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Lately returned to fashion as a prophetically post-modern and now presciently Lacanian text, *Tristram Shandy* occupies a more anomalous position than ever in histories of the English novel. Either erased completely from origin stories told about the infant form or requiring, within those stories, a Sternean digression of its own, its most significant exclusion has been from the tradition of formal realism which Ian Watt defined in *The Rise of the Novel* and identified with the writings of Richardson, Fielding, and Defoe. According to this most influential of accounts, the dominant strain of eighteenth century fiction reflected the rationalism, empiricism and individualism of an aspiring middle class in its distinctive formal qualities: the "particularisation of time, place and person;" a "natural and lifelike sequence of action;" and "a literary style which gave the most exact and rhythmical equivalent of the object described" (291). Refusing to group *Tristram Shandy* with the "degraded" minor fictions of the period—fictions possessed of such "fugitive literary tendencies as sentimentalism or gothic terror"—Watt was firm in his belief that, despite his marginality, Sterne was a master of the dominant form, uniquely capable of reconciling Richardson's "realism of presentation" with Fielding's "realism of assessment." If Sterne had applied his skill to "the usual purposes of the novel," Watt insisted, "(he) would probably have been the supreme figure among eighteenth century novelists." But because he "turned his irony against many of the narrative methods which the new genre had so lately developed," he produced only a parody of the novel, excluding himself from the great tradition while becoming a chance precursor of modernism through his subversive treatment of time. (291-2)

Watt's view of the novel's dominant tradition has proven to be determinant, as has his sense of Sterne's relation to it. Debated, modified and extended, his theory has remained in place, justifying a continuing tendency to read 18th century fictions—even in their most "developed" form—as prelude to the great nineteenth century social novels which "realistically" portray the construction and contestations of personal and class relations. The opposition between respectable realism and disreputable popular traditions has been modified only to the extent that the tradition of the fantastic has been treated with increasing seriousness by recent critical theorists who have conceptualized it as realism's coherent counterpart. Like proponents of realism, however, these critics theorize from positions within the traditions that they explore, on the basis of the same assumptions concerning social and epistemological relations as those that shaped the novels which they emphasize in their theories. Interpreting the values of the fantastic as subverting those of realism, they augment the oppositional structure initially described by Watt, ignoring texts that don't fit readily into one of their two categories. Similarly, those critics who have phrased analyses of *Tristram Shandy* itself have also failed to modify the theoretical landscape. Unwilling to read Sterne's novel in the context of realism, they have overlooked its affinity with methods and perspectives of fantasy. While noting the novel's various affiliations—with the traditions of Menippean satire and learned wit, with modernism and "the novel" in various vague forms—they have accepted and reproduced its marginal status by studying it, in its eccentricity, alone.

Adopting an alternative approach, I want to argue that once we redefine these novelistic traditions not as mutually exclusive, oppositional and hierarchical genres but as mutually constitutive modes, *Tristram Shandy* loses its eccentric cast and becomes comfortably, even commandingly ensconced in a network of genres, modes and registers which reflect and shape belief systems that, while complex and, at times, conflictual, are also always interactive. Further, by focussing on *Tristram Shandy*'s relation to the perspectives of realism and fantasy—exploiting its apparent marginality for its deconstructive value—I wish to use it as a lens through which to refocus the composition and politics of the traditions which its exclusion has been complicitous in defining.

It seems appropriate to begin my project by examining the tradition of realism that Watt defines and the discourse of individualism that he duplicates. It has been argued that the interaction of psychological and social forces that yielded the unitary, propertied...
and normatively male subject of capitalism, science, law, rationality—and realism—originated in the sixteenth century, as new forms of social hierarchy were established and as the individual's sense of self became increasingly identified with behavioural control and emotional restraint. Analyzing perceptible changes in attitudes and manners, Norbert Elias has mapped the social and psychological transformations which accompanied the "civilizing process:" a process through which the lives of human beings became increasingly divided between intimate and public spheres, and between permissible and prohibited behaviors. (190) In Elias's account, socially sanctioned prohibitions which were internalized by the individual came to be experienced as self-control: manners achieved the force increasingly of morality and morality constructed desire as perversion. The interior struggle between the need for repression and the urge to expression aroused feelings of shame and guilt, repulsion and despair: all of which became, in the late nineteenth century, the focus of a new science of interiority which replaced the discourse of morality with the discourse of psychoanalysis.

The sense of an unbridgeable chasm which separated the self from its self, from others, and from the natural world, saturated the social, psychological and intellectual relations which served both to mask and to reflect personal alienation in a hegemonic system of hierarchically ordered differences. The claustral self—represented in related forms by Descartes' thinking subject, Leibnitz's windowless monad, and the universalizing categories of the Kantian mind—wove, out of its own substance, elaborate webs that could attach themselves to a world which had grown threateningly strange. In England, acquiring individuals—adult, male, white and middle-class—who were freed in the seventeenth century from the absolute authority of God and King, depended for guidance upon the directives of personal conscience, and gave birth through reason to the holistic subject who must discover his father's name also assumes his father's place: his property, social position, capacity for survival in the public world, and his authority as founder of a family. The daughter's story, on the other hand, traces the displacement of the father by the aspiring husband, and carries her through the complexities of courtship to the threshold of marriage: what follows, unspoken, is her maternity. Often it is her first name that supplies the novel's title—Pamela, Cecilia, Evelina, Clarissa—emphasizing the extent to which her social identity is in abeyance during courtship, as she moves from the shadow of one patronymic into the shadow of another.
murdered God and King once filled cannot be lit by conscience, and reason cannot satisfy the longing for edenic harmony with nature. The prohibitions marked by difference yield a horror of indeterminacy and also a craving for it. That which we refuse as alien remains ummourned within us and haunts us with the terror and fascination of its otherness. Fantastic fictions struggle to articulate this kind of knowledge. They refuse the social subject's achievement of categorical identities in order to reveal the resistance of desiring subjectivities. Instead of tracking social progress, they trace the repetitious enactments of psychic loss. While realistic novels inherit, in diminished form, the multiplicity of the social imagination, fantastic narratives reflect the ways in which the cultural and personal imaginary is structured by a denial of heterogeneous community: the ways in which exclusions which are necessary at one level to the formation of cultural identities, are interiorized at another level as fantasized objects of desire and fear.

We might say, then, that the civilizing movement which yields the Janus-faced Enlightenment, finds form and expression in two radically different but fundamentally interactive ways of knowing and of telling which reveal themselves in theoretical, critical and literary discourses which can be read reciprocally. These conceptual strategies of realism and the fantastic constitute each other as narrative modes through diverse genres which are mutually constitutive while appearing to be mutually exclusive. Although these narrative modes are treated as distinct and separable by their critics, few texts employ a single mode in unadulterated form. Most fictions, like most theories, are composites which, in their complex interaction of genres, modes and registers reveal ideological contestations and personal ambivalences. So, Descartes' first two meditations—counted among the originary texts of rationalism—betray the cultural anxiety which Elias describes, and are marked by the feelings of alienation and loss that have been associated with men's exile from the natural world. (Bordo) Similarly, "Robinson Crusoe," read by Watt as formal realism's founding fiction, reveals in its fantastic sub-text the obsessive, claustral, appropriative and haunted subjectivity that is the other side of possessive individualism: a subjectivity dependent for its definition on the exclusions and introjections of racial, class and gender "others". Finally, the tradition of psychological realism read, for example, through "Clarissa," unveils a realistic narrative that tragically reveals, while it seeks

comically to resolve, the conflictual interactions of socioeconomic interests, alongside a fantastic narrative of psychic fragmentation and social alienation, of sexual anxiety and gender confusion, of interpretive relativity and authorial uncertainty.

