his ignorance. He states that “the mind should be accustomed to make wise reflections, and draw curious conclusions as it goes along” (ibid., italics mine). From the first chapter of the book to the last, he teases, baffles, ridicules, torments, perhaps almost contemptuously, the wrong-headed reader who will not take his advice: “’tis impossible for you to guess;—if you could,—I should
blush ... as an author" (I, xxv); "a reader in this world will not be able to comprehend" his history-story (X, vi).

So far Tristram is still a reformer, a revolutionary. His attack has been persistently directed against the specious authority of omniscience and omnipotence as a groundless convention and imposture. He denounces the false system of knowledge in art just as Locke denounces the same in philosophy. At the outset of the book he proclaims the declaration of artistic independence: "in writing what I have set about, I shall confine myself neither to his [i.e. Horace's] rules, nor to any man's rules that ever lived" (I, iv); and near the end of the book he is still quite convinced of the validity of his initial declaration: a lesson he has given to the world is "to let people tell their stories their own way" (X, xxv). He demands absolute artistic freedom from prescription, regulation or supervision by authority, for "the desire of life and health is implanted in man's nature;—the love of liberty and enlargement is a sister passion to it" (II, iv). What then is Tristram's way of telling his story, which he is confident is the best of "all the several ways of beginning [and ending] a book which are now in practice throughout the known world" (III, ii)? The answer to the question is supplied, not surprisingly, by Toby in his comment on "the present miserable state of military architecture":

What business, added the corporal triumphantly, has a soldier, an' please your honour, to know any thing at all of geography?

—Thou would'st have said chronology, Trim, said my uncle Toby; for as for geography, 'tis of absolute use to him (III, xix).

Chronology does not culminate in any knowledge whatsoever as the "science" of history has promised it will some day. That some day, an
end or terminus where an anxious questor may find rest and quietude, never comes. A historical fact in its uttermost solidity and clarity is, for example, that the king of Bohemia happens to be unfortunate; history is "a matter of contingency, which might happen, or not, just as chance ordered it" (ibid.), originating nowhere and ending nowhere. The "vast empire of time and all its abysses" (ibid.) is a cold inhumane edifice, implacable for man in his unstoppable "progress" from birth to death, intractable to any human desire for meaning or purpose. Man knows nothing in history; rather, man knows anything, if at all, in spite of history. Not an unreachable end of his journey in time but the process of the journey itself imparts what knowledge man can ever hope to attain. Hence the triumph of geography over chronology. It is not where you get at the end of your journey—nobody can get anywhere except death—but what and how you see on the way in the unstoppable process of living in time that humanizes the process, and enables you to begin to talk about its quality, its meaning. It is owing to his geography that Tristram can "turn [his] plain into a city" (III, xliii), turn "so barren a track" of plain straight stories as well as uninhabited plain landscape into a fertile soil of human truths and meanings.

In place of the inadequate classical system of knowledge, Tristram calls for a new system and a new narrative form. Within that new system the goal is "to do exact justice to every creature brought upon the stage of this dramatic work" (I, x). that is to say, "exact justice" to the completeness of spatial configuration as a whole rather than to the logical consistency of a temporal sequence. The structural principle of his new narrative form is geography which displaces chronology:
when a man sits down to write a history. —— tho' it be but the
history of Jack Hickarthrift or Tom Thunb, he knows no more than
his heels what lets and confounded hinderances he is to meet with
in his way, —— or what a dance he may be led, by one excursion
or another, before all is over. Could a historiographer driven on
his history, as a muleteer drives on his mule,—straight forward;
——— for instance, from Rome all the way to Loreto, without ever
once turning his head aside either to the right hand or to the
left,—he might venture to foretell you to an hour when he should
get to his journey's end; ———— but the thing is, morally speak-
ing, impossible (I, xiv).

At journey's end all shall be over that has defined human life as
human life. To refuse to see life in its dances and excursions, and to
proceed stoically toward its final negation in death is, "morally
speaking, impossible": it is a moral sin for the history-story-teller:

For, if he is a man of the least spirit, he will have fifty deviations
from a straight line to make with this or that party as he goes
along, which he can no ways avoid. He will have views and
prospects to himself perpetually soliciting his eye, which he can
no more help standing still to look at than he can fly (ibid.).

Deviations are but spontaneous self-expressions of the life of the spirit,
and other fellow travellers are co-builders of a human community on
their way to ineluctable death. Wit is as much a propellant of a
narrative as judgment: the reader is not an ignoramus for the author
to guide and enlighten, but a fellow traveller in a common history-
story.

