Warning Concerning Copyright Restrictions

The Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If electronic transmission of reserve material is used for purposes in excess of what constitutes "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.
Generating Texts

The Progeny of

Seventeenth-Century Prose

Sharon Cadman Seelig
VII

STERNE

Tristram Shandy

The Deconstructive Text

IN CONTRAST TO the other pairings discussed in this volume, the connection between Sterne and Burton is relatively well established. The first to take note of it in print was the Reverend John Ferriar, who in 1798 published a volume entitled Illustrations of Sterne in which he detailed particular passages of Tristram Shandy taken almost verbatim from The Anatomy of Melancholy. Ferriar points out that Sterne, considered innovative in his own time, was in fact relying on unrecognized sources: "When the first volumes of Tristram Shandy appeared, they excited almost as much perplexity as admiration. The feeling, the wit, and reading which they displayed were sufficiently relished, but the wild digressions, the abruptness of the narrative and discussions, and the perpetual recurrence to obsolete notions in philosophy, gave them more the air of a collection of fragments, than of a regular work. Most of the writers from whom Sterne drew the general ideas, and many of the peculiarities of his book, were then forgotten." While noting borrowings from a good many writers of the later Renaissance, including Bacon, Montaigne, and Bishop Joseph Hall, Ferriar devotes particular attention to Burton: "I had often wondered at the pains bestowed by Sterne in ridiculing opinions not fashionable in his time, and had thought it singular, that he should produce the portrait of his sophist, Mr. Shandy, with all the stains and mouldiness of the last century about him. I am now convinced that most of the singularities of that character were drawn from the perusal of Burton" (56-57).

Ferriar's assertion that Sterne took much from Burton is incontestable: most striking, and most amusing, is Sterne's denunciation of plagiarism (Tristram Shandy 3.1), which relies heavily on the complaint of Democritus Junior to the Reader (1.9), itself heavily indebted to Burton's predecessors. Ferriar finds the genesis of the first four chapters of Tristram Shandy in a passage from Burton on the ways in which "we are plagued and punished for our father's defaults" (65); he juxtaposes Sterne's and Burton's celebrations of the dignity of man (5.1), and the stories of the beggar pursuing an implacable kinsman (5.1). He traces the consolations for the death of Tristram's brother Bobby (5.3), which includes Cicero's philosophical triumph over grief and a meditation on the transience of all things, to Burton; he finds a number of Walter Shandy's prescriptions for Uncle Toby in Burton's cures for love melancholy. And Ferriar's substantial list has been augmented by the work of later scholars.

There is no doubt that Sterne read Burton, Rabelais, Montaigne, and Swift with profit and delight: the delight is reflected on every page, and the profits too. But whereas Ferriar feels his task is completed when he has located Sterne's sources, which he notes with such phrases as "Sterne should have considered how much he owed to poor old Burton" (73), my concern is not with borrowing nor with the notion of influence, which might lead us to believe that we had explained an author by noting whom he had read and excerpted; I am rather concerned with similarities of attitude and method, with what seems to me an essentially similar approach to the process of composition, an approach that is finally generic. Sterne stole from Burton the bits that most appealed to him, the parts most congenial to his imagination and interests. Moreover, the very fascination with earlier texts and the ability to incorporate large chunks of them into one's own text, whether seriously or playfully, are qualities that Sterne shares with Burton, qualities that deeply influence his work. The attitude to the text itself, the way it is constructed, and the way it reaches out to the reader are things the two writers have in common.

Let me first acknowledge the evident differences between these two texts: the one is a novel, described, according to the custom of its age, as a "private history"; the other is a medical and psychological treatise; the one is undoubtedly comic and indubitably bawdy, despite, even in part because of, its denials of that fact; the other has a serious moral and religious basis and a formal methodology. But such an attempt at a simple and concise account raises questions. Readers have long felt that if Tristram Shandy is a novel, it is unlike any other novel: much critical discussion has been devoted to demonstrating just how it grows out of its own and earlier periods (its relation to the learned wit of the Renaissance, for example, or to other interrupted narratives of the eighteenth century). A number of readers have also described it as the first modern novel, properly seen in relation to the works of Joyce and Woolf. Simi-
Anatomy of Melancholy, though it has its origin in medical treatises on melancholy, is inadequately defined by that genre, as the various designations of it as Menippean satire, encyclopedia, or commonplace book would suggest.

Nor is the tonal contrast between these two works so absolute as would at first appear. As Richard Lanham points out, modern American critics have redeemed Tristram Shandy from the Victorians' charge of immorality and triviality by making it into a serious philosophical work, concerned with such issues as time, truth, the process of thought, and the process of writing per se. Moreover, although a case can be made for the serious purpose of the Anatomy as a whole, and such readers as Patricia Vicari have seen it as essentially therapeutic, an edifice based on humanistic thought and religious conviction, it is anything but un­
vocally somber in tone. There are anecdotes, ostensibly serious in intent but hilarious in effect, like that of the baker who gelled himself to test his wife's chastity, of which Burton says, "Such examples are too com­mon" (3:306). The qualities that attracted Laurence Sterne to The Anatomy of Melancholy—its zest, energy, and humor—continue to attract readers who find in it not moral instruction but a cure for melancholy in the form of entertainment.

