VI.—THE LITERARY INFLUENCE OF STERNE IN FRANCE.

At the end of his entertaining biography, Mr. Percy Fitzgerald\(^1\) scours the vogue alleged by Sterne of his *Tristram Shandy* in France. "Such men as D’Holbach and Diderot might have it on their tables and affect to read a few pages, but to the mass of even educated foreigners, it must have been a book of cabalistics." "It is very different," resumes Mr. Fitzgerald,\(^2\) "with the *Sentimental Journey*. It has been received with delight by all Europe. The French have openly made it their own,\(^3\) and translated\(^4\) it over and over again."

Contradicted by the facts, this easy surmise of the influence of *Tristram Shandy*, as has been amply shown by M. Texte. On the other hand, the assumption concerning the *Sentimental Journey* carries conviction. That book has almost as its essential character traits to win an instant way in France. Besides, M. Texte here supports Mr. Fitzgerald. "*Le Voyage Sentimental* . . . charma toute la France par la sensibilité que Sterne y a répandue, et suscita toute une école d’imitateurs."\(^5\) Yet if Mr. Fitzgerald means literary influence, as

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\(^1\) *Life of Laurence Sterne*, vol. ii, p. 436.  
\(^4\) The French translations of *Tristram Shandy* are as follows:  
I. Frénaís, 1776, 2 vols. (only the first part, cf. Texte: *Jean Jacques Rousseau*, etc., p. 343);  
II. Frénaís, 1784 (? noted by the Dictionary of National Biography and the British Museum Catalogue, not by M. Texte);  
III. De Bonnay and de la Baume, 1785 (the latter part, cf. Texte, p. 343);  
IV. I. and III. printed together, 1785, 4 vols. (cf. Texte, p. 343);  
V. L. de Wailly, Paris, 1842 (noted by the Dictionary of National Biography);  
VI. Hédouin, 1890, 1891 (sic, noted by the Dictionary of National Biography).  
M. Texte seems to mean, I cannot but think him as wrong here as there. For only one French book, so far as I know, shows unmistakably the literary influence of the *Sentimental Journey*. The first translation\(^1\) often misses its distinctive traits, and perhaps the only French critic to express adequately these distinctive traits, the difference in art between *Tristram* and the *Journey*, is M. Émile Montégut.\(^2\)

Evidently there is need of some agreement as to what the characteristics of Sterne are in general, what habits of his expression might be supposed to have influence, and secondly, as to what separate characteristics shall be assigned to the *Sentimental Journey*. Sentimentality is easily set down first as the mark of all Sterne's work. "*Il promène son âme,*" as has been wittily said by M. Texte.\(^3\) But so, notoriously, does Rousseau; and how shall we disengage clearly the influence of this sentimentality from that of Richardson, whose hold on France had a tenacity little short of amazing? If we differentiate it by its objects, by its dithyrambs over dead asses and its moralities upon starlings, we find very little until the time is so late that we cannot be sure. The imitation by Mlle. de Lespinasse\(^4\) in her story of Mme. Geoffrin's milkmaid, not only seems too slight for more than mention, but, even if it had much greater literary importance of its own, would show at most only the vogue of Sterne's sentimentality. "Être ému où il faut," says M. Texte, "et même où il ne faut pas, sans en rougir jamais, c'est tout le secret de Sterne."\(^5\) Not at all. If that were the whole secret of Sterne, the *Sentimental Journey* would have been buried long ago. I fear the French critics in tracking this particular sentimentality are some-

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\(^1\) *Le Voyage Sentimental*, Frénaïs, Amsterdam and Paris, 1769 (Texte, p. 343); Liège, 1770 (Dictionary of National Biography). This was often reprinted. Other translations noted in the British Museum Catalogue are: Michel, 1787; Wailly, 1847; Janin, 1854; Hédouin, 1875. Fitzgerald mentions another, by Michot (*Life of Sterne*, vol. ii, p. 437).