Hence, first, Tristram's daring defence of wit against the authority of
Locke himself, who sharply distinguishes wit from judgment. For
Locke wit consists in an arbitrary assemblage of incongruous ideas for their specious resemblance according to individuals' temperaments and moods, whereas judgment consists in their clear, rationally perceived distinctions; and he deprecates wit, and metaphor and allusion as well, as insidious threats to the construction of rational knowledge (Essay, I, 203-4). For Tristram, on the other hand, wit or "imperfect judgment" as Locke would say is simply an integral part of the whole texture of the human mind. He insists on the completeness of human existence as it is, even if it means the inclusion of "scum and sediment an' all":

the great gifts and endowments both of wit and judgment, with every thing which usually goes along with them.—such as memory, fancy, genius, eloquence, quick parts, and what not, may this precious moment without stint or measure, let or hinderance, be poured down warm as each of us could bear it,—scum and sediment an' all; (for I would not have a drop lost) into the several receptacles, cells, cellules, domiciles, dormitories, refectories, and spare places of our brains...until every vessel of them, both great and small, be so replenished, saturated and fill'd up therewith, that no more, would it save a man's life, could possibly be got either in or out (II, The Author's Preface).

The landscape of his narrative will not be a "Freeze-land" of cold judgment and straight narrative: it will be a "clear climate of fantasy and perspiration, where every idea, sensible and insensible, gets vent...in this fertile land of chivalry and romance, where I now sit" (V, i). Similarly, the relationship between the author and the reader undergoes a radical change. A narrative is no longer a ready-made commodity produced by an omniscient author and purchased by
an ignorant reader for entertainment and an ulterior useful instruction: rather it is an artifact mutually constructed between author and reader co-operating in a joint venture. Such fellowship is what Tristram calls "conversation":

Writing, when properly managed, (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation: As no one, who knows what he is about in good company, would venture to talk all;—so no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself.

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

In conversation a mortal author meets a mortal reader as two equal human beings in a way they cannot in classical narrative where ceremonial death-like silence prevails as sacred knowledge is transmitted from god-like author to awe-stricken reader: "they [i. e. parrots jackdaws, apes, etc.] act by rote, as the others speak by it, and equally make me silent... they neither of them possess the talents for conversation—[I can make nothing of a discourse with them, beyond the proposition, the reply, and rejoinder" (VII, xxxii). Tristram liberates his text, opens up the gate for writing-masters' most jealous possessions of omniscience and omnipotence: he offers a blank page to his reader to paint widow Wadman in "to [his] own mind" (V, xxxviii) and leaves a "void space" for him to "swear into it, any oath that he is
most accustomed to” (II, xxxvii).

Indeed he opens up the gate, and never shall his system be able to
close itself, just as happens to Toby’s fortifications of the human heart.
Paradoxically Toby’s celebration of the New Science of the geography
of narrative, as well as of military architecture, is the very thing that
prevents Trim from bringing his “story of the king of Bohemia and
his seven castles” to a successful close. The conclusion Tristram
reaches following his stricture of the immorality of straightforward
narrative, which fails to do “exact justice” as it should, is that there
can be no such thing as a conclusion:

To sum up all; there are archives at every stage to be look’d
into, and rolls, records, documents, and endless genealogies, which
justice ever and anon calls him back to stay the reading of: - - - -
In short, there is no end of it; - - - - for my own part, I declare
I have been at it these six weeks, making all the speed I possibly
could,—and am not yet born [into his narrative] (I, xiv).

His new system of knowledge finally betrays itself to be as unfinishable
as any other system of human knowledge. From the standpoint of
sure knowledge of man’s radical ignorance, Tristram has taunted the
reader’s aspiration to, or assumption of, omniscience. But now the rea-
der’s ignorance becomes indistinguishable from the author’s own. Reader
and author, being participants in the same journey, must share the same
fate as well. Tristram’s mockery of his reader turns against himself, and
becomes self-mockery. He is sincere enough to admit his own igno-
rance: he knows that he knows nothing like other fellow mortals. Yet
as an author and man he has to confront an insoluble problem: how
can one write without knowing anything? how can ignorance achieve self-knowledge?