For both Sterne and Burton genre is an important issue; in both The Anatomy of Melancholy and Tristram Shandy generic nomenclature or even adequate description presents problems. I have outlined ways in which Burton's Anatomy challenges and trespasses on structural and generic boundaries, ways in which one aspect of his work operates in tension with another, a fact of its construction that has led to competing and radically conflicting accounts of its essential character. The same may be said of Tristram Shandy: to a degree unusual with the novels of its period, critics have seemed to feel that if they could just get the kind right, or satisfactorily determine the appropriate classification, whether generic or attitudinal, under which to approach Tristram Shandy, much else would fall into place. But as with The Anatomy of Melancholy, it has been unusually difficult to assign a designation, precisely because generic play and generic mixing are at the heart of Sterne's undertaking. As Wayne Booth points out with regard to Tristram Shandy, there is little use arguing for the unity of a work that so many readers have felt lacking in unity; similarly, it is perhaps wise of the mark to define the genre of a work whose very point seems to be to test notions of genre.

The aspect of Tristram Shandy that has so delighted modern readers...
Burton's text continued to speak to the reader and continued to grow and change with each successive edition. For Sterne, even more than for Burton, the text is an object to be seen as well as read. There are, famously, the two blank pages to mark the death of Yorick; the marbled pages, of which Sterne invites us to ponder the moral—"motly emblem of my work!" (3.36); the blank page for the reader to sketch his own image of the Widow Wadman; the comic diagrams representing the forward progress of Tristram's narrative (6.40) and the representation of Trim's flourish (9.4); the blank pages for chapters 18 and 19 of volume 9, which are inserted later. There is also, as in Burton, the textual variety created by italicized names of characters, titles in Gothic script, the plentiful use of dashes in imitation of breathless conversation, the strings of asterisks for words that the narrator thinks proper to tantalize with the omission of, the juxtaposition of English and Latin text, as in the case of Slawkenbergius's tale or Ernulf's excommunicating curse. Even the ironic inclusion of Slawkenbergius's entire tale—because, according to Sterne's note, "As Hafen Slawkenber­gius de Nasis is extremely scarce, it may not be unacceptable to the learned reader to see the specimen of a few pages of his original" (1.288)—rem­embles but goes beyond Burton's fondness for reproducing large chunks of sources. Sterne's textual play extends to the length and divisions of chapters: the chapters range from a single question—"Is this a fit time, said my father to himself, to talk of PENSIONS and GRENADIERS?" (4.5)—to many pages, and the chapter divisions are made as obtrusive as possible.

While Burton from time to time called attention to the process of his work or the direction in which his text was going, Sterne's attention is even more marked. The concern with text as text evident on the printed page is reinforced by verbal attention to the technical matters of writing, by Tristram's running commentary on his narrative: "How my father went on, in my opinion, deserves a chapter to itself. —" (5.2); "Stay—I have a small account to settle with the reader, before Trim can go on with his harangue. —It shall be done in two minutes" (5.8); "This will be fully illustrated to the world in my chapter of wishes." (3.7); "Let us go back to the *****—in the last chapter" (3.14). Like Burton's transitional comments—"But I rove," "But what have I to do with this?"—such remarks, ostensibly pointers to the subject, also draw our attention to the narrator himself. Perhaps the most sophisticated of these self-conscious maneuvers is Tristram's discussion of the authorship of "that remarkable chapter in the Tristrapedia, which to [the narrator] is the most original and entertaining one in the whole book." Tristram lays out possibilities that turn out to be impossibilities—that my father wrote the chapter upon sash-windows before the event—in which case the event would not have taken place—and then adjusts the fictional frame to demonstrate that the narrator is not only inside the novel but also outside it: "The second reason, which I have the honour to offer to the world in support of my opinion, that my father did not write the chapter upon sash-windows and chamber­pots, at the time supposed, and it is this. —That, in order to ren­der the Tristrapedia complete, —I wrote the chapter myself" (5.26). Tristram here moves from the role of a talkative, companionable narrator commenting on the story he is telling to that of a narrator playing generic games, calling our attention to the frame of the story, first by appearing inside the frame and then deftly slipping outside. Even more than in Burton, we do not so much listen to the narrative as watch the narrator construct and deconstruct his text; its transparent factitiousness becomes the chief point of interest.

Like Burton, who begins the Anatomy with a justification for his undertaking that points to roots in medicine, theology, and satire but that turns out to be multiedged and ambiguous, so Sterne also calls attention from the start to the nature of his book. But whereas Burton's persona Democritus Junior addresses the issue of character, title, and work directly, Sterne's narrator begins, famously, with what sounds like a conversational aside, rather than the formal opening of a narrative: "I wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me." In other words, Sterne indulges in generic play and ambiguity from the very beginning of his work. He alerts us to the fictional quality of fiction itself in opening chapters that include not only Tristram's account—much interrupted and commented upon—of his own conception but also a discussion of the proper way to write a narrative history. In these chapters Sterne shifts forms and occasions to create something like a sampler of kinds of discourse: the offhand remark, the colloquial comment, the learned dissertation (on the nature of the homunculus), the energetic encounter with the reader, the comment on the foregoing anecdote, general comment on the nature of the text, dis-
cussion of the theory of composition and genre, investigation of historical records, and shifting of interlocutors from male to female—all in four chapters occupying just six pages. Not until the fifth chapter does the narrator finally offer a conventional beginning: "On the fifth day of November, 1718, which to the era fixed on, was as near nine kalender months as any husband could in reason have expected, — was I Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, brought forth into this scurvy and disastrous world of ours." But even in this first apparently conventional sentence the public, declaratory tone is undercut, first by the reference to a husband's possible doubts about his wife's fidelity and second by the diction of "this scurvy and disastrous world."

