

Laurence Sterne

He was born in Ireland in 1713, and he died in London in 1768.

He might have died much earlier because of his weak lungs, especially considering how much he laughed, but he managed to live long enough to give his countrymen and the world two great books, *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*. The influence of these two books went beyond the country and century in which they were written. French, German, Italian, and English sentimental journeys were a glut on the literary market, and Tristram-Shandeism not only engendered hundreds of silly imitations in Sterne's own time, but it also influenced great writers down to the present — Goethe, Mann, Gide, Joyce, to mention a few.



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II SEM, CT3 : 18 th Century British Literature(Tristram Shandy) `

Sterne was an unimportant person who suddenly became important — for many people, notorious — in 1759. His background was undistinguished. The son of an army ensign, he grew up in army garrisons. There he learned about soldiers, and without that knowledge and experience, he could not have made Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim as convincing as they are. With the help of relatives, he went to Cambridge. After graduating in 1737, he entered the Church of England and, again with the help of relatives, became vicar of Sutton (and, subsequently, of Stillington) in Yorkshire. It was a comfortable enough way to make a living, and it did not require great effort or special piety. Several years later, he married a woman with whom he never got along, Elizabeth Lumley, and they had a child whom he adored, Lydia. It is quite unlikely that he could have gotten along with any woman who didn't match him in imagination, ingenuity, and capriciousness. As it was, Mrs. Sterne went officially mad for a period of time and was probably unofficially mad for most of her life. Sterne and his wife agreed not to disagree, but his happiest moments were those when they lived apart

When the first two books of *Tristram Shandy* were published in 1759, most readers were delighted. Some of them ceased to laugh, however, when they discovered that the writer was a parson of the church. At any rate, Sterne became a celebrity overnight, and many famous people received him and applauded him; they called him "Tristram" or "Parson Yorick," identifying him completely with his book. The years between 1759 and 1768 were intensely busy ones for him. He wrote his five installments of *Tristram*, several volumes of *Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, and at the end of the period, *A Sentimental Journey*. He struggled very hard to enjoy his life, having adequate proofs that it was not to last for very long; he hoped to find in relationships with women some recompense for the emptiness of his marriage. No doubt he did, since whatever was ideal in those relationships came in large part from his imagination.

Looking for a climate that would deal more gently with his damaged lungs, he spent a good deal of time between 1762 and 1765 in France. His wife and daughter were happy there, and he finally settled them there permanently. His time in France furnished him with the material for Book 7 of *Tristram*, as well as for the charming and successful *Sentimental Journey*.

This latter volume, a slim one, has won the hearts of readers and critics consistently during its years of existence (February 1768). The delicacy of the book pleases everyone, but there is still a lot of Sternean muscle rippling robustly under the skin. The complexity of life throbs beneath the surface of *Tristram Shandy; A Sentimental Journey* gives us Sterne's warm and gentle farewell to a life that gave him much satisfaction and delight. He died less than a month after it was published, at the pinnacle of his fame.

Character List

Walter Shandy - Father of Tristram. A man who loves hypotheses, theories, and erudition, and hates interruptions. He is an easily disappointed man.

Mother of Tristram- A singularly down-to-earth woman whose outstanding traits are her lack of imagination and her inability to ask an interesting question.

Captain Toby Shandy (retired) -Uncle of Tristram and brother of Walter. His main interest in life is fortifications and military history, and his character is one of gentleness and amiability.

Corporal Trim (James Butler) Loyal servant and former companion-at-arms of Toby Shandy. An eloquent orator who shares his master's enthusiasm for past battles.

Susannah The Shandy maidservant. A young woman who bustles about, she is the unwitting tool of various small disasters that strike the Shandy household.

Obadiah -The manservant. Another bustler, distinguished by frequent maladroitness and poor sense of timing.

The Scullion - A fat, simple kitchen servant.

Bobby Shandy -The older son of the Shandy family. Although he never appears in the book, his death is discussed in Book 4, Chapter 31.

Tristram Shandy No. 1 - The "hero," who is born in Book 3, Chapter 23. Victim of small misfortunes that seem great ones to his father. We see him rarely; all there is to him is the series of accidents, the question of whether his parents should put him into trousers, and the mention of a trip he took to France with his father and his Uncle Toby.

Tristram Shandy No. 2 --The author of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Laurence Sterne's chief character, he tells the story of the people listed above, he makes judgments about the events of their lives, and he gives us the step-by-step details of the problems and difficulties involved in writing this sort of book.

