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Shaun Regan

Among eighteenth-century works of prose fiction, *Tristram Shandy* is arguably both the most concerned with, and the most dependent upon, the material conditions of its production. From the "rash jerks, and hare-brain’d squirts" of Tristram’s pen to the anxiety engendered by unsold volumes, Sterne’s text is self-conscious about the physical act of writing and the economic realities of authorship.¹ As readers have long recognized, moreover, some of Tristram’s nicest jokes inhere in subtle manipulations of layout and form which are realizable only through the conventions of print.² In the main, critical attempts to provide a broader context for this comic play of print have proceeded diachronically, relating Sterne’s text either to the general historical movement from an oral/aural to a visual, print-based culture, or to Scriblerian satires upon literary hack-work and the early-century explosion of printed matter. For all its insights, this work has had the unfortunate consequence of deflecting attention


away from the specifically contemporary features of Sterne's print comedy. In this essay, I argue for a more synchronic reading by considering two discourses that characterized English print culture during the third quarter of the eighteenth century: satires upon review criticism, and the debate over literary property. By reading Sterne's text through these discourses, my aim will be to reposition *Tristram* both textually and culturally: textually, by differentiating between local effects which have often been lumped together in previous readings; and culturally, by locating the work more precisely within the print culture of its own day.

The third quarter of the eighteenth century witnessed significant realignments in what can be termed the "cultural ideology" of print. As James Raven notes, while the actual technology of print had remained "fundamentally unchanged" for two hundred years, the period 1750 to 1800 was marked by the heightened "scale and competitiveness of new production and selling strategies." This continuing growth in print culture was accompanied by changing attitudes towards commercial publishing. For the later-century successors of Pope and Swift, certainly, the commercialization of literature could still appear to involve processes of textual production which reduced the work of art to the level of any other manufactured good. The conservative sense that literature's descent into commerce had resulted only in a regrettable demystification is nicely restated, for instance, in the first volume of John Brown's influential attack on luxury, *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times* (1757): "The Laurel Wreath, once aspired after as the highest Object of Ambition,

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would now be rated at the Market-price of its Materials, and derided as a *Three-penny Crown.*” From the 1750s on, however, more conciliatory attitudes towards writing’s relationship with commerce also began to emerge. As Linda Zionkowski has shown, in a range of writings on the subject Oliver Goldsmith would waver between “nostalgia for a literature managed by the Great and a defense of authors’ reliance on commercial publishing.” More determinedly, in *The Case of Authors by Profession* (1758) James Ralph sought to counter Brown’s denigration of literary commerce by dismantling the qualitative distinction implied in the age-old “War” of “Wit and Money,” between independent, amateur writers and the “Pen-and-Ink Laborer” who “writes to live.” Highlighting the pitiable condition of the professional author, Ralph compared such traders in the pen to slaves, forced to “consume themselves” through hard literary labour. Significantly, even Ralph’s rallying cry to his fellow-writers did not involve a wholesale ratification of commercial literary culture. Rather, where Pope’s Grub Street satire had reviled emerging professionalism at every level of production, Ralph’s defence of authorial labourers entailed a narrowing of critical focus to the trade’s taskmasters. Feeling “the Pulse of the Times,” as he put it, “not to cure, but flatter the Disease,” Ralph depicted contemporary booksellers submitting writers to a punishing regime and colluding with the debased tastes of the book-buying public.

As such manoeuvres reveal, the period of Sterne’s authorial career witnessed not a revolution in print culture, but rather a rethinking, or discursive repositioning, of the relationships between professional authorship, textual commodification, and the consuming public. Sterne’s fictional contribution to these realignments in the cultural ideology of print intersected with, but in important respects also departed from, Ralph’s defence of authors “by profession.” As his early hawking of the “Dedication” to his text suggests, Tristram’s self-styling as a “genius” and a “gentleman” coexists

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7 [James Ralph], *The Case of Authors by Profession or Trade, Stated* (London, 1758), pp. 1, 13, 7, 22, 65, 21.
with his participation in the literary marketplace. As a professional writer, however, Tristram is himself susceptible to the still-powerful slur of hack-writing. Accordingly, during the course of his narrative Tristram emulates Ralph's reaction against the stigmatization of the hack both by painting a more sympathetic portrait of the writer's predicament, and by displacing this stigma onto alternative agencies. Describing the progressive/digressive machinery of his text in volume 1, for instance, Tristram evokes the "truely pitiable" distress of the author as he works for the "advantage" of both the reader and himself (1:22, 81). Likewise, in volume 4 the vulnerable materiality of Tristram's manuscript—the ironically literal consumption of his source of income—is presented as a function of the precarious occupational situation in which it is produced: "It is not half an hour ago, when (in the great hurry and precipitation of a poor devil's writing for daily bread) I threw a fair sheet, which I had just finished, and carefully wrote out, slap into the fire, instead of the foul one" (4:17, 349–50). Tristram's self-fashioning as a paid scribbler contrasts with Sterne's well-known assertion that, unlike Colley Cibber, he wrote "not [to] be fed, but to be famous." Although he represents his narrator as a poor devil writing precisely in order to be fed, Sterne's portrayal of the professional author is also purged of much of the pejorative efficacy of Scriblerian satires upon the hack. Exhibiting an understandable urgency to provide for himself, Tristram is depicted here not as essentially venal, but as working as conscientiously as possible in difficult professional circumstances.