The opening paragraph of the novel likewise mixes elevation of diction (the philosophical discourse of polite society) — "that not only the production of a rational Being was concern'd in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind"— with a quick descent to a more colloquial treatment of the subject: "Believe me, good folks, this is not so inconsiderable a thing as many of you may think it." Sterne reverts to the relatively formal — "you have all, I dare say, heard of the animal spirits, as how they are transfused from father to son, &c. &c."— and then again to the lively, and colloquial — "so that when they are once set a-going, whether right or wrong, 'tis not a halfpenny matter, — away they go clutting like hey-go-mad."

In short, from the very beginning of his novel, Sterne engages in linguistic play, involving levels of discourse, frames of reference, shifting of tone, ellipsis, and interruption, all signaling to the reader the variety of effects Sterne is capable of. Besides providing a flamboyant display of the narrator's prowess (rather like a glitzy software demonstration), these opening paragraphs are also a test for the reader, a kind of complex grid that enables him to register reactions to the quickly and subtly shifting variety of Sterne's text. 27 The bravura opening of *Tristram Shandy* is both invitation and challenge, analogous in its character and its methods to the shifting attitudes and moods of Democritus Junior to the Reader.

Sterne's novel resembles Burton's preface not only in its unstable verbal texture but also in its approach to structure, in its deliberate and nearly constant deviation from expectations. Given generic expectations of external form, Sterne's "private history" of course has no Burtonian synopsis, but Tristram does offer at the conclusion of volume 6 a series of diagrams supposedly representing the line of his narrative.

In this passage Sterne mocks the notion of regularity, the assumptions that gravity and straight lines are to be sought after, that moral rectitude and regularity of composition are somehow one. But his method, if not his tone, is analogous to that of Burton, whose elaborations, additions, and above all, digressions, are central to his work. Burton has his synopsis, Sterne has diagrams, but for both, as Sterne puts it, "digressions, incontrovertibly, are the sun-shine; — they are the life, the soul of reading" (1.22).

The presentation of self in Democritus Junior to the Reader is as inconsistent as the whimsical shifts of *Tristram Shandy*, and there are anticipations of the kinds of surprises we find in Sterne in the dispropor­tions of Burton: he is the author who, after over one hundred pages of a preface in which he has both apologized to and insulted his reader, writes: "I presume of thy good favour and gratious acceptance (gentle reader) out of an assured hope and confidence thereof, I will beginne" (1.113). And once past the preface, no sooner does Burton begin his discourse proper than he finds it necessary to digress. Having ascribed the cause of human melancholy to sin, he announces, just a few pages into
the body of his treatise: "Before I proceed to define the Disease of Melancholy, what it is, or to discourse farther of it, I hold it not impertinent to make a brief Digression of the Anatomy of the body, & faculties of the soule, for the better understanding of that which is to follow" (1.136).

This digression, by the standards of The Anatomy of Melancholy, is relatively brief—twenty-three pages—and, duly considered, not a digression at all: Burton is correct in providing the basis in physiology and anatomy for the rest of his treatise. But Burton’s method is Sterne’s in nuance, for as in Tristram Shandy, Burton discovers as he begins his discussion what else needs to precede a proper discussion of the subject; the digression is not a byway but a necessary element, an organic part of the whole. The difference, of course, is that Sterne is much more likely than Burton to emphasize his digressiveness, to call attention to the fact that he is moving through his subject by following sequences and intersections of ideas where they lead him. While Burton’s proceeding at least has its roots in an orderly and scientific method, one that attempting to contain a vast subject—the notion that before he can treat melancholy, he must first treat the body and the soul—Sterne’s is extravagantly whimsical and deliberately parodic.

Whereas one senses in Burton’s text a tension between his plan and its enthusiastic execution, Sterne’s whole plan is plainly enthusiastic; he speaks of “this rhapsodical work” (1.13) and prides himself on the extent to which the apparently marginal is in fact central. The digressions are not, as a reader before Sterne might have thought, accidental or inadvertently; they are not digressions at all; they are the thing itself. The question posed by readers of The Anatomy of Melancholy, whether the major digressions of Burton’s text—the Digression of the Air, the Digression of the Nature of Spirits, the Digression of the Misery of Scholars, and others—are departures from his plan or assimilated into the whole, is answered resoundingly by Sterne, who begins with the assumption that his readers consider a digression a wandering from the main topic and proceeds, gleefully, to demonstrate that these digressions are after all very much to the point—though of course by then the point has been redefined:

For in this long digression which I was accidentally led into, as in all my digressions (one only excepted) there is a master-stroke of digressive skill, the merit of which has all along, I fear, been overlooked by my reader—nor for want of penetration in him—but because ‘tis an excellence seldom looked for, or expected indeed, in a digression;—and it is this: That tho’ my digressions are all fair, as you observe,—and that I fly off from what I am about, as far and as often too as any writer in Great-Britain; yet I constantly take care to order affairs so, that my main business does not stand still in my absence. (1.22)

Sterne once again undermines the assertion of serious purpose with an escape clause, suggesting that all his digressions, “one only excepted,” contain a “master-stroke of digressive skill.” But of course we are not told which one lacks this skill, so that if we were to take this statement seriously we would be encouraged to examine each digression for this masterstroke. And if we were not to take it seriously, we would be thrown back on the notion that the jester who wrote this book is only digressing, laughing at us for seeking a serious purpose where none is, or perhaps for wasting our time with a text so clearly chaotic.