\(^2\) *Essais sur la littérature anglaise*, cap. Sterne.

\(^3\) Jean Jacques Rousseau, etc., p. 351.


times at fault; but even supposing them to be infallible, something more and something more definite is needed to constitute a literary influence.

There is safer ground in Sterne's humour, in his pervasive equivocation, in the character of his incidental creations—Mr. Shandy, Corporal Trim, Uncle Toby. Safest measure of all is Sterne's form—his constant use of gesture,¹ his random progress, his method, conversational and expository rather than narrative, narrative, indeed, only so far as to fool his readers.

This is the "œuvre décousue" of which M. Texte speaks, "sans plan, sans ordre."² "Il cause toujours et ne compose jamais," says M. Walcknaer.³ This is Sterne, or rather this is the effect that Sterne sought and achieved; but even this is not all Sterne, for it is not yet the Sentimental Journey. The Shandy style does recur in the Journey, but only as the incorrigible trickery of a man who has found his art. Instead of the mad breaks and the elaborate digression of Shandy, the Journey has transitions of consummate delicacy. The Shandy passages of description are only hints of Sterne's skill in miniature. The Journey, as M. Montégut points out, is a Dutch painting of French manners. It is much more; it is the art of pure description at its finest. Nothing, I venture to think, has ever surpassed the concentration, the brilliancy and the delicacy of these tiny chapters, where there is not a word too much and not a word amiss. In a literature not habitually tolerant of description, and swinging from the large, long landscape style to the large, short poster style, these pictures of Sterne's are almost alone.

For observe that the Sentimental Journey, though it is beautifully coherent, is hardly more than Tristram Shandy narrative. It has no narrative unity; it has very little narrative progress. Sterne has narrative incidents, narrative

¹ "Le roman de geste," Texte, ibid., p. 346.
² Ibid., pp. 351, 353.
³ Biographie Universelle, art. Sterne.
digressions, even in *Shandy*; but he never has as his object the conduct of a story. Call him, if you will, a novelist—I will not quarrel with Maupassant;¹ but remember that he is not even, except by the way, a story-teller. If we call *Tristram Shandy* story because of Uncle Toby, we may almost as well call the *Spectator* story because of Sir Roger de Coverly. In *Tristram Shandy* Sterne is a whimsical, satirical essayist romping in narrative forms; in the *Sentimental Journey* he is much more a describer of men and women, seeking description only, and for itself, and colouring it habitually with drama.

Dramatic description, if a label be desired, might well be pasted on the *Sentimental Journey*. The book is full of situations, but situations that lead nowhither, that are there merely for themselves. The snuff-box, the désobliéante, the gloves, the theatre passage—no wonder it has been a prize for the illustrators, though "indeed there was no need."

"I looked at Monsieur Dessein through and through; eyed him as he walked along in profile—then en face—thought him like a Jew—then a Turk—disliked his wig—wished him at the devil—

"—And is all this to be lighted up in the heart for a beggarly account of three or four louis d'ors, which is the most I can be overreached in?—'Base passion!' said I, turning myself about as a man naturally does upon a sudden reverse of sentiment; 'Base, ungentle passion! thy hand is against every man, and every man's hand against thee.' 'Heaven forbid!' said she, raising her hand up to her forehead; for I had turned full in front upon the lady whom I had seen in conversation with the monk: she had followed us unperceived. 'Heaven forbid, indeed!' said I, offering her my own—she had a black pair of silk gloves, open only at the thumb and two forefingers—so accepted it without reserve, and I led her up to the door of the *remise.*"²

The conclusion of these differences is that *Tristram Shandy* is trick, the *Sentimental Journey* is art.