Walter's journey has proved to be unfinishable, and Toby's system unclosable. Tristram's narrative hangs no less precariously between its obscure origin and uncertain end. Obscurity in the origin of narrative is similar to that which Locke detects in man's sensory perception. Locke speaks of a window of sensation in an empty cabinet as an image of the entry of the ideas of external things into the mind. A literary author avails himself of a similar window of sensation which lets him into the mind of people he is to depict. However, the mind of a perceiver/author cannot penetrate the surface of his object. External things cannot be known except in their sensory manifestations; other people's minds cannot be known except in their perceivable external signs, that is, in their physiognomic expressions. In both cases the surface is ultimately impenetrable, and the window-pane is opaque. If a transparent glass could have been set up in the human heart,

nothing more would have been wanting, in order to have taken a man's character, but to have taken a chair and gone softly, as you would to a dioptrical bee-hive, and look'd in, - view'd the soul stark naked; - - observ'd all her motions,—her machinations,—traced all her maggots from their first engendering to their crawling forth; - - watch her loose in her frisks. her gambols, her caprices; and after some notice of her more solemn deportment, consequent upon such frisks. Etc. —then taken your pen and ink and set down nothing but what you had seen, and could have sworn to: - - - But this is an advantage not to be had by the biographer in this planet (I. xxiii).
(Notice particularly the passage’s focus upon man’s physicality as in the oppressive imagery of “maggots” in their “engendering” and “crawling forth.”) The body is opaque and you cannot see “the soul stark naked”: “our minds shine not through the body, but are wrapt up here in a dark covering of uncrystalized flesh and blood” (ibid.). That is to say, the soul of other men is unknowable for the same reason that the real essence of external things is unknowable in Locke’s epistemology. The body alone is a visible and readable sign of the soul. Hence Walter’s preoccupation with the philosophical problem of the shape of the nose including his son’s, and Tristram’s body-symbolism in his images of the corpulence of Dr. Slop and David vs. the thinness of Yorick and himself. If physiognomic expressions are static physical features which adumbrate more or less fixed types of characters inside, the signs of gestures, phrases, images and other individual peculiarities, in a word, hobby-horses, can indicate an individual mind in its more subtle and volatile moods and thoughts. The former was employed to best effect by Hogarth in painting, and the latter by Garrick on the stage.

The problem of the hobby-horse as an artistic method of characterization entails a general problem of subjectivity. It is agreed that an absolutely transparent glass cannot be set up at the window to the mind. But even the second-best, and perhaps the only available path into the mind through perceivable expressive signs is a hopelessly entangled and confusing one. Visible external signs (signifiant) designate their content (signifié) within. The relation between the two, however, is arbitrary. The stability of signifiant does not make the arbitrary relation between the two any more necessary. The apparent
"necessity" of the relation merely reflects the necessity of the psychological law governing the perceiver's own mind, which appropriates and appoints external objects as signs of their own self-expressions. And this psychological law is the very thing that one is able to reach at the last stage of one's act of "reading" those signs. External things become meaningful signs only when the mind first subjectifies them, and then fills them with meanings of its own making. Therefore, the language of visible things is necessarily a private language, a language of a private eye. Things suffused by "the rays of light" from the perceiving mind are images of that mind itself, but "monstrously refracted" (I, xxiii); also monstrous is "that infinitude of oddities," say, of Walter, whose mind transfigures the outside world in such a way that "every object before him presented a face and section of itself to his eye, altogether different from the plan and elevation of it seen by the rest of mankind.—In other words, "twas a different object, —and in course was differently considered" (V, xxiv). External objects, and the world itself, may be signs of a mind and its internal world, but these signs are indefinable, unknowable, unreadable, except to that mind which has absolutely no need to define, know or read them. Thus the limitations of human epistemology as regards sensory perception necessarily cause with an author as well as with a man numerous examples of errors and mistakes, perpetual miscommunication, and ultimately total incommunicability.¹⁴