"Tristram Shandy" is a different case since it has not been claimed by either faction. Readily dismissed by theorists of realism, it has not been considered at all by theorists of the fantastic, and while some have categorized it as Menippean satire, they have done so only in the most general of terms. As a result, the text has retained its formally eccentric character in critical opinion. When the binary model that is usually applied is reconceptualized to emphasize interactive genres, modes and registers, however, the position of "Tristram Shandy" changes quite dramatically. Instead of appearing anomalous or marginal to the novel's shaping structures, Sterne's text becomes absolutely pivotal to our understanding of them. Neither a "parody" of realism nor utterly irrelevant to the fantastic, it proves to be a text that openly explores the limits and possibilities of both in their mutually constitutive dynamic. Published at the same time as "The Castle of Otranto," "Tristram Shandy" shares the fundamental interests of "pure" fictions of gothic horror, but with one important difference: its investigations are enacted in a comic register with sentimental undertones that aspire to the sublime while the gothic is played out in melodrama that struggles to transform itself in tragedy. Whether it is sounded in comic or tragic registers, however, the fantastic mode functions always to illuminate the shadow side of individualism, rationalism and social progress by revealing the price paid for the increasing rigidity of epistemological, psychological, sexual and social boundaries. Both modes of narrative reflect, reinforce and help through their expression to alleviate the anxieties of indeterminacy which haunt this patriarchal, imperialist and capitalist society in its early stages.

Placed in historical perspective, the impulses of the fantastic can be seen to structure a range of overlapping genres—the gothic novels of horror by Walpole, Matthew Lewis and Radcliffe, for example; the nineteenth century romance that includes "Wuthering Heights," "Frankenstein," and "Dracula" as well as Freud's case studies; the comic absurd that begins with Sterne, moves through Lewis Carroll to Joyce and Beckett, and extends to the novels of magical realism and the essays of Lacan. Although fictive and theoretical
texts in this tradition are stamped differently by their differing historical moments, all depict a subjectivity that is internally divided; a desiring subjectivity that seeks to articulate the absence and loss by which it has been shaped: a subjectivity that resists societal forces which would appropriate it for family, class and nation; for language and for reason; for the gendered division of labor and for forms of sexuality that are proscribed. Many fantastic fictions are contained fully by the interior landscape which the solipsistic mind projects, and most at least are dominated by it. While Tristram Shandy is not unique in its resistance to containment, it is certainly the first fiction to insist upon the necessary if partial engagement of the fantastic subject with its social context: of the fantastic with the realistic mode.

At the center of Tristram Shandy is Sterne's ironic interrogation of Locke who, in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, attempts to mediate between the old rationalism and the new empiricism, defining a subjectivity that functions in accordance with its own eccentric desires in a material world that still lies open to rational discovery. Sterne recognizes the paradoxical nature of Locke's search for incontrovertible truths hidden beneath inescapable relativities: for absolute principles that could guarantee the relation of the idea to its reality, the name to its object, private to public meaning and selfish interest to social need (Moglen, Chap. 1). He sees the fragility of the bridges that Locke had built to connect rationalism's perspectives with those of empiricism: his deployment of a theory of error to close the gap between rational thought and the eccentricities of association; his presentation of the slippage of signifier and signified as an abuse of language; and his spasmodic appeal to a deus ex machina when other forms of regulation failed. Positioning himself on the side of radical empiricism, Sterne chooses to look directly into the chasm that marks the divergence of fantastic discourses from those of realism, not ultimately to connect them through some clever sleight of mind, but rather to map the interaction of their constructive and deconstructive strategies. From this perspective, he prefigures modern epistemologies which assert that knowledge is produced and not discovered, and that what is known is inseparable from the subjectivity that knows. But entitling his book The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman Sterne also suggests that while knowledge relies on our personal constructions, those projections which we call opinions are both privately referenced and socially embedded.

The point is that Sterne takes subjectivity as his subject. He does not conceptualize that subjectivity as coherent in the mode of realism, fully embodied and transparently available as character; if ultimately conflicted, then capable of integration. He conceptualizes it rather in fantastic terms, as multiple and even pathologically divided; as mysterious to others and unknown even to itself. Following realism's familiar formula, Sterne has Tristram, his narrator, set out to tell the story of his life, only to discover that the single story he can write is "the history of what passes in a man's mind," an analysis of the way in which the self knows and constructs itself in language, and the way in which that construction marks him always as a character alienated from himself. This is a subjectivity that uncannily anticipates those phrased, dissected and debated by psychoanalytic theorists at later stages of the modern civilizing process of which Sterne was an earlier representative. Once this subject's project is defined as self-retrieval it is inevitably doomed, since to know the self is also to recognize the self as other, and to recognize the self as other is to lose the self one seeks to know. As Sterne understood, the lost reclaimed is the loss denied: a farce of misrecognition which can never be resolved but is continually replayed as the telling—which is also the making—of a life.

But if Sterne took subjectivity as his subject, the form of subjectivity that he explored was clearly and distinctly male. For him—as, indeed, for Freud, and later for Lacan—the central problem of this self-eluding and self-deluded subjectivity is concerned with the mystery of its engendering: the mystery of the origins of self, sexuality and sexual difference. The primal scene with which Tristram begins his inquiries and to which he compulsively returns throughout the novel, is precisely the scene of origination—the scene in which he is conceived by man and woman as a man. Haunting, shaping and prefiguring the text, it is a scene of interrupted coition that marks at once the irreconcilable differences between male and female, the incommensurability of passion and reason, the ultimate disjunction of the word and its referent, and the irrecovable separation of desire from its object. Radically ambiguous, it is a scene of indeterminacy that is ultimately determining for its protagonist—as any scene of primal fantasy must be. "The pitiful misadventures" which Tristram is doomed to
suffer mentally and physically in a fundamentally unsympathetic world are rooted here, in the eccentric associations and radical differences of his parents: his father, the most “regular” of men, who “winds up” both his house-clock and his wife on the first Sunday night of every month, and his mother who dares to speak as she is on the verge of being wound: 

Pray, my dear, quoth my mother, have you not forgot to wind up the clock? Well, Good G! cried my father, making an exclamation, but taking care to moderate his voice at the same time. Did ever woman, since the creation of the world, interrupt a man with such a silly question? Pray, what was your father saying? Nothing. (4)

Whether Walter is able to continue doing what he was (or was not) doing before he was so literally interrupted, can never be certain since Tristram is born a scant eight months later, “as near nine kalendar months as any husband could in reason have expected” (7). It is clear that Tristram’s personal fate might indeed have been sealed on this occasion, along with the fortunes of the Shandy house, by the scattering of animal spirits “transfused” from father to son, “his muscular strength and virility worn down to a thread,” and his melancholy disposition established prematurely. But whatever the particular circumstances were of his conception, Tristram’s fate as a man is necessarily determined by the anxiety of paternity which structures the relations of reproduction in his eighteenth century world. With his fatalistic comment about the inevitable prematurity of infant births, Sterne suggests that a man’s identity as father can never with certainty be fixed—although his name remains crucial to the validity of his claims on property. The male seed is alienated at coition, and the secrets of the enveloping womb are as final as the secrets of the grave. Man’s stakes in the reproductive process are increased as he “discovers” his radical differences from woman, whose identity is inextricably bound to her uniquely functioning body and her “essential” nature. So Walter sees that

...from the very moment the mistress of the house is brought to bed, every female in it, from my lady’s gentlewoman down to the cinder-wench becomes an inch taller for it; and give themselves more airs upon that single inch, than all their other inches put together."