I have argued that Burton’s structure, painstakingly laid out in his synopsis, is not precisely the “real structure” of his work but rather one that exists in counterpoint to it; and further that his forceful and pointed returns to his outline are evidence not of carelessness or an inability to manage his topic but rather of the tension between formal and organic structure, the synoptic outline and the associative, enthusiastic progress through the material that separates him from mere generic predecessors, from those who constructed more conventional anatomies. In this process Sterne has gone even further: digressions occupy a much larger proportion of his work; he calls attention to them in a way that on the one hand implies their transgressiveness and on the other hand impishly asserts their centrality. For example, he asserts the necessity of a digression to alleviate the seriousness of what has already been a pointedly giddy passage (1.22). He points out that the proper line of a narrative is mistakenly confused by “your men of wit and genius . . . with the line of GRAVITATION” (6.40). He elaborates on the necessity of digressions: “For, if he is a man of the least spirit, he will have fifty deviations from a straight line to make with this or that party as he goes along, which he can no ways avoid” (1.14). Like Burton, resolutely responsive to what he encounters, Sterne describes a process very like life itself, an ongoing encounter with experience that will change his text: “These unforeseen stoppages, which I own I had no conception of when I first set out;—but which, I am convinced now, will rather increase than diminish as I advance,—have struck out a hint which I am resolved to follow;—and that is,—not to be in a hurry;—but to go on leisurely, writing and publishing two volumes of my life every year” (1.14).
“nothing which has touched me will be thought trifling in its nature, or tedious in its telling.” But as before, Sterne’s digressiveness is not beside the point: it is the point, as is the teasing of the reader, the invitation to discern or disregard the relevance of this material, to join the narrator as partner rather than pawn in the game.

Sterne’s discussion of narrative method, which repeatedly advocates digressiveness, also parodies the use of literary convention and critical authority, cited in support of his practice:

I find it necessary to consult every one a little in his turn; and therefore must beg pardon for going on a little further in the same way: For which cause, right glad I am, that I have begun the history of myself in the way I have done; and that I am able to go on tracing every thing in it, as Horace says, ab Ovo.

Horace, I know, does not recommend this fashion altogether:
But that gentleman is speaking only of an epic poem or a tragedy; -(I forget which)- besides, if it was not so, I should beg Mr. Horace’s pardon; - for in writing what I have set about, I shall confine myself neither to his rules, nor to any man’s rules that ever lived. (1.4)

Sterne’s method here recalls in part Fielding’s consultation of Homer, Vergil, and Aristotle on the subject of poetry and history in the preatory chapters of Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones; but it even more closely parallels the shifting attitudes of Burton’s persona. Tristram first pays elaborate allegiance to literary convention in his pretense of adopting Horace’s method, then immediately admits that “Horace . . . does not recommend this fashion altogether” (1.4). Horace does not, of course, recommend it at all, but rather strongly advises against it. The joke continues as it becomes increasingly apparent that the narrator has paid very little attention to Horace—not being able to remember whether the dictum in question concerned epic or tragedy—whereas Sterne has given enough attention to this basic critical principle to be able to violate it flagrantly and precisely.

Sterne, like Burton, professes a thoroughness of methodology, implying that we cannot appreciate the complications, the consequences, until we have understood the causes, that we cannot understand the present without the past; but Burton’s methodology is more genuinely and obsessively thorough, whereas Sterne’s is more parodic. Like Burton, Sterne consults learned authorities, but the effect is entertainment rather than genuine enlightenment: Burton quotes authorities on both
sides of an issue and says, "Make up your own mind"; Sterne quotes Horace but acts contrary to his advice. In justifying his digression, Burton uses a common phrase of his period, "I hold it not impertinent"; Sterne adopts the mask of courtesy in the service of impertinence. In justifying his digression, Burton uses a common phrase of his period, "I hold it not impertinent"; Sterne adopts the mask of courtesy in the service of impertinence. In justifying his digression, Burton uses a common phrase of his period, "I hold it not impertinent"; Sterne adopts the mask of courtesy in the service of impertinence.

Inclusiveness, like digressiveness, is not a departure from Sterne's design but inherent in it. Thus, for Sterne as for Burton the text is a composite, or, as Burton calls it, a "Cento" or "my macaronicon," a work composed of the works and fragments of others. For Burton the model is perhaps the commonplace book, a tissue of commentary on the particular topics of his synopsi; for Sterne it may be an extravagant version of Locke's association of ideas. Both writers use the principle of association, Burton more naturally, Sterne more flagrantly, to construct their texts. Burton proceeds from one idea to another, from one way of looking at an issue to another, tending to lose the original principle he was maintaining and moving over into another attitude altogether; Sterne demonstrates inevitable, whimsical, and unfortunate connections and sequences. Tristram Shandy, like the Anatomy, is made up of different kinds of texts, but Sterne, even more than Burton, calls attention to the process of construction, as he does to his transgressiveness: what begins as the polite consultation of authority ends in the total rejection of it: "For in writing what I have set about, I shall confine myself neither to his rules, nor to any man's rules that ever lived" (1.4).