Such is the obscure beginning in Tristram's verbal artifact, and its end is an uncertain one at best. Now, incommunicability has not yet proved ultimate, nor the unknowability of the world has not yet been known in absolute certainty. Challenging his own negative presenti-
ment that there shall be no end to it. Tristram nonetheless dares to modify, refine and transform his text in unprecedented involutions in order to equate it, in "exact justice." to the "inextricable labyrinth" of of life (V, xiv), of a "whimsical view of the involutions of the heart" (N, i), thus entering the "vast empire of biographical free-booters" (III, xxiii). He writes "as a man of erudition" (I, ii), and his book will be a "cyclopaedia of arts and sciences" (I, xvii); he is unfettered by any authority but his own, and his mind and pen jump just as freely as "great wits jump" (III, ix). In spite of all this, however, the prospect remains precisely as he has foreseen: there is no end to it. His system of knowledge, new as it may be, is unclosable, and his journey unfinishable. There is no point of ending for his history-story, either in space or time, no matter how free and flexible it is to incorporate "Accounts to reconcile:/ Anecdotes to pick up:/ Inscriptions to make out:/ Stories to weave in:/ Traditions to sift:/ Person-ages to call upon:/ Panegyrics to paste up at this door" of the edifice of his story (I, xiv). The same fate has to be shared by Trim's story of his brother Tom and the Jew's widow, which "went on—and on—it had episodes in it—it came back, and went on—and on again; there was no end of it" (X, x). Toby's construct of story-telling—his account of the siege of Namur as an eyewitness—collapses either under its own pressure or because of unexpected apertures in its foundation: either because of "the almost insurmountable difficulties he found in telling his story intelligibly, and giving such clear ideas of the differences and distinctions between the scarp and counterscarp,—the glacis and covered way,—the half-moon and ravelin," or because "the ground was cut and cross-cut with such a multitude of dykes, drains, rivulets, and sluices,
on all sides" (I. i). The "incomprehensible contexture" of the literary
text which endeavors to resemble the "delicate and fine-spun web" of
the mind—"the infinitely fine and tender texture" of the book as well
as of the cerebellum—is "rent and tattered," being nothing better than
"a puzzled skein of silk, - - - all perplexity.—all confusion within side"
(II. xix). Perhaps truth is ensconced either at the end of a journey or
at the bottom of a system. Man's story-history, however, does not follow
a direct straight path toward an end; it deviates from the right course
in an "eternal scampering of the discourse" (III. xviii)—"discourse"
originally meaning "running to and fro" endess-ly; or, it refuses to
follow any course except one laid by itself in an erratic, meandering,
"rhapsodical" line (I. xiii) along which human story-history runs
"like wildfire" (I. x). Nor does any human system reach its bottom.
Such scrupulously constructed systems as Tristram's story-telling, Toby's
military architecture and Walter's philosophy—the exhaustive inven-
tories of historico-biographical information by the son, clear definitions
of logistic terms by the uncle, references and concordances by the
father—can never get "down to the bottom of the well, where TRUTH
keeps her little court" (IV. Slawkenbergius's Tale). In short, it is
impossible for man to end any journey or bottom any system. Since,
as Walter knows well, truth is perpetually in her "impregnable
fastness." Toby neither "know[s], nor do[es] pretend to know" anything
about "the right end of a woman [i. e. the origin of man's history]."
and Tristram does not know nor pretend to know anything about the
right end of a story. All that this mortal author knows is "the utter
impossibility for some volumes [and eventually to the very last one],
that you [i. e. the reader], or the most penetrating spirit upon earth
[i. e. the author himself in his creation], should know how this matter really stands" (I, xvi). Man does not know; man cannot know.

This notion of man's radical ignorance destroys irreparably his faith in, and the artist's obligation to, the ultimate coincidence of human motion in time and its “progress” through time. The time of the clock (chronos) and the time of the book (kairos)—the time running from birth to death and the time running from a beginning to an end—can never be synchronized. The one outruns the other, or the other way round. Conscientious “geographic” justice to landscapes on the way slows down the journey's speed so much that it undermines the very idea of a journey. Just as Walter's *Tristram-Shandy* is forced to outlive its usefulness because of Tristram's unstoppable growing-up chronologically, so *Tristram Shandy* cannot keep pace with the life of its hero because of the honors the author meticulously pays to every morsel and particle woven into the *texture* of the man and book. The result: “the more I write, the more I shall have to write—and consequently, the more your worships read, the more your worships will have to read” (V, xiii). When the story does get to the point eagerly anticipated with a presentiment of a revelation or a catastrophe, it is simply too late: "When I came—there was no tomb to drop it [i. e. “this tear” for tender and faithful spirits of Amandus and Amanda, the arch-lovers] upon" (VI, xii); the time for “the choicest morsel” of the story having arrived at last, “[I] feel my want of powers” (V, xxiv); “the fifteenth chapter is come at last; and brings nothing with it but a sad signature of 'How our pleasures slip from under us in this world'” (V, xv). Perhaps Tristram's story should have gone faster than the time of the clock. Wherever he may be in his story, death, or the definitive end
announced by the clock, overtakes him on the spot. Should he rather try to outrun death, to reach an end of his own choice before death forces him to surrender to its inhumane end? But he has just done this, he "wrote-galloping" to outrun death (VI, iv). The result is as painful as ever: Tristram is tormented by a sense of remorse that he cannot do justice to every creature in the geography of his story, because now he simply has no time to do so. His remorse is sexualized through his four female characters: Janatone, Nannette, Jenny and Maria. In his unwonted drive for the male principle of rationality and progress, he feels guilty at the injustice done to the female principle of nature and stability. Nannette invites him to join her in the roundelay "VIVA LA JOIA!" "in the lap of contentment here" (VI, xliii), instead of pursuing a dream beyond the reach of humanity. Maria in her madness is incapable of distinguishing a man from a goat, but Tristram meditates, what is there between the two after all but their essential resemblance in ignorance? It is true, Nannette's joy and contentment do not last forever because man's here-and-now in the body does not ("But that cursed slit in thy petticoat!" [ibid.]). Yet, all the more for that very reason, Tristram feels he has to do justice to it now and here: "but he who measures thee, Janatone, must do it now—thou carriest the principles of change within thy frame" (VI, ix); "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 . . . never to return more" (K, viii). In any event man's history and story cannot be synchronized: either his story with geographical justice is outrun by his history, as in the first case, or his "written-galloping"
story outruns his history, as in the second case; and the mortal author finds himself perplexed forever.