“I think, rather,” replied my uncle Toby, “that ‘tis we who sink an inch lower. If I meet but a woman with child I do it” (213)

It is the resentment that Walter reveals and the anxiety that Toby confesses which stamp the account that Tristram gives of his begetting: a story shaped by a masculinist science which centers the father and all but erases the mother, casting the prospective infant as a homunculus who resides, fully developed, in the sperm, requiring only safe delivery to the passive and incidental womb, which is “the place destined for his reception.” It is an erasure which could only be improved, as Tristram ironically suggests, if after the ceremony of marriage, and before that of consummation, all the homunculi could be “baptized at once, slap-dash, by injection” (47).

The laws, scholarly treatises and medical practices which collude, in Sterne’s comic representation, to help men establish women as unrelated to their children, reflect the politics of reproduction that Mary O’Brien and others have analyzed in a similar, but explicitly feminist mode. From this perspective, men bond together seeking to repair their alienation in principles of continuity that lie outside of nature. With their laws, they appropriate the children produced by female labor and substitute their own cultural productions for women’s reproductive creativity. But while Sterne ironically reveals the defensive nature of the impulse that makes a container of the fertile womb, it is the fear of that container as a malign vacuum that shapes, at conscious and unconscious levels, the fiction that he, with Tristram, writes. It is all very well for Tristram, having abandoned his mother for several chapters just as she discovers his elder brother’s death, to bemoan the fact that, in rejecting her, he is acting “like a Turk:” “as if Nature had plastered me up, and set me down naked upon the banks of the river Nile, without one” (277). But, despite his protests, the novel does proceed as if it would be better for men to be spawned spontaneously from river mud than to be born of women. Like the psychoanalysts who succeed him, Sterne is trapped in the terrain of male development which he also, with much precision, maps. Mrs. Shandy
moves through his text as many subtly maligned mothers move
through Freud's case histories: initiating nothing, but vaguely
responsible for everything unfortunate that happens.\textsuperscript{17} Never knowing
"more than her backside" what anybody means, she is without
intelligence, curiosity or imagination. Since a "temperate current
of blood ran orderly through her veins in all months of the year, and
in all critical moments both of the day and night." (451) she is
without passion or desire, although Walter refuses to see her as
lacking in lust. Deprived of her own interior life and disconnected
from the interior lives of others, she cannot be conceptualized in the
mode of fantasy. Marginal to the social world of family, she is
barred from participation in the realistic mode as well. Neither a
"real" nor a spectral mother, she beckons towards while veiling the
places where those mothers should have been. As an obstacle to
narrative, she is refused all humane and humanizing gestures by
the text. Her long and difficult labor takes place offstage, essentially
unremarked by the Shandy men. We see her on the verge of
discovering the death of her elder son, but learn nothing of her
response to that discovery. As caregiver, she is similarly invisible:
we are told only that while Walter is writing his \textit{Tristrapedia}—the
educational theory intended to compensate for all of Tristram's
woes—Tristram himself remains uneducated, "totally
neglected...and abandoned to my mother." (283) Her breast—the
sign and confirmation of her maternity—is evoked by Tristram
only once, in the context of a theory that associates the nursing
breast's flaccidity or firmness with the "length and goodness" of
the infant's nose. (174) "My mother, you must know..." he starts,
but turns immediately from description to digression. His mother
remains clothed—the taboo in place—but the few words he drops
are adequate to seal his mother's fate in the curious reader's mind.
Given what we know of Tristram's nose, and of his association of
nose and penis, we conclude—as we are meant to do—that hers is
not the good breast, flaccid and nurturing, but the firm, bad breast
complexly identified, in this context, with castration.

Already linked to Walter's possible impotence through her
untimely inquiry about the winding of the clock, Mrs Shandy here
becomes a specific victim of the castration fear that floods the novel:
associated with the lascivious Widow Wadman, who unmans
Uncle Toby with her penetrating gaze, and with Susannah, the
leaky vessel, who "cuts off spouts" and destroys bridges—

Tristram's significantly among them. Throughout the text, the
good mother—with the nourishing breast and sheltering, creative
womb—is known only in her absence, an implied "other" of the
women whose obstinate passivity or voracious sexuality cause the
primary experience of differentiation to be displaced by fears of
impotence and castration.\textsuperscript{18} Unrepresented, the fantasy of that
good mother is identified retrospectively with an originary loss
experienced by the subject as a lack which, while displaced and
veiled by language, persists as a desire which cannot be answered
and a fear which cannot be calmed. Once the barely perceptible,
oddly attenuated figure of Mrs. Shandy is placed at the center of
Sterne's fiction with the elusive space that she both confirms and
hides, the novel can be read as an effort on the part of the male
subject—both Sterne and Tristram—to deny, embody and appro-
appropriate this present absence in and for themselves, with all the traces
of femininity by which it is stamped, and the promise of wholeness
that it extends. Struggling to deny sexual difference by transform-
ing it into a male sameness, the text attempts on one level to
substitute father for mother, phallus for breast, word for thing and
integral self for multiple subjectivity, but the fetishizing gesture
necessarily undoes the compromise which it is intended to effect.
Desire is intensified by displacement. The threat of lack and the
knowledge of difference are always present and the need they
arouse must continually be articulated in order to be allayed.
Entombed within the self, the unrepresented aspects of the female
other become the source of a perpetual mourning that seeks formal
and thematic expression in the text, where it is most obviously
suggested in the melancholy resonance of Tristram's name.\textsuperscript{19}

While the idealized woman, who is the object not of fear but of
desire, makes her appearance as the romantic other in both \textit{A
Sentimental Journey} and \textit{Journal to Eliza}, she is largely excluded from
\textit{Tristram Shandy}, where she is (mis)represented by the fathers:
primarily by Walter, but also by Yorick, Uncle Toby and Trim.
Replacing the triangulated, competitive, heterosexual nuclear family
of realism with an extended family comprised of a male homosocial
community organized around the dyad of father and son, Sterne
lovingly brings the emotional logic of his misogynistic world into
fantastic focus. The occasion for relations between and among men,
women become mere background for the enactment of male pas-
sion and the trading of male property. Central to the functioning of
literature and psychology

the private as well as of the public world, men perform their emotional and intellectual labor in the context of an ambiguous masculinity that completes the appropriation of the female role on all but the most grossly biological of levels. Without competition, Tristram's relation to the fathers—like their relations with one another—is erotic in its longing for an unmediated connection that resurrects the imagined primal bond: a desire not to be like, but to be. It is an empathic urge that makes each male project himself onto the other in order to retrieve that other as a version of himself. More, since each, with his ambiguously mutilated manhood, serves as a feminized other for the others, each confirms the others' masculinity in order to construct a phallic economy which is based, ironically, on lack.

In this way, Sterne fantasizes a cultural form of the preoedipal moment in which the identification with the mother is shattered and the male child identifies with what Freud calls the ideal father of personal history. It is a moment between the fall from Edenic wholeness, retrospectively remembered, and entry into the conflictual world of hierarchical difference in which women can be suppressed but not denied. It is a psychic moment which Sterne—made possible by the Shandy men on Hobby-Horses that they ride along an edge that divides the internal from the external world. "A secondary figure, and a kind of background to the whole," (13) the Hobby-Horse is a comic double that expresses a man's eccentricity while defining the adaptive strategies that he employs in order to function in his social world. As Sterne explains:

A man and his Hobby-Horse, tho' I cannot say that they act and re-act exactly after the same manner in which the soul and body do upon each other: yet doubtless there is a communication between them of some kind, and my opinion rather is, that there is something in it more of the manner of electrified bodies,—and that by means of the heated parts of the rider, which come immediately into contact with the back of the Hobby-Horse. By long journies and much friction, it so happens that the body of the rider is at length fill'd as full of Hobby-Horsical matter as it can hold;—so that if you are able to give but a clear description of the nature of the one, you may form a pretty exact description of the genius and the character of the other." (57-58)