Parson Yorick --The village parson. Friend and level-headed adviser of the Shandy family, his iconoclastic wit makes many enemies.

Widow Wadman --A woman who has cold feet in bed. Disappointed in her first husband, she hopes to find a better one in Captain Toby Shandy.

Bridget-- Her maidservant. Sometime paramour of Corporal Trim.

Eugenius --A man of the world. Friend of Parson Yorick, he tries unsuccessfully to teach him caution and prudence.

Dr. Slop - The man-midwife. A very short, very fat obstetrician who attaches great importance to obstetrical instruments.

The Midwife - An old woman who assists at the delivery of Tristram.

The Curate (named "Tristram")- An officious person who baptizes Tristram.

Aunt Dinah -The Shandy family scandal.

Lieutenant Le Fever --An unfortunate soldier, sustained in his last moments of life by Mr. Toby Shandy.

Billy Le Fever --Son of the above and recipient of the generous bounty of Mr. Toby Shandy.

Kysarcius, Phutatorius, Didius, and Gastripheres - Learned men and acquaintances of Parson Yorick.

Jenny - A casually mentioned young lady friend of the author Tristram Shandy.

Plot of The Novel

The action covered in *Tristram Shandy* spans the years 1680-1766. Sterne obscures the story's underlying chronology, however, by rearranging the order of the various pieces of his tale. He also subordinates the basic plot framework by weaving together a number of different stories, as well as such disparate materials as essays, sermons, and legal documents. There are, nevertheless, two clearly discernible narrative lines in the book.

- The first is the plot sequence that includes Tristram's conception, birth, christening, and accidental circumcision. (This sequence extends somewhat further in Tristram's treatment of his "breeching," the problem of his education, and his first and second tours of France, but these events are handled less extensively and are not as central to the text.) It takes six volumes to cover this chain of events, although comparatively few pages are spent in actually advancing such a simple plot.

- The story occurs as a series of accidents, all of which seem calculated to confound Walter Shandy's hopes and expectations for his son. The manner of his conception is the first disaster, followed by the flattening of his nose at birth, a misunderstanding in which he is given the wrong name, and an accidental run-in with a falling window-sash. The catastrophes that befall Tristram are actually relatively trivial; only in the context of Walter Shandy's eccentric, pseudo-scientific theories do they become calamities.

Plot of the Novel

The second major plot consists of the fortunes of Tristram's Uncle Toby. Most of the details of this story are concentrated in the final third of the novel, although they are alluded to and developed in piecemeal fashion from the very beginning. Toby receives a wound to the groin while in the army, and it takes him four years to recover. When he is able to move around again, he retires to the country with the idea of constructing a scaled replica of the scene of the battle in which he was injured. He becomes obsessed with re-enacting those battles, as well as with the whole history and theory of fortification and defense. The Peace of Utrecht slows him down in these "hobby-horsical" activities, however, and it is during this lull that he falls under the spell of Widow Wadman. The novel ends with the long-promised account of their unfortunate affair.

Tristram Shandy's reputation


Tristram Shandy was a surprise commercial success. After failing to find a publisher for his first two volumes, Sterne was forced to publish them at his own expense. However, the work sold so well that the second edition featured illustrations by the renowned engraver [William Hogarth](#). In the [18th century](#), *Tristram Shandy's* popular success outstripped its reputation among critics. Since then, however, its reputation among critics and artists has steadily grown. In the [20th century](#), in particular, the work became venerated by modernist and postmodernist writers for its rule-breaking form, language play and blend of philosophical seriousness and humane comedy.

Important Question

Q.) *Tristram Shandy* is governed by a tension between the seemingly haphazard way in which the story is put together and an overarching sense of authorial design. Which predominates? Is the author in control of his digressions (and merely affecting their spontaneity), or does the story actually run away from him and have to be reined back in?

Answer

Tristram wants the reader to believe that he never revises, that his pen leads him where it will, and that his book is comprised of whatever he happens to think of at a given moment. However, he also takes great pains to reassure his audience that he knows what he is doing, and that there is a *reason* for writing the book the way he does--a reason more convincing, perhaps, than his own mere whim. The work is obviously not as chaotic as Tristram suggests. Yet neither does it seem entirely appropriate to judge it under conventional standards of order and unity. In fact, the book warns us against trying to do so; we are afraid of being made to look like a Walter Shandy for trying to force our preconceived systems on subtle and complex reality.



Thank you all for
watching and trying to
make out the
presentation attentively.