Sterne's text is full of comments that shift perspective or mood, as in the altered expectations in "I know there are readers in the world, as well as many other good people in it, who are no readers at all," in which both expectation and emphasis shift radically from the first to the third unit. This technique, like the array of types of discourse in the first four chapters, exemplifies Sterne's interest in the texture of his work, its discontinuities and disruptions. Clearly, one of his chief structural devices is the interrupted narrative (about which I shall say more later). But quite beyond a natural (or perhaps unnatural) interest in interruption, Sterne also creates intertextuality within a single text, through his fondness for disjunctiveness creating an apparently spontaneous flow marked by highlights and emphasis. There are insertions evident in the physical features of the text—differences in typeface, blank and black pages, etc.—but more persistently in the narrative itself: "The article in my mother's marriage settlement, which I told the reader I was at the pains to search for, and which, now that I have found it, I think proper to lay before him," (1.15). Sterne is plainly interested in the inserted tale (a technique he shares with Fielding and other writers of the period), even in the inserted curse. Tristram includes the opinion, in French, of the doctors of the Sorbonne on the validity of baptism of infants in utero (1.20); Yorick's sermon on conscience (2.17); Ernulf's curse (3.11) in a dual language version; not to mention Slawkenbergius's tale, the tale of Amandus and Amanda, Tristram's travel narratives, the story of the Abbess of Andouillets, of Maria and her goats, and the story of Le Fever. Indeed, the more one enumerates, the more one realizes that nearly the entire text consists of such insertions, to the extent that the supposed subject of the novel, the life (and opinions) of Tristram Shandy, comes to be an insertion within this welter of material. Sterne's disparate materials acquire definition by being set off against one another so that we are made aware of them as particular kinds and genres of texts. This procedure raises the question of genre once again, not just with regard to the whole—is this a novel or is it something else—but with regard to individual texts, jostling for our attention, making Tristram Shandy a book of books. Sterne's ostensibly spontaneous text calls attention to its own disjunctiveness, highlighting and emphasizing its departures, becoming in effect a metatext on spontaneity.

The strong tendency to digressiveness in Burton and Sterne is related not only to the associative process by which their prose, with apparent arbitrariness, moves but also to their love of language and linguistic play. In his initial digression Burton speaks of "many hard words [that] will often occur," with the implication that his purpose is to avoid confusion; the choice of a phrase like "hard words" (the sort of thing to be avoided in speaking to a lady, for example) suggests a deliberate, courteous, pedagogical preference for simplicity. But Burton then immediately favors us with some of the hardest and least polite words he might choose—"Myracle, Hypocriades, Herneus," before going on to others, perhaps equally hard, but more elevated: "Imagination, Reason, Humours, Spirits, Vitali, Natural, Animal, Nerves, Veins, Arteries," "which of the vulgar will not so easily bee perceaved" (1.139).

Sterne, like Burton, also delights in cœpta, in congeries, in the heaping.
up of examples, the making of lists. For example, Tristram gives us a list of things that will undoubtedly fall in the writer's way to divert him from the straight line that the reader might desire:

He will have views and prospects to himself perpetually soliciting his eye, which he can no more help standing still to look at than he can fly; he will moreover have various

Accounts to reconcile:
Anecdotes to pick up:
Inscriptions to make out:
Stories to weave in:
Traditions to sift:
Personages to call upon:
Panegyrics to paste up at this door:
Pasquinades at that:

He lists the kinds of behavior Mr. Shandy will not tolerate in his son's governor: he "shall neither lisp, or squint, or wink, or talk loud, or look fierce, or foolish; — or bite his lips, or grind his teeth, or speak through his nose, or pick it, or blow it with his fingers ... " ad infinitum (6.5). He lists the articles of ancient dress (6.19). And more.

We have already noted how, in Burton, such lists or examples acquire a life of their own, leading writer and reader in unexpected directions. The element of surprise is there in Sterne as well, but the surprises are more obviously orchestrated. For example, Sterne emphasizes the shifting character of his discourse by arranging the list of digressions vertically on the page; he emphasizes the absurdity of Mr. Shandy's qualifications for a governor by making these a parody of Pellegrini and by making Uncle Toby comment (as is his wont, discreetly to himself), "Now this is all nonsense again." While the method, the tendency, and even the root cause — love of language — remains the same, the effect in Sterne is yet more dramatic than in Burton. The instability of tone that results from Burton's lists becomes in Sterne a deliberate reversal of expectations and variation of tone, a text elaborately ludic.