A final transvaluation takes place within Tristram's vision of the structure of his own ambivalent and tormented architecture. It has been amply proved that man's journey is unfinishable, and man's system unclosable. The truth of human existence, then, should reside in that very fact. The ultimate and eternal reality of the human race resides in man's unfinishable journey as forever unfinishable, man's unclosable system as forever unclosable. Immobility in time, either in the rest in omniscience as with God or in the rest in nescience as with matter, would be death to man who is forever moving in time. Such is life as actually being lived, in the only way livable, by human beings; and that alone is the only and ultimate goal for human history-story to "proceed" toward. Man is eternally in the middle of time, knowing neither the beginning in birth nor the end in death. He can only imagine to himself the moment he came into being and the moment he shall go out of it: in the meantime, he has already been moving in time. He cannot regress to the state of original nescience nor proceed toward the state of final knowledge: in the meantime, he already knows something, has just barely acquired some vague ideas about some little obscure things. Man is forever in the middle state, and he "proceeds," if ever at all, toward this state, from which he has never in fact been freed. Tristram sets forth the structural principle of his work as follows:

By this contrivance the machinery of my work is of a species by itself: two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word,
my work is digressive, and it is progressive too.—and at the same time (I. xxii).

One can digress, when and only when there has been laid down a proper path to follow, a correct line of progress, from which one could be accused of digressing. However, this correct line of progress is non-existent, or, if it exists, is beyond human capacity at any rate, and one would have to be supra- or infra-human, that is, to deny one’s humanity altogether to be able to follow it. One digresses as long as one is human. The dichotomy, then, is no longer an ethical one between a right and wrong way, the rational and the irrational, based on the idea of human responsibility and free will. A genuine dichotomy is rather an existential one between the natural and the unnatural, between what can and cannot be done in the human condition; in a word, between the acceptance and the denial of human nature, and human life. (Remember here the confrontation of the rational of Walter and the natural of Toby.) Hence, the “digression” is life, and the “progression” is death in its aspiration as well as its actual achievement:

Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine;—they are the life, the soul of the reading; ——take them out of this book for instance, — you might as well take the book along with them;—one cold eternal winter would reign in every page of it; restore them to the writer; — — — he steps forth like a bridegroom,—bids All hail; brings in variety, and forbids the appetite to fail (ibid.).

In the final analysis, however, the refutation of progress by digression, of the rational by the natural, is far from absolute, as if human nature has to deny itself any absolute finality, even in its self-
vindication. Tristram adds, "if he begins a digression, - - - from that moment, I observe, his whole work stands stock-still;—and if he goes on with his main work, - - - then there is an end of his digression" (ibid.) Man is forever moving in time: there is an infinite space for him to travel, and an infinite number of pages for an author to traverse. If man is moving, perhaps he is doing something, moving toward some goal: perhaps he is doing some work he is ordained to do. Digression is a sin, then. But he cannot achieve the task, he cannot even know what the task is, because he is also ordained not to be able to know his duty, much less to achieve it. Hence the progression is futile, and more than that, it is a sin against the one who ordains that things should be so here with us. Man is conditioned to want to know and to be unable to know and both at the same time. Such is the self-knowledge of ignorance. And as ever the fact remains: man is already moving in time. "This is vile work" (ibid.), a work of man's life, author's book, and God's universe. And yet, man is still a supplicant, a pitiable benighted traveller in time. For man the cosmic work remains incomprehensible rather than vile, more mysterious than inhumane. God's creation is a mystery, and the pious author creates his in its image. after its likeness, for, after all, to write a book (story) and to live a life (history) are one and the same. Tristram constructs his verbal artifact the the way God has constructed His cosmic architecture:

I have constructed the main work and the adventitious parts of it with such intersections, and have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going (ibid.)
—for "forty years" in man's life, for nine volumes in the book's life, and possibly for millennia upon millennia in the universe's life.