If, however, Sterne concurred with Ralph's representation of the distresses of modern authorship, when it came to identifying the villains of the piece the two men notably parted company. For, where Ralph had implicated the booksellers in a contemporary corruption of taste, in *Tristram Shandy* traditional slurs against literary professionalism are subtly displaced onto the newly established institution of review criticism. With their focus upon critical *responses* to his work, previous discussions in this area have failed to elucidate Sterne's fictional *representation* of the reviewers' critical operations and cultural legitimacy. In this essay, by contrast, I intend to ex-

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amine the local features of *Tristram’s* treatment of the reviewers, as a way of reassessing Sterne’s place within the transitional print culture of the third quarter of the eighteenth century. As Tim Parnell has suggested, Sterne’s “otherwise traditional attacks on the cant of the carping critics” gain a “particular edge” from changes in the relationships between writers, readers, and critics consequent upon the decline of patronage and the founding of the Reviews.\(^\text{10}\) While my analysis will partly serve to substantiate Parnell’s hint, I also aim to reveal a fictional engagement with contemporary developments that was more precise, and more textually significant, than this unspecified “edge.” In its pointed allusions to the reviewers, *Tristram Shandy* both drew upon, and redirected, charges that were current in other contemporary criticisms of their activities. Similarly, some of *Tristram’s* best-known examples of print-based comedy played upon paradoxes that were being addressed in contemporaneous discussions of the “incorporeal” right of literary property. Along with their significance for Sterne’s representation of Tristram as a professional author, these discourses also possessed implications for the construction of *Tristram* as a material product. Negotiating between high-cultural and commercial constructions of writers and texts, *Tristram Shandy* not only criticized literary commodification, but also registered an accommodation of traditional satiric topoi to a commercial print culture.

The establishment of journals devoted exclusively to criticism constituted a direct, if somewhat belated, response to the expansion in print culture which had taken place in the previous half-century, following the expiry of the Licensing Act in 1695. From 1756, when Smollett’s *Critical Review* began publication, the objectives of both Ralph Griffiths’s *Monthly Review* (founded in 1749) and the *Critical Review* were to summarize the contents and provide an evaluative analysis of each new production to appear in print.\(^\text{11}\) As the *Critical Review*

\(^{10}\) Tim Parnell, “Tristram Shandy and ‘the Gutter of Time,’” *Shandean* 11 (1999–2000), 54.

Review's writers readily attested, this critical activity was founded in a desire to gain control over a proliferation of texts which appeared to threaten established hierarchies of writing. The "Plan" printed upon the back of the Critical Review's blue wrappers, for instance, declared that the journal had been established in an attempt to impose order upon the contemporary "Chaos of Publication," with its promiscuous mingling of "Genius and Dullness; Wit and Impertinence; Learning and Ignorance." As these references to "Chaos" and "Dullness" indicate, the Critical Review defined its mission partly by appropriating the terminology of Scriblerian satire—more specifically, the language and imagery of The Dunciad. Given that their satires had often been directed at critics as well as authors and booksellers, the Critical Review's appeal to the anti-Grub Street rhetoric of Pope and Swift, as Frank Donoghue notes, might itself be regarded as "ironically self-reflexive." Moreover, while both the Critical Review and the Monthly Review sought to install themselves as defenders of the high-cultural faith, the establishment of the reviews itself involved an extension of professional writing into what, for the Scriblerians and their successors, constituted at best a secondary literary activity. During the 1750s and 1760s, a stream of writers would find themselves questioning the basis of the upstart reviewers' authority. In a series of antagonistic writings, Smollett's reviewers in particular were variously maligned as the "self-erected Censors of the Republick of Letters"; as "self-elected monarchs" and "Dictators"; and, with a typical anti-Scottish twist, as "judging Caledonian Pedlars, / That to a scribbling world give law."

As they questioned the authority by which the Reviews had undertaken to rule over the realm of letters, these attacks made satiric capital of the reviewers' pose as gentlemanly defenders of polite literature. Disassociating itself from the patchwork productions of "obscure Hackney Writers," the Critical Review's "Plan" had claimed that

12 The full text of this "Plan"—initially published as the "PROPOSALS" for the journal—is reproduced in Basker, pp. 31-32.