With the essential traits of Sterne in mind, general and particular, it is easy to dispose of some minor claims to his

¹ Cf. the preface to *Pierre et Jean: le Roman.*  
² Cap. ix.
influence on French literature. Saintine's *Picciola*, says Mr. Lee in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, acknowledges a debt to Sterne. Of this acknowledgment one must say that it is the more generous since without it the debt would never have been suspected. *Picciola* was written in 1836, published in 1843. It is essentially what Sterne is not at all, romantic. This appears not only in the large use of natural scenery and in the remarkable coincidences of the action, but especially in the Byronic hero. Indeed, if we must derive *Picciola*, let us look rather to the *Prisoner of Chillon*. There is none of the Sterne wit, none of the Sterne form, and, since the emotion throughout is deeper and more human, none of the Sterne tone. The main idea—the misanthropic philosopher brought by adversity and by affection for the sole plant in his prison-yard to faith, resignation and domestic love—is utterly foreign to Sterne. Even the sentimental dilation over the plant is not in the Sterne key; it is too deep and too sincere. The only resemblance is in the dominance of emotion as ruling motive and trusty guide. Who would venture to assign that to Sterne?

It is even easier to reject *La Bibliothèque de mon Oncle*. Again there is an essential difference in both degree and kind. Sterne was as insensible to the *schwärmerei* of youth as to the happiness of domestic love. The dutiful propriety of Töpffer's Henriette or Lucy he could not have appreciated, except, perhaps, as motive for an equivocal sarcasm. If the affectionate whimsicality of Uncle Tom should suggest Uncle Toby, if a rustic scene has a hint of a similar one in *Tristram Shandy,* it requires an abnormal taste for derivation to magnify these into echoes. They seem infinitely more likely to have come from life or from Töpffer's own fancy. What is much more to the point, the form of meandering reflection has but slight claim; certainly not enough to establish, or even plausibly to suggest, a connection.

1 Art. Sterne.

What the critics had in mind who suggested Sterne in connection with Saintine or Töpffer seems to have been nothing more than reminiscence. Even reminiscence is hardly visible in these books; but it does appear in unexpected places. M. Texte finds it in Victor Hugo’s youthful Bug Jargal, in Charles Nodier’s Histoire du Roi de Bohême et de ses sept Châteaux. These are cases—there are doubtless others—of deliberate borrowing. Are they what we mean by literary influence? They show that Sterne was still read; they show that French men of letters found their account in Tristram, not in the Journey; and they show nothing more. Goethe said once to Eckerman, anent the tiresome cry of plagiarism (I paraphrase from memory), “You might as well ask a well fed man to give account of the oxen, sheep and hogs which he has eaten and which have passed into his blood.” Did Dumas even take a whole plot from an author that had failed to handle it? That is an interesting fact in the life of Dumas; it is a comparatively uninteresting fact in the history of literature, as we all know from many futile studies of so-and-so’s indebtedness to so-and-so. It is not literary influence. It does not affect the forms of art.

And so one searches Diderot’s Jacques le Fataliste with misgiving, because the critics have pointed out that it opens with a passage from Tristram Shandy, that it has toward the end a scene very similar to one in the Sentimental Journey, and that in at least one other place Diderot borrows from Sterne. Here, however, is much more than borrowing. Here is imitation, and imitation consistent enough to pique inquiry into its limits and character. At first the imitation seems too consistent; it looks like a mere paraphrase of Shandy, as in fact it has been called. Here are the Shandy dialogue, which Diderot prints like a play; the Shandy pauses, digressions,

1 Texte: Jean Jacques Rousseau, etc., p. 346. I have been unable to procure a copy of the latter.
2 Translated from the manuscript into German, 1792; first printed in French, 1796 (sic). Diderot: Œuvres, ed. Assézat, vol. vi, p. 4.
3 Ibid., p. 6; and Texte, pp. 345, 346.
4 Ibid., p. 6.
wheels within wheels, interpolations by the author to tease the reader, dialogue between author and reader.\(^1\) Here, occasionally and for satire, is even the elaboration of gesture,\(^2\) as in the master’s repeated taking of snuff and looking at his watch. In short, Diderot has tried most of Sterne’s narrative gymnastics.\(^3\) Superficially, \textit{Jacques le Fataliste} is a French \textit{Tristram Shandy}.