Functioning to mediate, initiate and defend, the Hobby-Horse seeks to modify the claustral psychic structure in a performative process through which the self establishes its relation to itself. 
Accomplishing the important work of sublimation, it allows the Shandy males to channel sexual energy into activities that have nothing to do with women and everything to do with other men. “Never did lover post down to a belov’d mistress with more heat and expectations than my uncle Toby did, to enjoy...in private” the war games that he plays with Corporal Trim. Walter, “hugely tickled” by an intellectual concept, is wont to “clap...both his hands upon his cod-piece” and Tristram flees the temptations of Nannette—repelled by the slit in her petticoat—in order to write the story of Uncle Toby’s courtship. All the hobby-horsical activities of the men—Toby’s war games, Walter’s theories, Tristram’s autobiography, Yorick’s wit, Trim’s inventions—are forms of play which help the self to assimilate instead of accommodating to the undeniable otherness of the real world. They are transitional practices, in D. W. Winnicott’s sense, which allow inner and outer realities to be maintained as separate yet interrelated. The balance is delicate, however, and the imaginative illusion, with its productive compromise, can slip into a form of madness when it is not shared by others. As Tristram suggests, “A man’s Hobby-Horse is as tender a part as he has about him” (87), and the bridges it constructs between the psychic and the social are very fragile. Anxieties of difference—the difference of man and woman, self and other, word and thing—can cause the dynamic interactions of symbolic play to be frozen into the hardened strategies of obsession. Because “it is the nature of an hypothesis, when once a man has conceived it, that it assimilates every thing to itself,” (114) the Hobby-Horse comes easily to exert a tyranny of its own. Attempting to control the world through theoretical formulations which experience belies, Walter’s “whole life (becomes) a contradiction to his knowledge”: “his rhetoric and conduct...at perpetual handcuffs”(150). Toby, enamoured of the game he plays with Trim, attributes to it more reality than the reality that it imitates. He condemns the peace of Utrecht and “grieves the war was not his knowledge”: “his rhetoric and conduct...at perpetual handcuffs” (114). Toby’s horse throws him “somewhat viciously” in this collision of fantasy with reality, creating “a sort of shyness” between them that gives the Widow Wadman her opening, and allows her to initiate her own campaign (352). In a similar way, Tristram is written by the autobiography that he seeks to write and Sterne is shaped by Tristram, the persona he projects. And while they, like Yorick, are able to reflect on the spaces that they open in their attempts at self-retrieval, self-reflexivity does not close the gaps although it is responsible for the creative dynamism of their projects.

Representing the uniqueness of a man’s “character”—the way he shapes the reality he lives—the Hobby-Horse has no relevance to women who, according to Tristram, “have no character at all” (49). To have no Hobby-Horse means to be deprived of the subjectivity which emerges with the splitting of the self, and to experience not desire but need: in Sterne’s women, in the form of lust. To be, in this sense, without an “other” is to be disengaged from culture and to be identified with nature: to exist as essence on the margins of language, and to be literal rather than metaphorical in speech. Without self-consciousness, women in the Shandy world lack an awareness even of the lack they lack: the lack which is signalled and performed by the Hobby-Horse itself. An imitation horse’s head mounted on a stick that fits between its rider’s legs, the Hobby-Horse enables children’s mimicry of power. Seeking reparation for their anxiety of impotence, the Shandy males—like “the wisest of men in all ages” (10)—gallop child-like out into the world under the sign of this fantastic phallus. A fetish object, the Hobby-Horse disguises and discloses the fear if not the actuality of castration. Identified with potency, it enables subjectivity to perform itself symbolically, at the same time that it reveals the inevitable impotence of that performance. To ride the Hobby-Horse is to play the Other who is powerful. It is to take on what Lacan has called the Name of the Father, and to participate, therefore, in the patriarchal order from a position presumed dominant in language.

In Tristram Shandy, Sterne explores the process through which the primal experiences of fragmentation, differentiation and loss come to be experienced as castration through linguistic representation. Specifically, it describes how the male body is castrated by the cultural mind and suggests some of the ways (the Hobby-Horse among them) in which it seeks compensation for that symbolic mutilation. From the moment of conception, when the scattering of animal spirits wears the homunculus’s “muscular strength and virility...down to a thread,” Tristram’s potency as a male is questioned. That question becomes more pressing with his birth, for while Dr. Slop in delivering him does not mistake his hip for his head and grasp it with his forceps, the substitution is implicitly...
suggested when it becomes clear that Tristram's nose, small already by heredity, has been flattened by the Doctor's intervention. The circumcision performed later by a falling window sash further focuses the significant ambiguity. Encouraging Tristram to piss out of the window, "without considering that 'nothing... in our family...was well hung,' (284), Susannah proclaims the "murder" of the child and announces that "Nothing is left...nothing is left—for me, but to run my country" (284). For Walter, who perceives that Tristram "comes very hardly by all his religious rites," the problem that results from the catastrophe is rhetorical, not anatomical. The "world" will have formed its opinion of these events, as Walter knows, and is not likely to change it even if Tristram "is shewn publicly at the market cross." (329) That opinion, formed on the basis of the community's own fears, is sealed irrevocably by the mishap of Tristrams's naming. To compensate for all of his infant's woes, Walter intends to name his son "Trismegistus": the Greek name of the Egyptian God, Thoth, regarded as the inventor of writing, the creator of languages, the scribe, interpreter and adviser of the gods, and the representative on earth of Ra, the god who signifies fertility. Through the error of Susannah—who has as little understanding of mythology as she has sensitivity to words—the boy is named for sorrow and represents the lack that, while inherent in language, is experienced in the body. The difference between the name that Walter wishes for his son and the name that he is given measures the distance between the male's idealized and real power. Whatever the "reality"—and, in this sense, there is for Sterne no reality outside of language—Tristram is emasculated. Later, he flees from the slit in Nanette's petticoat, and stands impotent before his Jenny's gaze, "reflecting upon what had not passed." (395). Describing himself as one "who shall never have a finger in the pye" (423), Tristram reflects that while a man "may be set on fire like a candle, at either end—provided there is a sufficient wick standing out," he himself prefers to be lit at the top rather than at the bottom, where the flame "has the misfortune generally to put out itself." (426). That is where Walter also chooses to be lit—at the source of his theories—and Toby too, in the games which do not test his modesty. It is only through displacements such as these that the Shandy men can escape the gaze of women: the Widow Wadman who wishes to see Toby's wound, Susannah who sees that "all" is gone, Jenny who sees Tristram's impotence, and even Mrs. Shandy, who sees in Walter the inept winder of the clock.

But while the Shandy males can avoid the female gaze which they experience as castrating, they cannot evade at all the castration which is imposed on them by language. Like Toby, "whose life was put in jeopardy by word," (67), all find, with Tristram, that the search for Truth is endless and that the path one follows to it is "a thorny and bewildered track,—intricate are the steps! intricate are the mazes of this labyrinth! intricate are the troubles which the pursuit of this bewitching phantom KNOWLEDGE, will bring upon thee" (69). An elusive object of desire, truth is always somewhere else, lost in the endless play of words by which it is projected; a testament in its absence to man's alienation from the society in which he lives and from the self which he inhabits. Refusing a realistic view of language that binds the word to its object, Sterne follows Locke in connecting words to ideas that are arbitrary and subjective. But while Locke identifies this relativity of meaning with abuses of language that are corrigible through careful definition, Sterne rejects the possibility that definitions can be anything but tautological. In his world, there is no way for individuals to move beyond the eccentricity of ideational associations to communication based upon shared meanings. As Walter recognizes, "the highest stretch of improvement a single word is capable of, is a high metaphor for which...the idea is generally the worse and not the better" (306). For this problem he has a formalist solution: the deployment of auxiliary verbs "to open new tracks of enquiry, and make every idea engender millions." But while his strategy enables him to produce endless variations on the theme of the white bear (Have I ever seen one? Might I ever have seen one? Am I ever to see one? Ought I ever to have seen one? Or can I ever see one? (307)), it can do nothing to prevent the slide in ordinary discourse from association to metaphor and from metaphor to metonymy. As Sterne suggests, each man must either remain mired, alone, in the path which his Hobby-Horse has broken—risking collision if he dares even the most harmless of diversions—or, like Tristram, he can self-consciously exploit the excessiveness of language in an effort to transform paralysis into creativity. To the extent that communication is possible within the vicissitudes of language, it is based less on shared assumptions and common definitions than it is on culturally induced and reinforced obsessions.