the journal would be "executed by a Set of Gentlemen"; and the title-page of each issue similarly declared that it was the performance of "A Society of GENTLEMEN." The sense that the reviewers constituted a league of gentlemen would also come to inform the Monthly Review. Recalling John Langhorne's review of its third instalment in his own review of volumes 7 and 8 of Tristram Shandy, for instance, Ralph Griffiths reinforced his advice to Sterne by reminding him of its cultivated provenance: "One of our gentlemen once remarked ... that he thought your excellence lay in the PATHETIC." Not surprisingly, these claims to gentility were seized upon by the reviewers' antagonists. By repeatedly referring to Smollett's reviewers as "Gentlemen Critics" in The Occasional Critic (1757), John Shebbeare transformed this social self-aggrandizement into a source of comedy. Within this context of self-representation and counter-representation, the ironic reference to "all the gentlemen reviewers in Great-Britain," in the first volume of Tristram Shandy (1:13, 40), provided a good indication of the position that Sterne would take in his own dealings with the reviewers. This early hit at the reviewers' polite self-fashioning is developed in a further reference to the critics in the first instalment of Tristram. Declaring that there is "nothing so foolish, when you are at the expence of making an entertainment of this kind, as to order things so badly, as to let your criticks and gentry of refined taste run it down," Tristram reveals that he has left "half a dozen places purposely open" in his text in order to placate (and thereby forestall the criticism of) these readers. Lumping his critics together with other imperfectly "refined" readers, and facetiously addressing one such critic as "Sir," Tristram insinuates that the critics are not gentlemanly but, rather, unmannerly guests at the table of the text: "I beg only you will make no strangers of yourselves, but sit down without any ceremony, and fall on heartily." For all his apparently deferential hospitality, in this scene Tristram actually depicts the critics as uncivilized devourers of the textual meal, lacking the urbane "complaisance" to which he himself appeals (2:2, 96–97).


16 [John Shebbeare], The Occasional Critic; or, The Decrees of the Scotch Tribunal in the Critical Review Rejudged (London, 1757), passim.

17 For the reviewers' uncivilized aggression, see also Tristram's complaint about their cutting and slashing of his jerkin (3:4, 189–91).
Exposing their proximity to the "Hackney Writers" from whom they had attempted to disassociate themselves, the reviewers were frequently accused of the very professionalism that their official assumption of gentility was designed to obscure. The close material connection between the livings made by the reviewers and other hack-writers is highlighted, for instance, in Charles Churchill's *Apology* to the *Critical* reviewers: "Hence are a thousand Hackney-writers fed; / Hence Monthly Critics earn their Daily Bread."\(^{18}\) Writing, like Tristram, for their "Daily Bread," the reviewers (the "Monthly Critics") are here condemned as second-order hacks, able to survive only through their parasitic relationship with other Grub Street writers. In *Tristram*, similarly, Sterne transferred onto these new professional critics the accusations both of hack-writing and of the kind of unnatural participation in the marketplace which led to the overproduction of the presses and the vulgarization of writing. Appealing to Pope's distinction between those who write purely for money and those naturally intended for a literary occupation, Tristram contrasts the "critick (by occupation)" with a critic "not by occupation,— but by nature" (2:2, 97). By turning James Ralph's defence of "authors by profession" into satire of the idea of a "critick (by occupation)," in the early volumes of *Tristram Shandy* Sterne thus joined a number of his contemporaries in maligning the professionalization of this second-order literary activity.\(^{19}\)

Such satire of the reviewers' hack-writing itself comprised a number of related charges. As writers for money, the reviewers might legitimately be seen as available for hire. In Sterne's narrative, Tristram himself attempts to hire a critic. Struggling to get his father and Uncle Toby off the stairs in volume 4, the narrator offers a crown for a "day-tall critick" to help him to see the brothers to bed (4:13, 340–41). As the Florida editors indicate, Sterne's adjective is derived from


\(^{19}\) Both Howes and Donoghue view Sterne as responding to the reviewers only in the second instalment of *Tristram* (*Critical Heritage*, p. 8; *The Fame Machine*, p. 74). As the passages from volumes 1 and 2 which I have been discussing indicate, however, *Tristram's* initial instalment also contained pre-emptive strikes at its prospective critics. In this regard, Sterne's practice differed from that of writers who either responded to negative reviews of previous texts (such as George Canning and Philip Thicknesse), or sought to defend the *Monthly Review* against the *Critical Review* (as did Shebbeare). In his *Apology* to the *Critical Review*, Churchill was responding to the journal's misattribution of *The Rosciad* (1761).
the term *day-taler*, “a worker engaged and paid by the day.” More generally, these new critics “by occupation” were satirized both for performing to order pre-set tasks, and for adjusting their evaluations of texts in accordance with the biases of the owners and editors of the Reviews. Mocking the *Critical Review*’s claims to disinterestedness, for instance, Shebbeare archly noted that one of the productions of its “Chieftain”—Smollett’s *Complete History of England* (1757–58)—was “a Subject of much Praise” in the journal. Elsewhere, the taint of editorial interference would attach particularly to Griffiths’s role at the *Monthly Review*. This more general sense of the proprietors’ economic and interpretative control over the reviewers is invoked in volumes 6 and 7 of *Tristram Shandy*, which see Sterne’s narrator depicting the reviewers as asses. At the beginning of volume 6, looking back over the textual terrain that he has traversed so far, Tristram casts a sardonic glance at the “Jack Asses” who have “view’d and review’d us” during this journey. As Sterne’s annotators again indicate, this portrayal of the reviewers evokes the satire upon critics in *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Dunciad*. More recently, however, the reviewers specifically had been portrayed as asses in texts such as the anonymous *The Battle of the Reviews* and John Hall-Stevenson’s “lyric epistle,” *A Nosegay and a Simile for Reviewers* (London, 1760). In his own allusion to the critical “Jack Asses,” Sterne limited his earlier survey of his possible satiric casualties (“I’ll not hurt the poorest jack-ass upon the road,” 4:20, 356) to the reviewers alone. The earlier invitation to critics to fall heartily upon the textual meal is recalled here as Tristram reflects upon the good fortune of both author and reader in having


21 [Shebbeare], p. 141.