The \textit{Shandy} style naturally pleased a mind of Diderot’s superabundance. It gave free rein to philosophizing on everything and nothing. For \textit{Jacques} is the work of a burning mind, throwing off sparks fit to kindle a score of stories. If Sterne’s method was the pleasure of Sterne’s fancy, it was for Diderot rather a vent for his prodigious fertility. He absorbed like a glutton, but he wrote always. It has been said of him that he cared only to write; to publish was a minor consideration.\(^4\) \textit{Jacques} shows him writing what he chose, as, at the moment, he chose, without stint, without husbandry. The book is a quarry for any romancer that has Diderot’s scent for suggestion in the work of others.

But, after all, \textit{Jacques le Fataliste} has greater consistency of form than \textit{Tristram Shandy}, and, after all, a strong sense of narrative. True, the freakish progress of \textit{Shandy} is adopted\textit{ in toto}. The postponement of Tristram’s birth and then of his breeching has its parallel in the story of the amours of Jacques, announced in the earlier part, consistently interrupted at every stage, sometimes at half-stages or even half-sentences, by the other tales that make the bulk of the volume, and finished never. But there is much more narrative in \textit{Jacques}. The separate stories are more numerous, and, in general, more developed, and the interpolation of essay and dialogue, though frequent, is a far smaller fraction of the whole.

Besides, though Goethe’s opinion of the whole\(^5\) as a whole

\(^1\) Cf. \textit{ibid.}, p. 106.  
\(^2\) Cf. \textit{ibid.}, p. 48.  
\(^3\) Cf. especially \textit{ibid.}, p. 123, an incident, by the way, actual in the life of Sterne’s father.  
\(^4\) Lanson: \textit{Histoire de la Littérature Française}, p. 726.  
seems extreme, the threads are dropped and picked up, if not in a fixed order, at any rate with much more regularity than in *Tristram*. And not only is there a great deal of mere "yarn" of the Yankee sort¹ told one to cap another, but Jacques the valet has more than a suggestion of the *valet picaresque*. There are decidedly picaresque adventures; and though these are sometimes interrupted by the author's satirical "Now I might make them do so-and-so, or so-and-so," Diderot gives some value to the adventure as such. In Sterne the incidental adventure counts almost as little as the whole fable.

Diderot's narrative interest and narrative force are best exhibited in the episode of the landlady's tale of Mme. de Pommeraye. Schiller translated this into German,² and it has been selected since for separate publication. No wonder. It is not only pure narrative, slightly interrupted; it is narrative of the highest order; it is, at the end of the eighteenth century, a short story done with nineteenth-century French art.³ Here is no hop-skip-and-jump, but a strong plot well complicated⁴ and brought to a striking solution of character. It may be said that the *dénouement* is not satisfying, not consequent on the character of one of the actors—in fact, Diderot acknowledges this by appending a clumsy explanation;⁵ but observe that the objection presupposes plot and character. This otherwise admirable narrative occupies one-fourth of the book.⁶

The story of Mme. de Pommeraye points a contrast also in tone. It deals with passion, and passion is unknown to Sterne. His emotion is sentimental, and of this Diderot has hardly a trace. There is, to be sure, the touching incident of the woman with the broken jug;⁷ but the beaten horse⁸

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 88, 89.  ² In 1785; *ibid.*, p. 3.
³ Cf. Fuguet: *Études Littéraires, XVIIIe Siècle*, p. 298.
⁴ Cf. the complication of the venal confessor, Diderot, *Œuvres*, vol. vi., p. 148.
inspires no sentiment, and it is possible that this incident, like that of the landlady's pet dog, is meant as satire on Sterne.