Nowhere is the relation of personal to social signification more...
literature and psychology

graphically demonstrated and more wittily explored than in the fiction's production of the meaning of "noses." Well might Tristram protest:

For by the word NOSE, throughout all this long chapter of noses, and in every other part of my work, where the word NOSE occurs, —I declare, by that word I mean a NOSE, and nothing more or less. (162)

The fact is that, throughout the text, Sterne creates for his reader the association of nose with penis and, as part of that association, the identification of Shandy noses with inherited impotence and lack. We are told, for example, that Tristram's great grandfather was forced to provide "an unconscionable jointure" for his wife in order to compensate for the size of his nose which, while "little or no nose," according to his wife, "no more nose... than there is upon the back of my hand," according to his son, and "shaped like an ace of clubs" in Tristram's view, was still—as his great grandfather himself insists—"a full inch longer than my father's" (163). Walter does not "conceive how the greatest family in England could stand it out against an uninterrupted succession of six or seven short noses," and indeed Tristram with Toby—if not Walter himself—signals the end of the familial line by not conceiving at all. But the nosology of the Shandy family raises more questions than it answers since, according to the logic of the text, the mutilations which the Shandy males endure are more psychological than they are physical: fears of inadequacy which reflect a cultural imperative.

The anxiety about less and the desire for more are all-pervasive, as "Slawkenbergius's Tale" reveals. The sense of lack yields images of an idealized Nose which all men want, from which all benefit, and which none can possess. Diego, the story's hero, has stopped in Strasburg as he travels from the Promontory of Noses, which he visits when his "dear Julia" rejects him because she has suspicions about the adequacies of his nose. What he has gotten there is everybody's business but anybody's guess. Clearly, he feels obliged to save himself for his beloved, and defends his organ valiantly against the sight and touch of others, with a sword so massive that no scabbard is large enough to fit it. Everywhere and nowhere, reputed to be both on his face and in his breeches, his Nose is the subject of fantasy, the topic of gossip, the object of women's desires, the cause of men's anxiety and, not least of all, the focus of scholarly theorizing and debate. Among the learned, disputes about the nose's nature and the possibility of its existence become so heated that the Nose itself is soon forgotten, having served "as a frigate to launch (the theorists) into the gulph of school divinity,—and then they all sailed before the wind" (198). "Macerated with expectatio..." Strasburgers can do nothing but obsess about the veiled appurtenance of Diego. The men, women and children who leave their city to wait for his return, are "tossed to and fro... for three days and nights... with the tempestuous fury of (their) passion." When they finally do reenter the gates of Strasburg, no more the wiser, they discover themselves to have been undone by curiosity, for the French, "ever upon the catch," have taken advantage of their absence and marched in. "Alas! alas! cries Slawkenbergius—it is not the first—and I fear will not be the last fortress that has been either won—or lost by Nose" (203).

As Sterne's anatomy of the nose is, in fact, an anatomy of the personal and cultural meanings of the penis, his allegory of the Nose is an allegory of the penis's relation to the Phallus: an exploration of the process through which the ideal concept is constructed and a revelation of the fragility of that construction. Projected by castration anxiety and the fear of impotence, the Phallus represents a penis which, invincible in perpetual erection, signals both self-control and power over others. Appropriately, Diego's codpiece does not permit an unobstructed view of the reputedly impressive organ which it neither fully contains nor completely hides. Veiled, it becomes, with all of its elusive allusivity, the social and individual object of desire which marks the lack out of which desire emerges and which it reproduces. But Sterne, unlike Lacan, does not present the Phallus as a transcendental signifier—an originating idealization that generates significations but is not itself the effect of a prior signifying chain. On the contrary, he demonstrates the Phallus's embeddedness in culture, insisting that it cannot be detached from the penis on which it depends to symbolize its difference as a positive reconfiguration of the negative term.26 Further, by subjecting the idealized organ to the laws that govern language, Sterne brings the paternal law which promotes this idealization into the realm of relativity and desire, emphasizing the vulnerability of the Symbolic order itself.
knowledge, justice—and the father—are revealed by Sterne to fall as far short of their ideal representations as penis does from Phallus.

From the beginning of his story, what it means to Tristram to become a man is not only to accept the erasure of his mother but, even more importantly, to assume his father’s place. But the place of the fathers, as Tristram learns, is not a place of personal power, however it might appear societally. At every crucial moment of Tristram’s development, Walter inadvertently undermines the masculinity of his son, turning him into a version of himself. The pitiful misadventures of Tristram’s conception, of his birthing, of his naming, and of his education are all expressions of Walter’s futile hobby-horsical obsession. So, too, with Tristram’s incapacities as a reader: his inability to narrativize his life in a coherent form. “(T)is my father’s fault,” he defensively explains, “and whenever my brains come to be dissected, you will perceive, without spectacles, that he has left a large uneven thread, as you sometimes see in an unsaleable piece of cambric, running along the whole length of the web.” (351). It is this inherited irregularity that makes Tristram a writer in the fantastic mode: one who unwillingly turns the realistic narrative inside out in order to interrogate psychic integration, rationality and social order. Had his vision been elaborated in a tragic register, its perversity would have projected disintegration and despair as appropriate responses to the entropic pull towards the vacuity of meaning which is death. But Sterne’s register is comic, and it is through humour that Tristram actively engages the maddening disjunctions by which the other characters are paralysed. Unlike the other Shandy men, he deploys his hobby-horse to articulate his doubleness, producing an ironic form of autobiographical self-reflection that acknowledges while refusing psychic fragmentation. Recognizing that everyone’s life is farcical, he believes that “it was ordained as a scourge upon the pride of human wisdom, that the wisest of us all should thus outwit ourselves, and eternally forego our purposes in the intertempore act of pursuing them” (284). The comic view that he enjoys of others is for him but a version of the pleasure he derives from the performance of himself: a performance in which he is both audience and actor. Proliferating roles, he achieves a fullness of self-expression that is experienced as subjective depth. And as subjectivity is for him performance, so reality seems to be a construction which he is easily able to revise.27

Representing subjectivity as performance, Sterne points to a radical indeterminacy that refuses gender difference and interrogates the misogynistic urge that largely motivates and anchors the precarious balances of his fiction. In his exploration of that sexual indeterminacy, Sterne moves his fantastic project—sporadically and ambivalently—beyond the merely comic, into the self-transcendent space of the sublime. Collapsing the Phallus into the always already collapsed penis, Sterne with Tristram surrenders all claims to a universalized and mastering masculinity.28 But at the same time that he renounces phallicism, he embraces a form of gendered subjectivity that seeks to obliterate the oppositions of sexual difference while paradoxically remaining male. The indeterminacy that he struggles to embody in his text is grounded in a place outside of the symbolic order, in a supplementarity that is not controlled by reason, in an excess that is not subordinate to paternal law. It is an indeterminacy identified by some feminists (who share not his perspective but his focus) with the suppressed body of the mother; with feminine space, therefore, and with an erotic connection that predates the primal rupture responsible for initiating difference and differentiation.29 Kristeva conceptualizes it as the semiotic (le semiotique): an affective dimension of human experience that disrupts the Symbolic, mediating between it and the primal experience of infantile mentation which Lacan calls the Real.