22 See for instance *The Battle of the Reviews* (London, [1760]), p. 43. Smollett and Goldsmith, who had both reviewed for the *Monthly Review*, also accused Griffiths of such interference (Basker, pp. 58–59). In the editor’s defence, Wilbur T. Albrecht has cited evidence of Griffiths going to “considerable lengths to maintain a high degree of honesty and impartiality in the *Monthly’s* reviews”; see his entry on the journal in *British Literary Magazines: The Augustan Age and the Age of Johnson, 1698–1788*, ed. Alvin Sullivan (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 233. Editorial “interest” could, of course, take a variety of forms. A nice case in point is William Kenrick’s lengthy review of *A Vindication of the Exclusive Right of Authors to their own Works* (London, 1762)—a favourable appraisal, in Griffiths’s own journal, of a work published by Griffiths himself, which promoted the commercial interests of publishers such as Griffiths; see *Monthly Review* 27 (Sept. 1762), 176–91.

23 *Notes*, p. 396.
escaped being "devoured by wild beasts." At the same time, though, Tristram's question—"who keeps all those Jack Asses?"—indicates a movement away from the earlier satire of the reviewers themselves, towards a consideration of the periodicals' proprietors, the reviewers' keepers. Besides hinting at the new deluge of critics liable to appear following the establishment of institutions of criticism ("Did you think the world itself, Sir, had contained such a number of Jack Asses?"). Sterne's narrator begins at this point to picture the reviewers as a set of bestial drudges, rather than the "wild" creatures—and aggressive consumers—that had initially been feared (6:1, 491–92).

This depiction of the reviewers is developed in volume 7, where Tristram tells the story of the poor, panniered ass which had prevented him from passing through a gateway on his departure from an inn, a partial allegory of the relationship between writer, reviewer, and journal proprietor. Concluding his pathetic description of the encounter with the ass, Tristram contemplates the best narrative position for his equivocal interjection, "Out upon it!" This he ultimately leaves to be settled by

The REVIEWERS
of MY BREECHES.

which I have brought over along with me for that purpose.

Having invited the reader's participation in realizing the conclusion of the tale (Tristram's breeches being rent in "the most disastrous direction you can imagine"), Sterne puns upon the literal "breeches" worn by Tristram in the narrative, and the breaches of decorum committed both by this incitement to the reader's immodest imaginings and by the formal (typographical and verbal) impropriety of the passage itself (7:32, 632). The spatial arrangement of the passage also brings to mind Tristram's statement two chapters earlier (7:30, 625) about the greatest vexations:

what philosophy justly calls

VEXATION
upon VEXATION.

With this intra-textual allusion, Sterne nicely suggested the vexations of the vexatious critics.
Intriguingly, in their reviews of volumes 7 and 8 of *Tristram* both the *Critical Review* and the *Monthly Review* responded directly to Tristram's description of his encounter with the ass. Appropriating the title "The reviewers of breeches," the *Critical Review* recalled Tristram's earlier discussion of Uncle Toby's breeches, and warned that Sterne's long-running text, if continued, was liable to become equally threadbare. For Griffiths, writing in the *Monthly Review*, the chapter as a whole contained "so much benevolence—so much true and delicate humour." Asking, therefore, "what is the world to understand by the reviewers of your breeches?," Griffiths has "shandy" admit that he himself does not understand the term, with the suggestion that it constitutes merely another of the foolish utterances of one who wears a "fool's cap." Attempting to defuse the impolite affront embodied in the chapter's ending, Griffiths, like Thackeray later, thus implied that this final hit at the reviewers bore little relation to the rest of the episode, which he proceeded to champion as one of the exemplary, sentimental beauties of Sterne's work.