Still more strikingly different is the tone of the satire in general. Diderot catches some of the Sterne wit, and he has some dialogue of delicate cynicism; but there are no asides so fanciful as Mr. Shandy's disquisition on the irregular verbs, and in general the essay-dialogue parts have more substance and seriousness than Sterne's. The moralizing is often rather deep; the satire, often serious, always hits harder, and is sometimes bitter to virulence. The clergy, in particular, are pursued with intent to kill. It is not merely sneer and jeer, but open and foul abuse. The hatred of the cloth is so uncontrolled as quite to o'erleap itself. The artist is lost in the revolutionist. There is none of this animus in Sterne, whose game was always to trifle. Diderot, though he has some pleasant trifling, was anything but a triffer.

That Sterne, for all his trifling, created a few characters far more distinct and human than even Mme. de Pommeraye will be accepted without elaboration, and is the most marked difference. In the matter of morality Sterne is despicable and Diderot is outrageous. With these characteristic differences, then, Jacques le Fataliste is an imitation of Tristram Shandy, an imitation not of the tone, but of the method and manner; only there is somewhat more method and much less manner. Of the Sentimental Journey there is nothing. The possible connection of one of the closing scenes with a similar scene notorious in the Journey is hardly worth mentioning. In spite of its mimic pranks, Jacques is story; and if Tristram Shandy is not story, much less is the Sentimental Journey.

Many years later another French story-writer not only knew his Sterne too, but was preoccupied, as M. Faguet in-
sists, with description. Here surely the *Sentimental Journey* should have borne fruit. But Théophile Gautier saw not so much men and women and their drama of attitude and gesture as gorgeous hangings and outlandish scenery. He indulges extravagantly in furniture and dressmaking where Sterne passes with a hint, like the black silk gloves at Calais or the waiting-maid’s purse. He riots in colour and light, and Sterne manages wonderfully in his *Journey* with very little of either. Still, that Gautier remembered Sterne seems evident in *Fortunio*. Without listening for more than an echo read the opening and the close of Chapter III in *Fortunio*:

"Nous croyons qu’il n’est pas inutile de consacrer un chapitre spécial à la chatte de Musidora, charmante bête qui vaut bien après tout le lion d’Androcles, l’araignée de Péliston, le chien de Montargis et autres animaux vertueux ou savants dont de graves historiens ont éternisé la mémoire."

"Ceci paraîtra peut-être un hors-d’œuvre à quelques-uns de nos lecteurs; nous sommes tout à fait de l’avis de ces lecteurs-là.—Mais sans les hors-d’œuvre et les épisodes comment pourrait-on faire un roman ou un poème, et ensuite comment pourrait-on les lire?"

and then the whole of Chapter V:

"Musidora est assurément fort contrariée, mais nous le sommes bien autant qu’elle.

"Nous comptons beaucoup sur le portefeuille pour donner à nos lecteurs (qu’on nous pardonne cet amour-propre) des renseignements exacts sur ce problématique personnage. Nous espérons qu’il y aurait dans ce portefeuille des lettres d’amour, des plans de tragédies, des romans en deux volumes et autres, ou tout au moins des cartes de visite, ainsi que cela doit être dans le portefeuille de tout héros un peu bien situé.

"Notre embarras est cruel! Puisque Fortunio est le héros de notre choix, il est bien juste que nous prenions intérêt à lui et que nous désirions connaître toutes ses démarches; il faut que nous en parlions souvent, qu’il domine tous les autres personnages et qu’il arrive mort ou vif au bout de nos deux cent et quelques pages.—Cependant nul héros n’est plus incomode: vous l’attendez, il ne vient pas; vous le tenez, il s’en va sans mot dire, au lieu de faire de beaux discours et de grands raisonnements en prose poétique, comme son métier de héros de roman lui en impose l’obligation.