For Sterne as for Burton, the writing of the chief text for which he is known was literally his life's work. Although Sterne wrote and published four volumes of sermons (under the title The Sermons of Mr. Yorick) as well as A Sentimental Journey and The Anatomy of Melancholy are their authors' dominant and defining texts. Sterne promised early on "to go on leisurely, writing and publishing two volumes of my life every year; — which, if I am suffered to go on quietly, and can make a tolerable bargain with my bookseller, I shall continue to do as long as I live" (1.14); he did in fact publish volumes of Tristram Shandy, if not quite at the rate promised, until a year before his death. Sterne's remarkably various work was published sequentially during the last nine years of his life; Burton's Anatomy, already substantial at its first publication in 1621, continued to grow (increasing by half its volume) in four further editions issued over seventeen years. In both cases the book served as a kind of record of the author's changing attitudes and opinions as well as of the continuity of his interest. For example, in the section on clerical preferment, Burton revised his text from "Preferment as I could not get" to "Greater preferment as I could not get" upon his obtaining the promise of the living of Seagreve; moreover, references to additional authorities on subjects already treated in earlier editions of the Anatomy provide evidence of Burton's continuing reading and interest in his subject. Readers of Sterne have found a kind of record of the author's developing attitudes in the increasing tendency toward sentimentality (and the cultivation of it) in Tristram Shandy, culminating logically in the writing of A Sentimental Journey as the last work of his life.

These works were also uniquely identified with their authors, partly through the creation of personae with strong resemblances to their creators. Democritus Junior both is and is not Burton: despite Burton's disclaimer, "'tis not I, but Democritus, Democritus dixit" (1.110), Burton was buried under his name in Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. In Sterne's case both Yorick and Tristram have close affinities with Sterne: Tristram, like Sterne, endures the unfavorable remarks of his critics, is tall and thin, suffers from "a vile cough" that makes him flee England and undertake a continental journey that parallels Sterne's own; Tristram refers to one "dear, dear Jenny," who resembles Catherine Fourmantel, the singer in whom Sterne was romantically interested early in his career. Sterne goes further, not only in creating resemblances but in calling attention to them, playing with our sense of the degree to which the frame separating novel from life is permeable. He obviously encouraged the association of Yorick with himself, mounting a kind of self-defense with the suggestion that Yorick was the author of many a charitable action for which he was not duly credited, but also opening himself to criticism, since readers took offense at the notion of a clergyman as fasci-
nated by bawdry as Sterne, or as delighted with performance as Yorick, whose name Sterne used in publishing his own sermons. Just as Burton acknowledged that for him the writing of the text was therapeutic—"I write of Melancholy, by being busie to avoid Melancholy" (1.6)—so for Sterne, writing is a contest against a deadly and persistent foe: "There is no living, Eugenius, . . . at this rate," Tristram confesses, "for as this son of a whore [Death] has found out my lodgings———" (7.1).

For Sterne, then, as for Burton, the text is in some sense life itself, and that text is dialogic, antiphonal, and digressive. I have already argued that in a quite particular sense Burton maintained a dialogue with his own text, adding to it, altering it, responding to it over a series of editions as he might to another text or to a human interlocutor. Sterne's narrator likewise conveys a strong sense of conversation with the reader (or the imaginary hearer). He even makes the case as a point of principle: "Writing, when properly managed, (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation: As no one, who knows what he is about in good company, would venture to talk all;—so no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself" (2.11). Sterne maintains dialogue with those readers whom he rebukes for missing clues, for paying inadequate attention; he likewise challenges the reader who expects some sort of straightforward narration, who dares to care about plot (the sort rebuked for a "vile pruriency for fresh adventures" and "a vicious taste . . . of reading straight forwards . . . in quest of . . . adventures"[1.20]), or who looks for some proportion between the duration of the event and the duration of the narration.

Yet Sterne, though maintaining the appearance of a dialogue with his reader, is, like Burton, perhaps in a more profound sense in dialogue with his own text. In his explanation (4.13) of the difficulties of moving forward with his narrative, he provides a marvelous image of the writer who is completely involved with, implicated in, wound up in, inseparable from his text:

I will not finish that sentence till I have made an observation upon the strange state of affairs between the reader and myself. . . . I am this month one whole year older than I was this time twelve-month; and having got, as you perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth volume—and no farther than to my first day's

life—'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out; so that instead of advancing, as a common writer, in my work with what I have been doing at it—on the contrary, I am just thrown so many volumes back—was every day of my life to be as busy a day as this—And why not?—and the transactions and opinions of it to take up as much description—And for what reason should they be cut short? as at this rate I should just live 364. times faster than I should write—It must follow, an' please your worships, that the more I write, the more I shall have to write—and consequently, the more your worships read, the more your worships will have to read. (4.13)

Analogous to the diagrams in volume 6 of the line of the narrative, Sterne's verbal account here shows a never-ending sequence of digressions and complications, with the parentheses within this long, loose period mimicking the eruption of fresh matter into an already overfilled agenda. Although the narrator speaks of the "strange state of affairs between the reader and myself," the focus of the passage is on the narrator's infinitely tangled relationship with his own text. The comic conclusion, "Will this be good for your worships eyes?" clearly undercuts what is in danger of becoming a philosophical discussion about the divergence of art and life, fictional time and life time; but it also creates a discontinuity between the readers, mocked as "your worships," and the author, who plainly writes not to instruct the reader but to delight himself and whose particular delight is in the construction of an impossible problem with which to amuse and perplex.