IV

Locke's and Pope's humility and contentment may appear to have been reformulated into an intensely tragic depth in Sterne. Nevertheless, the moral universe of *Tristram Shandy* is as different from a world of tragic "overreachers" in the Renaissance as from the world of romantic agony of *Sturm und Drang*. The Shandys inhabit the more congenial and humane climate of the Europe of the eighteenth century—the Augustan Age in literature and the Enlightenment in general philosophy. The book is above all "a civil, nonsensical, good humoured Shandean book" (V, xvii), and its "True Shandiesm... opens the heart and lungs, and like all those affections which partake of its nature, it forces the blood and other vital fluids of the body to run freely thru' its channels, and makes the wheel of life run long and cheerfully round" (V, xxxii). Then why does one sense, in a book professedly of humble and complacent *joie de vivre* in this world of ours, so much anxiety barely suppressed that it verges on a sense of irremediable futility and despair? Partly because it is acutely responding to the emergence of a modern historical consciousness, which will soon usher in the anxiety-ridden Age of History in the nineteenth century. But more immediately because it is fully aware of an inner necessity in novel-writing, itself a new and emerging literary genre at the time. The novel-form as a *histeire* necessarily involves a generic dilemma in dealing with eternal truth through a temporal mode of expression, and this dilemma is, if not exactly identical with.
at least in a radical and quite significant parallelism to the initial general problem: how to live an eternal state in time. In this respect, it is no accident that the emergence of modern historical consciousness was contemporary with the emergence of modern artistic consciousness.

In other words, we have finally come to the point where we should discuss Laurence Sterne the author and man himself. In fact, the present essay has been deliberately ambiguous on the question of the precise relationships among the characters, the author and the Zeitgeist. It can be foreseen that the problem of relationships will take us in two directions: the one to situate Sterne the author vis-à-vis Tristram, who is to be situated likewise vis-à-vis his fictional characters, Walter and Toby; the other to situate Sterne the author vis-à-vis Sterne the parson, and his historical age and milieu, perhaps including an intermediary term of the reader bridging the timeless fiction and the historical reality. Quite obviously, such a problem greatly exceeds the scope of the present essay, and therefore remains to be addressed on another occasion.

NOTES


2 John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, in two volumes, ed. Alexander Campbell Fraser (New York: Dover, 1950), vol. I, p. 27. Throughout this essay the quotations with volume and page references are from this edition.

3 cf. Francis Bacon on his similar “progressive” method: “Now my method, though hard to practice, is easy to explain, and it is this. I propose to establish progressive stages of certainty. The evidence of the sense, helped and
guarded by a certain process of correction, I retain. But the mental operation which follows the act of sense I for the most part reject, and instead of it I open and lay out a new and certain path of the mind to proceed in, starting directly from the simple sensuous perception." The mental operation he rejects is that of scholastic logic, and his alternative is the one which "derives axioms from the senses and particulars, rising by a gradual and unbroken ascent, so that it arrives at the most general axioms last of all. This is the true way, but as yet untried." (*The New Organon* in *Francis Bacon: A Selection of His Works*, ed. Sidney Warhaft [Indianapolis: the Odyssey Press, 1965], pp. 327-333.)

4 The following passage from R. G. Collingwood equally applies to Locke whose *Essay* was published in 1689: "the eighteenth-century historians, who recognized that all true history is the history of mankind, assumed that human nature had existed ever since the creation of the world exactly as it existed among themselves. Human nature was conceived substantialistically as something static and permanent, an unvarying substratum underlying the course of historical changes and all human activities. History never repeated itself but human nature remained eternally unaltered." (*The Idea of History* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946], p. 82.)


explain the secret of his originality, Sterne reportedly named the three sources of his genius: his own imagination and sensibility (the "immortal flame" of "sensation"), the Bible and John Locke. In Read’s translation, the biographer goes on to say as follows:

"the third course was the study of Locke, which he [Sterne] had begun in his youth and continued through all his life; those who knew the philosopher well enough to recognize his presence and his influence will find them or sense them on every page, in every line, and in the choice of all his expressions; this philosopher, who was too religious to want to explain the miracle of sensation, but who, with this miracle which he does not dare to question but accounts to God, unfolds all the secrets of the understanding, avoids all errors, and arrives at positive truths; a holy philosophy, without which there will never be on earth either a true universal religion or a true system of morals or man's complete power over Nature." (Read, p. 137)

The interlacing of quotations and interpretations among Locke, Sterne, Suard and Garat is as tempting as hopelessly confusing. I have contented myself with only knowing that at least it is beyond any doubt that Sterne did study Locke seriously. And being aware of the danger of accepting this interlacing at face value and taking advantage of it, I have taken precaution not to regard it as more than a useful pointer toward the necessity of a direct confrontation of Locke’s Essay and Tristram Shandy.


8 Some words on Locke's concept of "association of ideas" seem to be necessary here, because the idea has been made, by many, and for me, mistaken, critics, to serve as the evidence of Sterne's "modernity." Some critics' eagerness to save the book from oblivion for the modern reader is quite understandable, given the history of critical appraisal of the book over the generations. However, they are to be blamed for the lack of critical prudence all the same, when they excavate and extract the concept of "association of ideas" and immediately identify it with William James’s "stream of consciousness" or Henri
Bergson's "sous vital." (For just one of the numerous instances see Helen Moglen, "Laurence Sterne and the Contemporary Vision," The Hinged Skull: Papers from the Laurence Sterne Bicentenary Conference, ed. Arthur K. Cash and John M. Stedmond [n.p.: The Kent University Press, 1971].) In discussing apparently the same "association of ideas," James and Bergson are explicating their concept of the reality of the human consciousness whose transcendental value is implicitly assumed, whereas Locke is denouncing one of many weaknesses of the human mind as a hindrance to his explicit goal of constructing a coherent system of knowledge. The critics must have been reminded of their mistake by simply re-reading Locke's short chapter on the idea, or Fraser's opportune quotation from Locke's Conduct of Understanding in the footnote: there Locke unequivocably asserts that "association [is] as frequent a cause of error in us as perhaps anything else that can be named, and a disease of the mind as hard to be cured as any" (I, 527, footnote 1): Fraser comments in the same footnote that "it is curious that Locke, midway chronologically between Hobbes and Hartley [a founder of association psychology], introduces 'association' not, as they did, to explain human knowledge, but with the opposite intent of accounting for human errors." But the naive mistake survives: well, Locke was negative on the mental phenomenon of association, then it must have been used by Sterne for an ironic or comic effect. Arthur K. Cash, for example, makes a qualifying comment to that effect on the status of association in Locke's empirical epistemology, only to identify Locke's "psychology of the train of ideas" instead with the Jamesian "stream of consciousness." ("The Lockean Psychology of Tristram Shandy," ElR 22 [1955], pp 125-135). The Lockean "train of ideas" is psychological in the sense that it takes place within the mind while it is processing externally derived ideas, but his "psychology" is meant to perform a corrective and regulatory function against irregular, loose and free "trains of ideas": it may, as Cash states, "offer an explanation of the 'digressive method' of Tristram Shandy," but never condones it, much less encourages it. In fact, association with Locke never presents itself as a flow or flux as with James or Bergson, rather it "cements" ideas together in wrong and false connections, fixes ideas to their inflexible, stagnant "habitual trains" (I, 232, 529), men's "appetites and prevailing passions"—certainly one of the major forces behind the psychological flux—only make the
mind "resist the strongest batteries" of a clear argument "like mud walls" (II, 453). The correct "psychology" of the mind is the one of steady progression of ideas to "raise an edifice uniform and consistent with itself," which "shall be all of a piece and hang together" (I, 118).

9 As is expected, Walter is borrowing verbatim from the following passage in Locke (I, 243): "Hence I leave it to others to judge, whether it be not probable that our ideas do, whilst we are awake, succeed one another in our minds at certain distances; not much unlike the images in the inside of a lantern, turned round by the heat of a candle. This appearance of theirs in train, though perhaps it may be sometimes faster and sometimes slower, yet, I guess, varies not very much in a waking man: there seem to be certain bounds to the quickness and slowness of the succession of those ideas one to another in our minds, beyond which they can neither delay nor hasten."