In Tristram Shandy, Sterne draws on that unrepresentable space both formally and thematically. He captures affectivity in the immediacy of color, shape and sound: in black, white, mottled and blank pages; in visual images of assorted kinds; in deletions, asterisks and underlinings, and always in the omnipresent dash. Interrogating the denotative function of language, Sterne emphasizes the connotative richness of ironic ambiguity, of multiple references, and of jokes and puns. Refusing the illusion of public time—the time of the fathers which is linear and death-directed—Sterne emphasizes the synchronicity of an interior present characterized by repetition, simultaneity and cyclicality: a time which is, for Kristeva, women’s time. (Signs, Autumn, 1981) Like Uncle Toby’s whistling, these are expressive strategies that suggest that “little knowledge is got by mere words” and, that to achieve wisdom of a deeper sort, it is necessary, as Tristram notes, “to go to the first springs.” (479) These strategies are part of a fantastic
discourse that, shaped by the eccentric consciousness of the writer and available also to transgressive forms of reading, strives to articulate the yearnings and frustrations of desire. When it is sounded in a tragic register, it reveals pathological states of mind that lead to psychic disintegration and the destruction of the social self. When it is performed in comic tones, as it is in Tristram Shandy, it is endlessly playful in its multiplicity and denial of hierarchical difference: in Kristeva’s words, a kind of “speech exultant” that strives to repair the damage that the Symbolic has caused (“The Freudian Thing” 120). Whether comic or tragic, this discursive form rejects the complementarity of sexual and gender differences. So, while the tragic fantastic is rooted in the culturally-carved depths of an oppositional psycho-sexual division, its comic counterpart—exemplified first by Sterne and later by Lacan—seeks to obliterate that difference altogether by returning to (or projecting) a prior psychic state. The urge to indeterminacy expressed by this nostalgic desire for return speaks vividly to the conflict between psychological and cultural imperatives which is intensified under specific historical conditions. In Sterne and Lacan’s strikingly ingenious, historically distanced, yet surprisingly similar interventions, the complex intransigence of the misogynistic construction of modern subjectivity is revealed with a force that is no less disquieting for all its comic energy and exuberance.

Although Sterne and Lacan position themselves quite differently in relation to the phallic order with which they are obsessed, both seek to define a subjectivity that has access to a self-transcendent and transformative world beyond the phallus. Trapped in the oppositional terms of the cultural symbolic, the two men describe the ungendered/gendered subjectivity of their fantasies as fundamentally male and as shaped by structures of knowledge and feeling that they identify with but paradoxically deny to women. The elusive theory that Lacan formulates to mask and to exploit this paradox is similar to the fictive strategies that Sterne deploys on behalf of the same interests. Extending his comic fantasy into the register of the sublime, Lacan names as “jouissance” that state of self-transcendent being—excessive, supra-sensible, intense—which is the object of his own heroic quest. The term is equally appropriate in suggesting the aspiration of the Shandean hero and the nature of the Sternean text.

Associated with the sexual moment that is always in excess, jouissance is the plenitude that can only be achieved outside of the cycle of desire which belongs to a phallic economy. Doomed always to be listening, like Mrs. Shandy, unheard, behind the door, women are said by Lacan to possess in their linguistic exclusion a supplementary jouissance which remains as mysterious to them as it is impenetrable to men. In this, they are like the “good old God” to whom Lacan also refers: without substance, merely reflecting surfaces that project the (male) self back upon itself so that in loving God or women, men must always love themselves (“God and the Jouissance of The Woman,” 142). Searching for the integrity of transcendence, they must put aside the phallic function which divides one always into two, and never reconstructs unity from division. “Short of castration,” Lacan says, “man has no chance of enjoying the body of the woman, in other words, of making love” (“God and the Jouissance of The Woman,” 143). For him, male jouissance cannot originate in the materiality of the body to which women are unself-reflexively confined. It is discoverable rather in an erotics of immateriality which is the “outsidesex” (hors-sexe) represented by men’s “love” of an idea, for example, or a poem, or a spiritual experience. For Lacan, those who go “beyond the phallus,” are mystics who put themselves on the side of the “not-all.” Their souls are conjured not out of the heterosexual relation, but out of the “homosexual.” They speak of love, which is a form of jouissance, and bond lovingly with other men since it is “by their courage in bearing this intolerable relation to the supreme being, that friends come to recognize and choose each other” (“A Love Letter,” 155). Finally, these poetic, self-transcending, mystical and male-identified souls who appropriate the roles of the woman and the God whom they have lost are exemplified in the Master’s work: “Add the Ecrits of Jacques Lacan, which is of the same order” (“God and the Jouissance of Woman,” 147).

Add also to that order the Shandean comedy of Laurence Sterne—with an important difference. Throughout Tristram Shandy, as we have seen, Sterne reduces women to barely perceptible presences in his text, placing them outside of language, denying them complex subjectivities, describing them as lustful but making them incapable of the “hors-sexe” to which he, with Lacan, assigns the highest value. Appropriating as much of women’s reproductive function as he can, Sterne denies their capacity to create culture or to make ethical judgments based on empathic connection. And
while women are more visible in his two later works than they are in *Tristram Shandy*, they exist there only as imaginary, idealized others, fueling but not moving beyond the regressive cycle of desire. In the maudlin *Journal to Eliza* and, with fuller consciousness, in *A Sentimental Journey*, Sterne reveals the solipsistic nature of the Imaginary phallic function through which the other is both projected by and worshipped as the self. Rejecting women's subject status, Sterne—like Lacan—seeks in the homosocial love of other men and, more centrally, in the narcissistic love of self, the route to erotic self-transcendence which defines the sublime in its fantastic comic form. It is a quest that releases him into the "love" of the idea, not as truth but as a form of self-creation; into art, as the exploitation of linguistic multiplicity; and, unlike Lacan, into the immediacy of pre-linguistic space. Having said "no" to the idealized Phallus, having revealed the fallacies of the phallic order and the finitude as well as the unknowability of the father's name, Sterne seeks his jouissance partially in a form of Lacanian "castration" that belongs to the carnivalesque order of the penis/breast: "the same order" as that which structures the *Ecrits* of Jacques Lacan, despite his protests to the contrary.\(^\text{31}\)

This order, which functions at social and psychic levels, is both potentially radical and insistently conservative. For Lacan, the conservative impulse always dominates, binding him to linguistic meaning, the Phallus and, most importantly, the self. In the momentary resolutions of his repetitious quest, the sublime urge is drawn back into comedy and mystical knowledge emerges from the ethereal body of his work. For Sterne, the balance is more heavily weighted by ambivalence and the liberatory gesture is made continuously available as excess. In the ambisexual aesthetic of his text,\(^\text{35}\) in his thematic addiction to the pure affectivity of tears, and in his celebration of sentimentality as the ground of an affective connection which undoes differentiation, Sterne unveils the penis which, in the words of Irigaray, "overlies the breast which overlies the cord, which binds, gives life to, nourishes and centers bodies" ("The Bodily Encounter with the Mother," 42). In his appropriation of the feminine, Sterne tries to transform the negations of cultural and psychic loss into an impossible plenitude by releasing the entombed body of the mother into the body of the text, by assuming as fantasist the function of the good and nourishing breast, and by atoning for the reinscription of otherness by struggling to magically undo the misogynistic knot. But the carnivalesque order to which these strategies belong, while radical in its social critique and its articulation of desire, is bound to the dominant discourse and is limited, therefore, in its capacity for subversion. Social roles that are playfully inverted still retain their symbolic cultural meaning. The psychic fantasy of the penis/breast, as Melanie Klein suggests, is not integrative but expressive of ambivalence. And while sentimentality encourages the expression of humane sympathy, it can also maintain the social and psychological status quo, reinforcing the feeling subject's difference by insisting upon his superior moral stance (Frank). So, too, while empathy allows the boundary between subject and object to be momentarily suspended, it does yield readily to the mirroring dynamic that claims and celebrates the self in the other's name: a form of solipsism exhibiting itself as virtue. Finally and fundamentally, while the androgynous performance, the sentimental tear and the erotics of empathic connection are all ultimately identified in Sterne's fiction with the exclusion of the female subject, it is her femininity which indisputably marks the male body which is presented both as castrated and as polymorphously perverse.