"Il est beau, c'est vrai; mais, entre nous, je le crois bizarre, malicieux comme une guenon, plein de fatuité et de caprices, plus changeant d'humeur que la lune, plus variable que la peau d'un caméléon. A ces défauts, que nous lui pardonnerions volontiers, il joint celui de ne vouloir rien dire de ses affaires à personne, ce qui est impardonnable. Il se contente de rire, de boire et d'être un homme de belles manières. Il ne disserte pas sur les passions, il ne fait pas de métaphysique de cœur, ne lit pas les romans à la mode, ne raconte, en fait de bonnes fortunes, que des intrigues malaises ou chinoises, qui ne peuvent nuire en rien aux grandes dames du noble faubourg; il ne fait pas les yeux doux à la lune entre la poire et le fromage, et ne parle jamais d'aucune actrice.—Bref, c'est un homme médiocre à qui, je ne sais pourquoi, tout le monde s'obstine à trouver de l'esprit, et que nous sommes bien fâchés d'avoir pris pour principal personnage de notre roman.

"Nous avons même bien envie de le laisser là. Si nous prenions George à sa place ?

"Bah ! il a l'abominable habitude de se griser matin et soir et quelquefois dans la journée, et aussi un peu dans la nuit. Que diriez-vous, madame, d'un héros qui serait toujours ivre, et qui parlerait deux heures sur la différence de l'aile droite et de l'aile gauche de la perdrix?

"—Et Alfred ?

"—Il est trop bête.

"—Et de Marcilly ?

"—Il ne l'est pas assez.

"Nous garderons donc Fortunio faute de mieux; les premières nouvelles que nous en aurons, nous vous les ferons savoir aussitôt.—Entrons donc, s'il vous plaît, dans la salle de bain de Musidora."

Is it not an echo, but an echo of *Tristram Shandy*?

Are there no French children, then, of the *Sentimental Journey*? There is at least one child. It is hard to mistake the parentage of Xavier de Maistre's *Voyage autour de ma Chambre*. And let me say at once that I lay no stress on the eloquent tear dropped in Chapter xviii, and noted for Sterne's by Sainte-Beuve. That tear, and the repentance in Chapter xxviii, may be drawn from Sterne's reservoir, or they may be a coincidence. Mere borrowing, as I have urged, means very little; and Maistre frankly recognizes Sterne, even alludes to him as of course familiar to his readers. "C'est le dada de

1 Published at Turin, 1794.

2 *Oeuvres Complètes du Comte Xavier de Maistre*, etc. (1 vol.), précédée d'une notice . . . par M. Sainte-Beuve: Paris, Garnier, 1889; p. xii.
mon oncle Toby.” Form learned from Sterne is the quest, and it is here—trick learned from Tristram, but also art learned from the Journey.

For trick, chapter XXXIII, consists of two sentences; chapter XIII, of one; chapter XII, of asterisks. The opening of chapter VI is like Tristram, and it is like Tristram to have this chapter sixth instead of first.

CHAPITRE VI.

“Ce chapitre n'est absolument que pour les métaphysiciens. Il va jeter le plus grand jour sur la nature de l'homme: c'est le prisme avec lequel on pourra analyser et décomposer les facultés de l'homme, en séparant la puissance animale des rayons purs de l'intelligence.

“Il me serait impossible d'expliquer comment et pourquoi je me brûlai les doigts aux premiers pas que je fis en commençant mon voyage, sans expliquer, dans le plus grand détail, au lecteur, mon système de l'âme et de la bête.—Cette découverte métaphysique influe d'ailleurs tellement sur mes idées et sur mes actions, qu'il serait très-difficile de comprendre ce livre, si je n'en donnais la clef au commencement.

“Je me suis aperçu, par diverses observations, que l'homme est composé d'une âme et d'une bête.

“Je tiens d'un vieux professeur (c'est du plus loin qu'il me souvienne) que Platon appelait la matière l'autre. C'est fort bien; mais j'aimerais mieux donner ce nom par excellence à la bête qui est jointe à notre âme. C'est réellement cette substance qui est l'autre, et qui nous lutine d'une manière si étrange.