By contrast with such diversionary manoeuvres, Sterne provides a number of indications that the chapter promotes the connection of reviewers and asses which had been instigated in the previous volume. At the opening of volume 6, for instance, Tristram had reflected upon the hard and unceasing toil of the reviewing "Jack Asses": "—-Heaven be their comforter—-What! are they never curried?—-Are they never taken in in winter?" (6:1, 492). Recalling both the appellation and the sentiments contained in this passage, Tristram addresses the poor ass in volume 7: "God help thee, Jack! said I, thou hast a bitter breakfast on’t—and many a bitter day's labour—and many a bitter blow, I fear, for its wages" (7:32, 631). Significantly, in depicting the reviewers as workers acting not of their own volition these episodes imply a movement towards a position of sympathy for the hacks, in the light of their treatment at the hands of their taskmasters. It is necessary, therefore, to draw

25 *Critical Heritage*, p. 164. Quoting a long extract from the encounter with the ass (though not Tristram's consideration of the best narrative position for his "Out upon it!," or his reference to the "reviewers"), William Makepeace Thackeray would conclude thus: "A critic who refuses to see in this charming description wit, humour, pathos, a kind nature speaking, and a real sentiment, must be hard indeed to move and to please." *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. C.B. Wheeler (1853; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), pp. 222-23.
out more fully the implications of this "assy" representation. In his movement from satiric opposition to comparative generosity, Sterne might initially appear to be acting here in the spirit of "good temper" with which Tristram had earlier promised to deal with the reviewers (3:4, 191), by allowing to them the more pitiable and understandable professional situation in which he had placed Tristram himself. As he said of reviewers in a letter to John Hall-Stevenson the following year: "These poor Devils, as well as thou and I, will have their Say—or else they cannot have their supper." In his treatment of the reviewers Sterne could be said to re-enact, within the mid-century discourse about the Reviews, the subtle but significant adjustment that had taken place between Pope's satires upon professional print culture and Fielding's. In Pat Rogers's account, Fielding portrays the hack as "sinned against as well as sinning"; revealing in The Author's Farce (1730), for instance, "the baneful effects of Book-weight upon the hacks, not as with Pope the pollution by Curll of civilised standards." As the further reference in volume 9 of Tristram Shandy to "any damn'd critick in keeping" should also remind us, however, the relative tempering in Sterne's own representation of the reviewers—which likewise portrays them as sinned against as well as sinning—does not imply any wholesale exoneration of, or reconciliation to, these critical antagonists (9:26, 794). Whatever the more sentimental associations of the ass, it is important that the reviewers are reduced in these episodes to a lower material stratum, that is, to a primarily bodily existence which implies an incapacity for mental operations at any significant level of judgment or discrimination. The notion that they were "kept" men was itself, of course, hardly flattering to the reviewers. As Philip Thicknesse charged in an attack upon the Critical Review in 1768, the reviewers' biases revealed them as writers who were "to be had, like common prostitutes, for hire." Within this satiric schema, the bodily labour of the reviewers is seen as both under the direction of the pimping proprietors and beyond the purview of civilized manners.


27 Letters, p. 281 (15 July 1766).


29 Philip Thicknesse, Useful Hints to those who make the Tour of France, in a Series of Letters, Written from that Kingdom (London, 1768), p. 2.
By redirecting his focus towards the journals’ keepers, Sterne further signalled the distinction between his representation of Tristram as professional author and his treatment of professional critics. Whereas the proprietors are seen as punishing and exploitative taskmasters, Tristram evinces a largely harmonious relationship with his own employers—with Dodsley, Becket, and any other “creditable bookseller” (7:37, 640). Like Ralph, Sterne painted a more sympathetic portrait of the professional author, but this treatment did not lead him into disparagement of contemporary booksellers. Where Ralph had sought to transfer the slur of lowering professionalism from commercial writers to booksellers, Sterne transferred such slurs to the new culture of professional criticism. In this regard, it is especially significant that the phrase “critic by profession” should have emerged, in the wake of the Reviews, at the same historical moment that the phrase “author by profession” began to gain currency as a verbal marker for the movement away from the traditional stigmatization of authorial professionalism.30 Satirizing the reviewers as critics by profession (in Tristram’s phrase, “by occupation”), Sterne effected his own displacement of satiric charges between different spheres of professional activity within the print culture of his own day—from professional authors (and their booksellers) in general, to the more specific institution of review criticism (incorporating the self-styled “gentlemen reviewers” and their keepers).

Notwithstanding this discursive recuperation of the authorial hack, as the output of a professional writer Tristram’s text might still appear to possess merely commercial—rather than properly artistic—value. Sterne’s negotiation of the cultural status of this textual product—as well as of his professional writer—can be gauged by considering the textual constructions advanced both in pamphlet satires upon the Reviews, and in the literary property debate. Significantly, where the reviewers in the Critical Review in particular had represented the establishment of their journal as a stand against the aesthetic and moral relativity of the marketplace, satires upon the reviewers reactivated the imputation of a causal relationship between writing for money and dull, inexpert, and lifeless productions. In his stinging attack upon the Critical Review, for instance, John Shebbeare mocked

the journal’s lament (in its “Plan”) that the “noble Art of Criticism” had been “reduced to a contemptible Manufacture.” Attempting to reinforce the distinction between manufacture (“the Thing made”) and art (“the Means by which it is made”), Shebbeare somewhat contradictorily hypothesized a grotesque body-text, an “alarming Object” composed of “the Skill of a Writer, a Brother-Scotch-Critical-Annalist pounded into Paper, dissolved into Ink, handled by the sooty Hands of a Printer’s Devil, and then thumped in between two Pieces of Pasteboard, bound in Leather, made perhaps of the Author’s own Hide.”