Tristram Shandy, I need hardly remark, is filled with images of interruption, impotence, and failure, from the unseasonable question with which Mrs. Shandy interrupts her husband, to the digressions that make up the text, to the failure of the family bull with which the novel concludes. Sterne never seems to fail to find such tales and images amusing, dwelling as he does on the near mis-conception of Tristram, his mis-naming, the unwitting substitution of a name of grief for a name of power, Tristram's near-castration, the mutilation of his pointedly symbolic nose, the failure of Walter Shandy to make any impression on his wife, the significant and highly suspicious injury of Toby Shandy, the broken bridges, dangerous crevices and passages, Uncle Toby's peril at the hands of the predatory, venereal Widow Wadman—all these amount to a concentra-
tion of interest that several critics have found less indicative of a sense of humor than of a personal concern. Not only do the main and subordinate events of the narrative focus on such matters: they are also borne out by seemingly minor and irrelevant asides, as for example in Yorick's consideration that he might as well support a midwife for the village as continue to lend his horse, because "it confined all his charity into one particular channel, and where, as he fancied, it was the least wanted, namely, to the child-bearing and child-getting part of his parish; reserving nothing for the impotent,---nothing for the aged,---nothing for the many comfortless scenes he was hourly called forth to visit" (1.10). Tristram Shandy is a novel in which there is a particular interest, charitable and otherwise, in the impotent.

Certainly one might argue for a connection between the frequent images of sexual failure and interruption or inadequacy and the instances of narrative interruption: the one becomes a metaphor for the other. But it is also true that the one may become a compensation for the other. For it is a curious fact that Tristram, whose biographical facts suggest practically unmitigated disaster, who might seem, like the other members of his family, doomed to impotence and frustration, is nevertheless a powerful storyteller. Like his father the rhetorician, who fails so badly to achieve the desired effect with either his wife or his brother, Tristram too has a way with words; the son of a father embarrassed about the means by which he might engender a child and of a mother more concerned with the clock and the calendar than with sexual relations, offspring of a nearly universal blank and a less than overpowering passion, Tristram is a captivating weaver of tales, one who at first invites us to consider him inept and out of control and then triumphantly, if ironically, points out the success and appropriateness of what he's done. In fact, it is precisely through his mastery of digressions that Tristram controls the text and the reader, emerging as a potent narrative voice, a persona who, while endlessly flirting with chaos, dominates otherwise uncontrollable experience through language.

There is undoubtedly a strong relation between words and power in Tristram Shandy as well as a relation between words and sexuality. Sterne establishes, indeed cultivates, the relation between language and sexuality by suggesting possibilities that are then denied, by accusing the reader of imagining things that the author never intended; so persistently does Sterne make these denials that even the most unsuspecting reader must be convinced that he protests too much. Several other instances suggest the unusual potency of words in this novel. Witness, for example, Tristram's assertion that "twas not by ideas,—by heaven! [Uncle Toby's] life was put in jeopardy by words!" (2.2). The ambiguity about just where Uncle Toby received his wound—in the groin or at the siege of Namur—is sexually charged, not to say full of pitfalls. And we see the connection between sexuality and words, between sexual innuendo and power, in the story of the chestnut.

When Yorick picks up the chestnut that has burned Phutatorius (the name means lecher) in his most vulnerable spot and rolled onto the floor, his action may be seen as emblematic of Sterne's professed attitude toward words, that is, that a good word is unharmed—and may even be enhanced—by its connotations: "He did it, for no reason, but that he thought the chestnut not a jot worse for the adventure—and that he held a good chestnut worth stooping for" (4.27). Yorick has been described as a sentimentalized version of the author, an amiable satirist and moralist, kindly and charitable, but unhappily for his own fortunes, too quick to offend the great of the world by attention only to the merits of a case rather than to the politics. But Yorick is also the jester who establishes the relationship between apparently innocent words and bawdry, for although he did not initially aim the chestnut, he did, musingly, pick it up. While Sterne's presentation of Yorick amounts to a self-defense of the innocent, unworlly-wise wit and jester, the actions that Tristram recounts allow of another interpretation: "But this incident, trifling as it was, wrought differently in Phutatorius's head; He considered this act of Yorick's, in getting off his chair, and picking up the chestnut, as a plain acknowledgment in him, that the chestnut was originally his,—and in course, that it must have been the owner of the chestnut, and no one else, who could have plaid him such a prank with it" (4.27). Tristram implies here, as he has earlier insisted about Slawkenbergius's tale, that the fault is in the mind of the perceiver, that Yorick's supposed guilt resides only in Phutatorius's mind, just as anyone who assumes that nose may mean anything other than nose is imposing his own corrupt or salacious reading onto the text. Yorick's action, according to the narrator, suggests that a chestnut that has had a risqué adventure is no less worthy than one that has not, just as words, Tristram would insist, are not the worse just because certain people cannot keep from thinking that something else is meant by them.

But of course Sterne goes out of his way to supply us with other meanings for the words he uses by the very act of insisting that they can
have but one meaning, and that meaning strictly innocent. Just as words, in Sterne, acquire a life of their own, so the chestnut is earlier described as "of more life and rotundity than the rest" (4.27), having a kind of vigor appropriate to a sexually tinged adventure. Its physical action is analogous to the effect of words on the imagination: "The genial warmth which the chestnut imparted, was not undetectable for the first twenty or five and twenty seconds, and did no more than gently solicit Phutatorius's attention towards the part." Ultimately more than the attention is engaged: his faculties—"imagination, judgment, resolution, deliberation, ratiocination, memory, fancy"—are wholly devoted to attempting to determine the cause. Phutatorius's conjectures range from the neutral (even that stage being sexually tinged in the telling)—"his imagination continued neuter"—to comically figured images of castration: "a thought instantly darted into his mind, that the anguish had the sensation of glowing heat— it might, notwithstanding that, be a bite as well as a burn; and if so, that possibly a Newt or an Asker, or some such detested reptile, had crept up, and was fastening his teeth—." And though Sterne/Tristram seems to mock and reject Phutatorius's corrupt imagination, he also encourages the lively action of words, which, like the chestnut, happily careen through a series of decent and indecent meanings.