“Messieurs et mesdames, soyez fiers de votre intelligence tant qu'il vous plaira; mais défiez-vous beaucoup de l'autre, surtout quand vous êtes ensemble.”

CHAPITRE VII.

“Cela ne vous paraît-il pas clair? voici un autre exemple:

“Un jour de l'été passé, je m'acheminai pour aller à la cour. J'avais peint toute la matinée, et mon âme, se plaissant à méditer sur la peinture, laissa le soin à la bête de me transporter au palais du roi.

“Que la peinture est un art sublime! pensait mon âme;

“Pendant que mon âme faisait ces réflexions, l'autre allait son train, et

1 Cap. xxiv.
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Dieu sait où elle allait!—Au lieu de se rendre à la cour, comme elle en avait reçu l'ordre, elle dérivait tellement sur la gauche, qu'au moment où mon âme la rattrapa, elle était à la porte de madame de Hautcastel, à un demi-mille du palais royal.

"Je laisse à penser au lecteur ce qui serait arrivé, si elle était entrée toute seule chez une aussi belle dame."

But the movement, though whimsical and interrupted, is never random or violent. It is like that of the Journey, now fast, now slow, flitting apparently, but always nicely calculated, and always by such delicate transitions as are almost the hall-mark of the Journey. Hardly one of these miniature chapters, miniature like Sterne's, but shows how closely Maistre had studied Sterne's form, how sympathetically he realized it, how skilfully he followed. Mark that artistically abrupt introduction of Mme. de Hautcastel, just quoted, and the Sterne manner even to the final equivocation. Of all this a typical instance is Chapter xi:

CHAPITRE XI.

"Il ne faut pas anticiper sur les événements: l'empressement de communiquer au lecteur mon système de l'âme et de la bête m'a fait abandonner le description de mon lit plus tôt que je ne devais; lorsque je l'aurai terminée, je reprendrai mon voyage à l'endroit où je l'ai interrompu dans le chapitre précédent.—Je vous prie seulement de vous ressouvenir que nous avons laissé la moitié de ma môme tenant le portrait de madame de Hautcastel tout près de la muraille, à quatre pas de mon bureau. J'avais oublié, en parlant de mon lit, de conseiller à tout homme qui le pourra d'avoir un lit de couleur rose et blanc: il est certain que les couleurs influent sur nous au point de nous égayer ou de nous attrister suivant leurs nuances.—Le rose et le blanc sont deux couleurs consacrées au plaisir et à la félicité.—La nature, en les donnant à la rose, lui a donné la couronne de l'empire de Flore; et lorsque le ciel veut annoncer une belle journée au monde, il colore les nues de cette teinte charmante au lever du soleil.

"Un jour nous montions avec peine le long d'un sentier rapide: l'aimable Rosalie était en avant; son agilité lui donnait des ailes: nous ne pouvions la suivre.—Tout à coup, arrivée au sommet d'un tertre, elle se tournait vers nous pour reprendre haleine, et sourit à notre lenteur.—Jamais peut-être les deux couleurs dont je fais l'éloge n'avaient ainsi triomphé. Ses joues enflammées, ses lèvres de corail, ses dents brillantes, son cou d'albâtre, sur un fond de verdure, frappèrent tous les regards. Il fallut nous arrêter pour
la contempler: je ne dis rien de ses yeux bleus, ni du regard qu'elle jeta sur nous, parce que je sortirais de mon sujet, et que d'ailleurs je n'y pense jamais que le moins qu'il m'est possible. Il me suffit d'avoir donné le plus bel exemple imaginable de la supériorité de ces deux couleurs sur toutes les autres, et de leur influence sur le bonheur des hommes.