12 Particularly relevant in this connection is the following passage in The Essay where Locke investigates, to its discredit, the possibility of definition of man by external physical features: he examines the marginal cases in changelings and monsters, to conclude that no "sort of outside is the certain sign that there is or is not such an inhabitant within" (II, 241). Quite revealingly, Locke himself tackles Walter’s problem of noses as follows. "The well-shaped changeling is a man, has a rational soul, though it appears not: this is past doubt, say you: make the ears a little longer, and more pointed, and the nose a little flatter than ordinary, and then you begin to boggle: make the face yet narrower, flatter, and longer, and then you are at a stand: add still more and more of the likeness of a brute to it, and let the head be perfectly that of some other animal, then presently it is a monster; and it is demonstration with you that it hath no rational soul, and must be destroyed" (ibid., italics mine). (This passage is followed immediately by his conclusive statement cited above.) If Locke’s "lantern, turned round by the heat of a candle" is an immediate source of Toby’s "smoak-jack," as I strongly suspect, then Locke’s flattened nose is in
all probability an "archetype" of Tristram's crushed nose. Tristram, Walter and Toby all live out Locke's philosophical problems: *Tristram Shandy* embodies the *Essay*.

13 Hogarth states in the inscription to the print *The Bachel* (1738) that the artist should "learn the language" of the visible objects and "if possible find a grammar of them." E. H. Gombrich traces the problem of physiognomic expressions back to the problem of a window in the Italian Renaissance with Alberti and da Vinci, as follows: "It was Alberti who first suggested the idea of considering a painting as a window through which we look at the visible world. It was Leonardo da Vinci who gave substance to this idea by suggesting that 'perspective is nothing else than seeing a place behind a pane of glass, quite transparent, on the surface of which the objects behind the glass are to be drawn.'" (*Art and Illusion: a Study of the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* [Bollingen Series XXXV, 5; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960], p. 299, italics mine.)

14 Ever since Locke asserted the supremacy of sense as a foundation of knowledge, the course of subsequent development of Locke's empiricism through Berkeley's idealism to Hume's scepticism is a straight and inevitable one. They all start with the similar notion of the relationship between the perceiver and the perceived, and the differences among their philosophies are to be explained by the differences in their characterization of that framework. For Locke, the real essence does exist, but is unknowable to man, and man only knows its qualities in their sensory manifestations. Yet it is a valid knowledge, even though partial, of external things. He never doubts that it is a thing's qualities that produce sensation in the mind, and that the relation of perception between the perceiver and the perceived is constant, because after all "God does not deceive us." Berkeley first stresses the irrelevancy of the unperceivable essence, and then reverses the relation between the perceiver and the perceived. The reality of a thing is a reality of its qualities being actually perceived by the mind. It is the act of perception by the active mind that constitutes the reality of the passively perceived. Hence his famous axiom: *esse est percipi*. Hume discards the Lockean faith in the constancy of the relationship between the perceiver and the perceived, and thereby he also denies self-consistency of Berkeley's constitutive perceivers. The constancy and reality of the relation is attributed by Locke to the constancy and reality of the real essence, and by
Berkeley to those of God’s Eternal Mind. For Hume, what is actually received or projected by the perceiver is merely impressions whose transitoriness undermines the identity of both the thing perceived and the self perceiving. Identity is merely a “bundle of sensations,” whose sole synthetic or unifying principle is “association,” determined arbitrarily by habits and customs. Thus, Locke and Hume talk about association at cross-purposes—which has confused, incidentally, some of Sterne’s critics about the problem of the idea of association in Tristram Shandy as is pointed out above (see note 8): the Lockean association is a hindrance to orderly and rational construction of certain knowledge; Hume categorically denies any certainty to human knowledge, and then what is left in his philosophy of sceptical nescience is the Humean “association” as the sole constructive force in man’s act of knowing anything at all.

15 cf. Locke on the impossibility of “bottoming”: “where is the man that has incontestable evidence of the truth of all that he holds, or of the falsehood of all he condemns; or can say that he has examined to the bottom all his own, or other men’s opinions?” (II, 373). Nevertheless, Locke believes in the existence of a bottom somewhere, and its significance for him is identical with the significance of the end of a journey in rest and quietness for David, as is clearly shown in the following passage from Locke’s Conduct of Understanding (§ 44), quoted by Fraser in his footnote to the passage just quoted: “It is necessary in any question proposed to examine and find out upon what it bottoms. Most of the difficulties that come in our way, when well considered and traced, lead to some proposition which, known to be true, clears the doubt, and gives an easy solution of the question; whilst topical and superficial arguments, of which there is store to be found on both sides, filling the head with variety of thoughts, and the mouth with copious discourse, serve only to amuse the understanding, and entertain company without coming to the bottom of the question,—the only place of rest and stability for an inquisitive mind, whose tendency is only to truth and knowledge.” (italics mine)