Such depictions of a debased material product were also central to The Battle of the Reviews, which combined a general structural debt to Swift’s The Battle of the Books with the literalistic logic of his “Meditation upon a Broom-Stick,” in order to attack the Critical Review and the Monthly Review together. As its anonymous author recognized, once manifested in material form and released into the marketplace even the cultivated work of verbal art might become both indistinguishable from the mass of hack publications and vulnerable to the same fates as other material objects. In a discussion of contemporary novels that amounts to a topos of cultural instability, for instance, The Battle of the Reviews reveals that the text’s ultimate degradation is to possess value solely in relation to its use as a factor in the economic process. Serving “ungloriously to wrap up Cheese and Butter,” the text is represented here as not only at the mercy of faddish consumers (“deplorable Instability of Taste!”), but as possessing the sole function of impeding the perishability of other manufactured goods (pp. 38–39).

Even as their authors set about re-establishing a clear distinction between the creative activity of “Art” and the material realm of “Manufacture,” then, the debased representations employed in these satires also incorporated an uneasy acknowledgment that printed texts could be reduced to the purely physical level of a manufactured commodity. Significantly, a number of the assumptions which

31 [Shebbeare], p. 6.

32 The Battle alludes jocularly to Swift’s “Meditations upon a Broom-Stick” (p. 16). Other examples of the work’s strong debt to Swift and the Scriblerians are its joke upon the Lagadoan attempts of one of the Monthly Review’s critics, “Mynheer Tanaquil Limmonad,” to extract “solar Beams out of Lemmon-juice” (p. 84), and its discussion (which points back to the Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus, 1741) of the parental role in generating a child of wit (pp. 8–9). Also relevant is Shebbeare’s assertion that the Critical Review reviewers had excelled in “the profound Art of reaching the very Bottom of the Bathos in Criticism” (p. 7).
underpinned this satiric discourse were cognate with arguments set forth in the contemporary debate about literary property. Legal defenses of perpetual copyright, for instance, involved a similar devaluation of the material, commercial processes by which texts might be disseminated to a wider public. As Mark Rose has argued, during the course of the eighteenth century the concept of literary property became abstracted from the book as object. \(^{33}\) While common law defenses of authorial property were primarily promoted by the London booksellers in a bid to secure their valuable copyrights, this movement from rights in physical objects to rights in abstract texts also forced proponents of perpetual copyright to grapple with the paradoxical ontology of material artifacts that were not reducible to their materiality. Discussing the "Nature of the work" in his Letter on literary property of 1747, William Warburton had argued that, as a "Product of the Mind," the authorial property in a book was "not confined to the Original MS. but extends to the Doctrine contained in it: Which is, indeed, the true and peculiar Property in a Book." For Warburton, the "necessary Consequence" of this model of abstract literary property was that "the owner hath an exclusive Right of transcribing or printing it for Gain or Profit." \(^{34}\) At the same time, this definition of the work as a composition of the mind possessed some incongruous implications for the status of the text itself (as opposed to the copyright) as a consumer good. As the anonymous author of a Vindication (1762) of Warburton's arguments indicated, only the "mechanical composition; that is, the printing, &c." of the literary copy was truly an "object of trade." \(^{35}\) As a consumable object, the text might exist only in its materiality, devoid of both doctrinal or discursive content and the authorial invention which enabled its creation. Ultimately, indeed, the arguments set forward by defend-


\(^{34}\) [William Warburton], *A Letter from an Author, to a Member of Parliament, Concerning Literary Property* (London, 1747), p. 8.

ers of perpetual copyright could be taken to suggest that the literary work did not inhere in the printed text at all.\textsuperscript{36}

In his epistolary correspondence and elsewhere, Sterne himself took a practical, if sometimes mischievous, interest in copyright issues. A letter to Robert Dodsley of 1759, for instance, sees the author toying with the idea of an “arcanum” that might allow him to ascertain the true market value of his copyright—and thereby to undercut himself by twenty per cent.\textsuperscript{37} An equally equivocal letter appended to \textit{A Political Romance} the same year raises the spectre of Curllean piracy in an attempt to dissuade the pamphlet’s printer, Caesar Ward, from making alterations which might compromise the author’s “incontested Right” to his textual property.\textsuperscript{38} In the courts, the London booksellers’ common law claims to this right would be finally rejected in 1774 in a case (\textit{Donaldson v. Becket}) involving one of Sterne’s own booksellers, in favour of the more limited statutory rights outlined in the Copyright Act of 1710. To the extent that he discriminated between them at all, Sterne’s allusion to his “incontested Right” suggests that, in 1759 at least, he may possibly have leaned towards the concept of an author’s \textit{inherent}, or metaphysical, right to property in his texts. Crucially, however, the problematically \textit{material} status of the text, which defenders of this right were portraying as merely a convenient commercial vehicle for the transmission of wit, originality, or creativity, was also the very condition which enabled some of \textit{Tristram}’s most notable set-pieces. Indeed, in ways which have not been fully appreciated, a number of these print-based jests played specifically upon the issues debated, and the difficulties confronted, within the contemporary debate about literary property. In order to unravel further the discursive intersections between \textit{Tristram}, review satire, and the copyright debate, it will be necessary here to examine in detail a few key instances of this textual horseplay.