"Je n'irai pas plus avant aujourd'hui. Quel sujet pourrais-je traiter qui ne fût insipide ? Quelle idée n'est pas effacée par cette idée ?—Je ne sais même quand je pourrai me remettre à l'ouvrage.—Si je le continue, et que le lecteur désire en voir la fin, qu'il s'adresse à l'ange distributeur des pensées, et qu'il le prie de ne plus mêler l'image de ce tertre parmi la foule de pensées décousues qu'il me jette à tout instant."

"Sans cette précaution, c'en est fait de mon voyage."

Clearest mark of all is the delicacy in transition, as in the opening of Chapter xv, gauged at once to bring the servant on the scene swiftly and to explain the previous allusion to the wet sponge, that not a word may be displaced or wasted.

The fulness and minuteness of gesture is not only characteristic in itself; it also shows that Maistre grasped as characteristic in this form that it should be applied to the most insignificant incidents and the smallest objects—a portrait, a house-dog, a bed, a coat, a rose,—and that it should be applied sentimentally. Maistre may have his passing sarcasm on sentimentality;¹ but his whole book is steeped in it. In form and in tone his Voyage is a sentimental journey. In form and in tone there is the same subtle unity—not a unity of the fable, for the Voyage has no more narrative unity than the Journey, but a descriptive unity. No wonder it closes like the Journey, but how much more delicately!

For the Voyage autour de ma Chambre is not a copy. It has not a single detail demonstrably borrowed, and as a whole it is original. That is what makes its imitation at once so interesting to study and so profitable. This is literary influence, that an author, in adopting a form, should use it for himself. Thus, for instance, that Maistre should so have modified the form as to present less drama and more essay follows from the temper of Maistre. From the temper of

¹Cap. ix.
Maistre also comes the occasional tone of oratory, the larger use of natural scenery, the very slight use of manners, the comparatively indistinct presentation of persons, the serious reflections philosophical and religious. And the nobler soul had also the freer fancy; he is less concrete, or, to put it conversely, more abstract, more purely fanciful. In a word, he is always himself. He learned from Sterne precisely as one painter learns from another.

One book, then, in 1794, appears to sum up the influence of Sterne’s best form on French literature. For the rest, one direct imitation of Tristram, and perhaps a score of passages here and there, reminiscent possibly of his sentimentality, possibly of someone else’s. Yet “Sterne is so French.” After all, is he? He has the quickest sensibility to French habits of expression, but not so much to manner in word as to manners, to attitude. He seems to like the language; but his sympathy is not from mastery. In mastery Sterne is at the first reader, without vocabulary, without syntax, and especially without idiom. The idioms of manners he read at sight; but it is at least doubtful that he knew enough French to appreciate French style.

So there is no promise for inquiry whether Sterne, teaching so remarkably little to France, may on the other hand have learned something from her. One looks again in his Prévost, the very man of men for Sterne; but ten pages of Manon bring him to a stand; a story always in motion, a story of passion, above all a style that is what Sterne’s at its best never is—artless, a lovely simplicity. Not all the tears o’er faithless Manon shed persuade me that Sterne had anything from the Chevalier des Grieux; and on M. Brunetière’s presentation of Prévost’s later stories I will risk the assertion that he had nothing from them either. M. Jusserand

1 Capp. v, xl. 2Capp. xxi, xxix, xxx. 3Cf. Cap. xxxiv, on old letters, which is somewhat in the strain of Donald G. Mitchell. 4Études Critiques, vol. iii. 5English Essays from a French Pen, page 147.
suggests Scarron: I cannot find even a clear reminiscence. Nor is it probable that he had anything from Crébillon fils. He visited that worthy; he alludes in the Journey to his Égarements du Cœur et de l'Esprit; he concocted with him the precious plan by which each was to attack the morality of the other's books; but nothing beyond these personal relations has been suggested by the hardy explorers of Crébillon fils.

Sterne's best art, then, seems underived and almost uncommunicated. There is some colour for calling Tristram Shandy Rabelaisian; but the Sentimental Journey, as it is one of the most exquisite pieces in literature, is also one of the most truly unique.