The ultimate irony is that this master of irony, like his equally masterful successor, should install the woman's body firmly in the space of indeterminacy which the fantastic sublime must then strive to embody and achieve on the basis solely of her exclusion. The misogynistic text, like the feminist critique which is its mirror image, perpetually reenacts a displacement which becomes the inevitable condition of compulsive reassertion. Once the maternal body and the primal bond are identified specifically as originary points of loss and self-transcendence, the anxiety of indeterminacy restricts the power of the sublime motive along with its potential for subversive change. In Sterne's comic vision, women are the scapegoats who must be cast out if the male community is to be reproduced and reinforced. But in signalling the end of the Shandy line, his "cock and bull" story suggests, at the level of realism, the profoundly anti-social aspect of his comedy which can then be no comedy at all.

It is in his repeated gesture towards the sublime that Sterne seeks, perhaps unconsciously, to halt the unravelling of his comic form. Unlike Lacan and very like Kristeva, Sterne continually emphasizes the significance of an affectivity that, underlying and
resisting language, is central to the construction of community. And although the community that he wishes to construct is male, the aspiration and the impulse are not gendered and refuse the hierarchizations of social difference. They are conceptualized in the mode of the fantastic as lying at the core of a narcissistic subjectivity that, in its yearning for nondifferentiation, undermines the stereotyping function of the civilizing process. In its tragic form, the sublime impulse accepts aggressivity and violence as its proper mode and looks towards death and dissolution. The comic impulse answers alternatively to eros and responds profoundly to the promise of jouissance. Even as Sterne’s scepticism about the purity of the empathic motive grew, his faith in its binding, albeit fleeting power increased. In this, he was able to point beyond the cultural and personal misogyny which his text so intricately maps to a space of indeterminacy that exists within the self. It is in that space that he imagines the generation of an ethics of connection that would not be restricted by the social law. Such an erotic connection, rewritten in the realistic mode, would facilitate the transcendence of oppressions born of difference, linking the individual to what Sterne calls in A Sentimental Journey, “the great Sensorium of the world” (129).

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Notes

I am particularly grateful to Seth Moglen, Lynda Marin and Eben Moglen for their careful readings of this essay. I am also grateful for the research funds granted by the University of California, Santa Cruz.

1For example, in the most recent and detailed revision of Watt’s argument, Michael McKeon traces the novel’s origins to a range of earlier narrative forms in which are contested progressive and conservative ideologies which contest “questions of truth” and “questions of virtue.” While significantly extending the introductory segment of Watt’s story, he ultimately joins his influential predecessor when he draws his conclusions. He credits Richardson and Fielding with structuring the tradition of formal realism through their staging, in Pamela and Joseph Andrews, of the conflictual relation between naive empiricism and extreme scepticism. Sterne is even less relevant to the dialectical dynamic that McKeon tracks than he was to the one toward which Watt had gestured earlier. Tristram Shandy receives a single reference in this large book, when McKeon observes, with some ambiguity, “(t)he implications of the formal breakthrough of the 1740s are pursued with such feverish intensity over the next two decades that after

Tristram Shandy...the young genre settles down to a more deliberate and studied recapitulation of the same ground, this time for the next two centuries” (410).

“Other “degraded” fictions of the eighteenth century, most notably the popular sentimental romances which were female-authored, have not yet emerged into the larger critical consciousness although sentimental fictions of the eighteenth century America have been extensively studied by feminist critics. I do intend to consider this group of novels in the larger study of which this essay is a part.

In addition to Watt, McKeon and Armstrong (discussed below), I would mention Georg Lukacs and Raymond Williams particularly as notable theorists of realism who write within the the realist tradition which they analyze. I discuss the fantastic at some length below but will mention here Tzvetan Todorov, David Puner, Rosemary Jackson, and William Patrick Day, all of whom treat the fantastic as a form subversive of—and therefore oppositional to—realism. In my own book, The Philosophical Irony of Laurence Sterne, published in 1975, I argued—against John Traugott and Melvyn New—for Tristram Shandy’s novelistic qualities. That argument now seems to me extremely weak. This essay can be read, in part, as an effort to reconceptualize Sterne’s relation to the traditions of the novel.

Elias writes, “The pronounced division of the “ego” or consciousness characteristic of man in our phase of civilization, which finds expression in such terms as “superego” and “unconscious,” corresponds to the specific split in the behavior which civilized society demands of its members. It matches the degree of regulation and restraint imposed upon the expression of drives and impulses. Tendencies in this direction may develop in any form of human society, even in those which we call “primitive.” But the strength attained in societies such as ours by this differentiation and the form in which it appears are reflections of a particular historical development, the results of a civilizing process (190-191).

The radical differences of the sex/gender system are naturalized both in realistic fictions and by theorists of realism who systematically subordinate gender relations to the relations of class. The effects of this subordination are particularly interesting in Nancy Armstrong’s book, Desire and Domestic Fiction. Here Armstrong seems to set off in quite a new—and feminist—direction when she defines the novel as a modern discourse of gendered subjectivity that makes its appearance in the eighteenth century conduct books and then shapes and is shaped by what she categorizes as domestic fiction: a genre that begins with Pamela, and includes all novels with female protagonists and an emphasis on sexuality and the marriage plot. In fact, Armstrong’s concerns are not psychological, as her emphasis on subjectivity would lead us initially to believe. She wishes to demonstrate that the novel sought to disentangle sexual relations from the language of political power in order to mask socio-economic interests by representing them as psychological and by identifying that psychological discourse with women. Hypothesizing the textual restructuring by men of women’s sexuality and subjectivity, she subjects sexual to class relations, as do McKeon and Watt, and a textualized female
subjectivity to a male materiality conceptualized in oppositional and hierarchicalized terms. Despite her allegiance to Foucault, she reads the history of the novel positioned, albeit uneasily, with the formal realists; positioned, that is, within the masculinist and materialist discourse that she wishes to interrogate. I explore, at greater length, the inconsistencies and problems raised by Armstrong's argument in an essay, "The Anxieties of Indeterminacy: (Un)Gendering the Subject," published in Genre. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White observe that "... whilst the 'free' democratic individual appeared to be contentless, a point of judgment and rational evaluation which was purely formal and perspectival, in fact it was constituted through and by the clamour of particular voices to which it tried to be universally superior. It is on this account that the very blandness and transparency of bourgeois reason is in fact nothing other than the critical negation of a social 'colourfulness' of a heterogeneous diversity of specific contents, upon which it is, nonetheless, completely dependent" (199). Stallybrass and White brilliantly extend and link Bakhtin's analysis of the carnivalesque and Elias's account of the civilizing process. It is important to note, however, that neither Bakhtin nor Elias—not, for that matter, Stallybrass and White themselves—consider the central importance of gender in their arguments.