To begin with, \textit{Tristram} contains a number of narrative episodes and verbal jests which traverse the text’s complex existence as immaterial copyright, individual manuscript, and printed reproduction.


\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Letters}, pp. 80–81 [October 1759].

During the course of his travels through France in volume 7, for instance, Tristram discovers that he has lost his "remarks"—the set of notes which is to become volume 7 itself. Believing them stolen, Tristram despairingly exclaims that they were "the best remarks ... that ever were made—the wisest—the wittiest," before recalling that he had left this parcel of written comments in the pocket of the chaise which he has just sold, so that he has sold both chaise and remarks to the chaise-vamper. As Tristram's declaration that the remarks are worth 400 guineas indicates, the comedy of cross-accidents and misadventures in this episode depends upon a distinction between immaterial copyright and material text. Rather than the physical manuscript itself, it is the property which it represents—the ownership of the right to print and sell multiple copies—which may be worth such a sum. Attempting to reconcile these two textual forms, the author of the Vindication of perpetual copyright had indicated that although the sentiment or doctrine "considered abstractedly, is incorporeal and ideal, yet, being impressed in visible characters on the paper, the manuscript copy is a corporeal subject."39 Thus, while the property of his text resides in an immaterial right, Tristram recognizes that the actual pre-print sale of his discourse requires some form of textual embodiment. Like the novels described in The Battle of the Reviews, however, once embodied in material form the text could also become mixed up with other objects of trade and, consequently, be reduced to a merely material level. Having passed through the hands of the chaise-vamper, Tristram's remarks, like Fordyce's Sermons in Sheridan's The Rivals (1775), end up as curl papers—as "papilliotes" in the hair of the tradesman's wife (7:36–38, 638–41).

In the process of retrieving these papers, Tristram plays upon the literal manipulation which they have endured at the hands of the chaise-vamper's wife, and the semantic twisting which the printed text is liable to undergo upon entering the public sphere of commercial and critical consumption:

*Tenez—said she—so without any idea of the nature of my suffering, she took them from her curls, and put them gravely one by one into my hat—one was twisted this way—another twisted that—ay! by my faith; and when they are published, quoth I,—*

39 Vindication, p. 17.
They will be worse twisted still. (7:38, 641)

The twisting of Tristram's text here recalls similar manipulations of sense and substance elsewhere in *Tristram*. As the narrator notes, for example, the manuscript of Yorick's funeral sermon upon mortality is "rolled up and twisted round with a half sheet of dirty blue paper, which seems to have been once the cast cover of a general review, which to this day smells horribly of horse-drugs" (6:11, 515–16). In this allusion to the *Critical Review*'s blue wrappers (and to Smollett's former medical training), Sterne simultaneously hinted at the main public perpetrators of textual twisting, besmirched the *Critical Review*'s editorial pronouncements (as printed upon its wrappers), and followed *The Battle of the Reviews* in describing a text whose sole function is physically to protect another object. Equally frequent, in *Tristram*, is the verbal play upon the physical and discursive "matter" of texts which had become endemic to such satire. The twenty-fifth chapter of volume 4, which immediately succeeds the twenty-third chapter, for instance, sees Tristram declaring that he has torn the intervening chapter from his book in order to make his encyclopedic text "more perfect and complete":

—NO doubt, Sir—there is a whole chapter wanting here—and a chasm of ten pages made in the book by it—but the bookbinder is neither a fool, or a knave, or a puppy—nor is the book a jot more imperfect, (at least upon that score)—... So there's an end of that matter.

Tristram's final comment here plays upon the closure of the preceding discussion (concerning "experiments upon chapters") and the removal of the pages of chapter 24. As Peter de Voogd notes, in the first edition of *Tristram* the page numbers leap at this point from 146 to 156, suggesting that the chapter has been physically removed from the printed text.40 Claiming to have "torn out" the chapter, Tristram is careful to point out that, by contrast to Hafen Slawkenbergius's encyclopedic treatise upon noses, in which the bookbinder has "most injudiciously placed [the prologomena] betwixt the analitical contents of the book, and the book itself" (3:38, 273), it is he himself who, "upon reviewing it," has removed this chapter from *Tristram Shandy* (4:25, 372, 374). As though he were prevented from rewriting or renumbering by the later constraints of the

40 De Voogd, p. 385.
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printed text, the removal of pages from the manuscript of *Tristram* is thus reproduced here in its published form. Eliding the distinction between manuscript and printed discourse, Tristram is at this point literally caught between these two modes of textual existence, as Sterne stages an ironic clash between the text's status as mass-produced artifact and a pre-print transmission of individual copies to individual readers.