In his influential book, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, Tzvetan Todorov defines the fantastic as a genre and analyzes it in terms of the hesitation experienced by a person who is familiar with the laws of nature when he or she encounters a supernatural event. The feeling of hesitation that is experienced can be resolved at the level of the uncanny and the theme of indeterminacy of the story or the story’s account of the civilizing process. It is important to note, however, that neither Bakhtin nor Elias—not, for that matter, Stallybrass and White themselves—consider the central importance of gender in their arguments.

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Sterne himself participating in and therefore justifying—at conscious and unconscious levels, both formally and thematically—positions which he also attempts to soften through irony and humour.

Sterne humorously supports the hint of Tristram’s illegitimacy by having a bend sinister—"this vile mark of illegitimacy"—drawn across the coat of arms on his coach, instead of the respectable bend dexter (237).

The homunculus theory, which had some adherents in the 17th century, was as outdated at the time that Sterne wrote *Tristram Shandy* as was Robert Filmer’s theory of patriarchalism, to which Walter also subscribes. Although Sterne’s use of the theory obviously serves a comic purpose in this context, and is used to support Sterne’s view of Walter’s misogyny, it is also consonant with the gender anxiety that saturates the text on unconscious as well as on conscious levels.

Leigh A. Ehlers and Ruth Faurot have, in their feminist readings of the text, attempted to save Sterne from accusations of misogyny by reading Mrs. Shandy as a strong presence and a viable alternative to the Shandy males. Clearly, I do not find their arguments persuasive. Ruth Perry and Calvin Thomas also place the question of Sterne’s attitude toward gender at the centre of their respective readings. Although Sterne’s use of the theory obviously serves a comic purpose in this context, and is used to support Sterne’s view of Walter’s misogyny, it is also consonant with the gender anxiety that saturates the text on unconscious as well as on conscious levels.

In “Bodily Encounter with the Mother,” Luce Irigaray writes eloquently of the way in which castration fear and the oedipal myth conceal the severance of the umbilical cord, and “a hole in the texture of language corresponds to the forgetting of the scar of the navel” (42).

In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud distinguishes between the conscious process of mourning in which the libido is slowly detached from the lost loved object until the ego is free and uninhibited, and the unconscious process of melancholia, which marks not the withdrawal of libido but rather the identification of the ego with the abandoned object. In “A Poetics of Psychoanalysis: The Lost Object—Me,” Nicolas Abraham and Maria R. Torok develop Freud’s theory of melancholia, describing an “encyclopedic” or “encyclopedic” of the lost subject which ultimately supplants the subject and “carries the ego as its mask” (5). Finally, in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, Julia Kristeva describes melancholia as “an archaic expression of an unsymbolizable, unnameable, narcissistic wound, so precocious that no outside agent can be used as referent” (12).

It is interesting to consider the way in which Freud rewrites the story of the rapprochement period in what we might call a Sternean version, without women, even as he attempts to understand the full gender complexity of this moment of psychic development. In “The Ego and the Id,” he first suggests that behind the ego-ideal “there lies hidden an individual’s first and most important identification with the father in his own personal pre-history.” He then adds: “Perhaps it would be better to say ‘with the parents’; for before a child has arrived at definite knowledge of the difference between the sexes, the lack of a penis, it does not distinguish in value between its father and its mother...” But he swerves again as he adds: “In order to simplify my presentation I shall discuss only identification with the father” (31). This, of course, is what he does, and the mother, like Tristram’s mother, is erased again.

The Lacanian resonance is made all the more appropriate by Richard Macksey’s report both of Lacan’s own statement that “Tristram Shandy est le roman le plus analytique de la litterature universelle,” and of his appreciation “of the peculiar way in which all of the ‘characters’ in the novel constitute themselves as modes of discourse and the equally peculiar way in which the novel constitutes itself around a notorious lack” (1007). It is interesting that neither Macksey nor other Lacanian critics of Sterne have noted or discussed the specifically phallic nature of the hobby-horse.
seems so dangerous!

of Lacanian theory, and some feminist readings of the same material, I am only between the phallus and the penis, but between the phallus in its control the meaning of the word subject can any longer "be," and which is consequently "veiled" or lacking, symbolic castration" (127).

symbolic and pre-symbolic stages. In "The Bodily Encounter with the subject has surrendered to language, symbolic capacity and the phallus in its imaginary capacity. The erect penis and in the other as that which only the male subject can "have" (97). I hope explaining that whether the phallus functions in its idealized Imaginary capacity, holding out the possibility of a jubilant meconnaisance to the male subject, or in its veiled symbolic function, signifying what every subject has surrendered to language, it is dependent upon the erect penis. 

As should be evident by now, there is a good deal of slippage in Lacan not only between the phallus and the penis, but between the phallus in its symbolic capacity and the phallus in its imaginary capacity. The erect penis seems to represent both, in the one case as that which no fully constituted subject can any longer "be," and which is consequently "veiled" or lacking, and in the other as that which only the male subject can "have" (97). I hope it will be obvious from this and subsequent sections of my argument that while I wish to make explicit the connection between a Sternian perspective of Lacanian theory, and some feminist readings of the same material, I am not suggesting that Sterne is himself a protofeminist. I am interested in deconstructing the differences between theory and fiction, as well as strict definitions of the meaning of gendered writing and reading.

Freud's observation in "Humour," that narcissism triumphs in humour is relevant here: "The ego refuses to be disturbed by the provocation of reality, to let itself be compelled to suffer. It insists that it cannot be affected by the traumas of the external world; it shows, in fact, that such traumas are no more than occasions for it to gain pleasure." He also points out that: "In humour, the super-ego repudiates reality and serves an illusion. Its liberating gesture means "Look! Here is the world, which seems so dangerous! It is nothing but a game for children...just worth making a jest about" (162, 160).

In this, Sterne is clearly to be distinguished from Lacan. As Jane Gallop suggests, in "Beyond the Phallus," "The Lacanians' desire clearly to separate phallus from penis, to control the meaning of the signifier phallus, is precisely symptomatic of their desire to have the phallus, that is, their desire to be at the center of language, at its origin. And their inability to control the meaning of the word phallus is evidence of what Lacan calls symbolic castration" (127).

A dominant aspect of Julia Kristeva's project has been to define, conceptualize, and foreground pre-Oedipal and pre-linguistic space. In "Revolution in Poetic Language," for example, she deploys her concepts of the maternal chora, the semiotic and the thetic to explore the ways in which language resists intelligibility and signification in a dynamic interaction of symbolic and pre-symbolic stages. In "The Bodily Encounter with the reality presupposed by the Name of the Father" ("Guiding Remarks for a Congress on Femininity, Sexuality," 90). At the same time, as Kaja Silverman points out, Lacan suggests in "Four Fundamental Concepts" that the phallus may not always be the primary or even the earliest signifier of desire and in "Semaire XI," he confers foundational status upon the breast as a part object also suggesting the primal significance of the gaze and the voice, both experienced initially within the maternal domain ("The Lacanian Phallus," 112-113).

Dennis W. Allen argues interestingly that Sterne invaginates his text, but it will be clear that in my view the text, like its author, is ambisexual and complexly gendered.

Hans Loewald writes: "The more we understand about primitive mentality—which constitutes a deeper layer of advanced mentality—the harder it becomes to escape the idea that its implicit sense of and quest for irrational nondifferentiation of subject and object contains a truth of its own, granted that this other truth fits badly with our relational view and quest for objectivity" (772).

Kristeva suggests a "reformulation of the moral imperative...leading to an ethics which would not be one of repression," in the context of the narcissistic subject whom she calls "the-subject-in-process." The "subject-in-process is always in a state of contesting the law, either with the force of violence, of aggressivity, of the death-drive, or with the other side of this force: pleasure and jouissance" ("An Interview with Julia Kristeva," 8).

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