This discursive play of wit about textual materiality both represented contemporary anxieties concerning the literary marketplace, and undermined the notion that the author's property could exist in an idealized text which was not embodied in physical form or which, more precisely, was securely cosseted from material vulnerability. As Sterne's mock-removal of a chapter also suggests, however, while the processes of textual commodification may have threatened to exorcise the aura from the authorial work, its status as a commercial object also enabled a play of wit located in the material features of the printed text. As we have seen, within contemporary defences of perpetual copyright the "mechanical composition" of the text was devalued as an "object of trade," detached from the prior creation of the work within the author's mind and, even, from the embodied form of an autograph manuscript. With his own investment in tricks of textual signification which could only be produced in the form of the printed text, a construction of authorial property in which the printing and the commercial multiplication of copies was allowed only to succeed the authorial "work"—and in which such material effects might provide a figure for the reductive agency of commerce upon this work—was clearly not to Sterne's advantage. For Sterne, we might say, the contemporary challenge presented to this mode of print comedy was to locate the "Product of the Mind" within the "object of trade"; and thus to produce a play of wit that was embodied in, rather than merely reduced to, the materiality of print. It is in the light of this challenge that I want to end by taking a fresh look at *Tristram's* marbled page: a comic document which directly confronted this tension between the author's wit or creative principle, and the mass-produced, materially replicated text.

The original marbled pages in *Tristram Shandy* were coloured leaves which differed from copy to copy. Within the context of the

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41 For a more direct allusion to copyright issues in *Tristram*, see also Keymer, p. 38.
narrative, the page appears in the midst of a discussion concerning treatises written upon "noses," which itself incorporates a discussion of the nature and progress of property acquired in opinions. The page's reference to its own materiality is immediately suggested by the figure of the saint—"Paraleipomenon"—to whom Tristram appeals in the run-up to its appearance (3:36, 268). Meaning "things omitted in the body of a work, and appended as a supplement," "Paraleipomena" accurately describes leaves which were separately produced, individually hand-stamped with page numbers, and then tipped into the individual printed copies of the text. Once secured within Tristram, these leaves disrupt a key constituent of what Alvin Kernan has termed "print logic"—the concept of "fixity" (of "a single accurate text ... solidly fixed in permanent form on the printed page, always exactly the same in copy after copy"). Importantly, the individual uniqueness (or, essential dissimilarity) of the marbled pages inheres in their material form. By contrast to the textual representation of personality—the kind of originality that involves the text, or rather each copy of the text, presenting a "picture" of its unique creator—Tristram's marbled original is not susceptible of accurate replication. As I have suggested, Sterne faced the challenge of transmitting the ideal or manuscript copy—and, thus, the originality and individuality of the authorial work—directly to his reader by means of the commodified, mass-produced artifact. While Tristram's later invitation to the reader to fill a blank page with a picture of Widow Wadman (6:38, 567) promotes an especially individualized experience of his text, the productive multiplication of copies again ensures that the texts purchased by separate readers will remain identical. By contrast, the marbled page produces a materially embedded individuality in each separate copy of the text. With this literal play of "matter," therefore, Sterne comically replicated the uniqueness and witty, authorial immanence of ideal or manuscript copy. Ironically, of course, each of the marbled pages was produced not by the author himself, but by manual productive processes. Furthermore, the originality of these pages embodies

42 OED definition, taken from Notes, p. 269. For technical information on the marbled pages see Diana Patterson, "Tristram's Marblings and Marblers," Shandean 3 (1991), 70–97.


44 Letters, p. 87 (27 January 1760).
not an original conception of the nature of (all of) the final printed texts but, rather, an originary desire to create original or unique texts. Nevertheless, where defences of authorial copyright had opposed a base, mechanical composition to the concept of texts as works of the mind, under the sign of Saint Paraleipomenon Sterne located the work's animating principle in precisely the mechanically produced, material features which, in the discourses I have been discussing, had threatened to undermine or vulgarize, or which had been simply demarcated from, the wit of the writer.

Both in his representations of texts as material objects and in the manipulation of the physical form of his own text, I have been arguing, Sterne explored and exploited the vexed interrelationships between the immaterial creativity of the author, its appearance in manuscript form, and the mechanical reproduction (and mass replication) of the printed artifact. Through these representations and effects, *Tristram Shandy* made comic capital out of processes of textual commodification that had been embedded within the establishment of a professional print culture—a culture which had traditionally been situated in opposition to the courtly milieu of the gentlemanly writer and which, from the perspective of the Scriblerian satiric tradition, had been viewed as posing a threat to established hierarchies of cultural value. Confronting the perceived threat to authorial integrity posed by commercial publishing, Sterne thus negotiated contemporary anxieties concerning the relationship between the writer, the text, and the marketplace. In particular, the marbled pages comically reproduced the original creativity of the writer's mind within each printed text of *Tristram*. In the process, these motley emblems of Sterne's work offered up for public consumption an embodied form of authorial wit. Where, in his engagement with the reviewers, Sterne had signalled a displacement of the stigmatization of professional writing from authors to critics, with this materialized play of wit Sterne also marked his text's embedment in the commercial world of contemporary print culture.45

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