Sterne, while ostensibly rejecting salacious material through Yorick's expressed opposition to Phutatorius's treatise, entitled de Concubinis renunciatis, of course constantly flirts with such possibilities. Writing, which might be a balm for genital inflammations or wounds, cannot so function here: the pages of Phutatorius's treatise, cool off the press, are rejected for the purpose because its "doctrines ... had inflamed many an honest man in the same place" (4.27). Yet Yorick, like Sterne, also opposes affected gravity, in telling a bawdy story for his reader's enjoyment, in declaring "Heaven forbid the stock of chastity should be lessened by the life and opinions of Tristram Shandy." Much of the humor of this tale consists in the discrepancy between the simple incident of low comedy and the elevated style in which it is described; thus the pleasure is dual: a rather simple, backroom story, provoking guffaws, is recounted with elegant diction and rhetorical flourishes, so that the pleasures of the text are bawdy, narrative, and linguistic.

It is perhaps not entirely irrelevant that Sterne and Burton, the one a bachelor and the other a not altogether successfully married man, express in their writing a very particular degree of interest in sexuality. The bulk of the third partition of the Anatomy is given over to the symptoms, causes, and cures of Love Melancholy; Burton is nowhere more eloquent than in his account of the madness of love, his detailing of the deformities that can disfigure a woman without rendering her unattractive to the opposite sex (3.164). Burton documents with enthusiasm instances of love among the palm trees, love between species, instances of unnatural lust (given in Latin), and the inflammatory effects of "heroical love." He describes love out of control: "They cannot, I say, contain themselves, they will be still not only joying hands, kissing, but embracing, treading on their toes, &c. diving into their bosomes, and that liberenter & eam delectatione, as Philostratus confesseth to his mistress; and Lamprias in Lucian, mammillas premens, per sinus clam dextra, &c. feeling their paps, and that scarce honestly sometimes" (3.145). And then he realizes that his own enthusiasm has carried him away: "But I rove, I confess" (3.257); "But I am too lavish peradventure in this subject" (3.257), he says, only to plunge once more into an infinity of examples. Burton confesses, about midway through his treatment of the subject, "I confess I am but a novice, a Contemplator only, Nescio quid sit amor nec amo, ... yet homo sum, &c. not altogether inexpert in this subject" (3.195–96). For a novice, a contemplator only, Burton shows a good deal of interest, and displays a good deal of expertise, even if acquired second-hand. For all that The Anatomy of Melancholy and Tristram Shandy may appear at first to be generically diverse, they resemble each other in their subject matter, their attitudes, their representation of spontaneity, and their manipulation of the reader. Both works are characterized by a considerable misogyny, conventional to be sure, yet noteworthy. Burton reports with enthusiasm a good many of the commonly held opinions of the faults and weaknesses of women, and then, several times, rather lamely draws back: "Let Simonides, Mantuan, Platina, Pet. Aretino, and such women haters bare the blame, if ought bee said amisse, I have not writ a tenth of that which might bee urged out of them and others. ... And that which I have said (to speake truth) no more concerns them then men, though women be more frequently named in this tract" (3.229). Sterne's presentation of women is also predominantly negative, ranging from the rather Popean dictum that "the females [of the Shandy family] had no character at all" (1.21), to the utter blankness of Mrs. Shandy, to the predatory Widow Wadman. But whereas Burton's misogyny is conventional, overt, and based in centuries of patristic and other authority, Sterne's is more suggestive and insidious, based in the innu-
Anatomy of Melancholy
Arnoldum Montaltum Savanarolum Langium Valescum Crimisonum
Alexandrum Benedictum Laurentium Valeriolam

And so directed against Madam, of whose reading Sterne particularly
Shandy
complains, as she misses clues he has placed for her, and, according to
his insinuations, reads matters into his text which he never intended. 41

But the female inquisitiveness and lack of insight found in Tristram
Shandy are balanced by elaborate representations of masculine incom­
pleteness and inadequacy, and once again, Burton's text provides provo­
active models for Sterne. Not only does Tristram Shandy resemble The
Anatomy of Melancholy in its view of women and its reliance on digression
and interruption; both texts contain gaps and omissions that do not
merely remain blank but become spaces for the reader's directed imag­
ination. While citing an overwhelming multiplicity of examples, Bur­
ton often ends by suggesting that there are more: a list of ten or twenty
examples is likely to conclude with an “etc.” or with suggestions for
further reading. For example, regarding the remedies of love, Burton
writes: “Plura qui volet de remediis amoris, legit Jasonem Pratensem,
Arnoldum, Montaltum, Savanarolum, Langium, Valescum, Crimsonum,
Alexandrum Benedictum, Laurentium, Valeriolam; et Poetis Nasone, et
nostratibus Chaucerem, etc. with whom I conclude” (3.272). In the midst
of a discussion of the most alluring part of a woman (“some peculiar
part or other which pleaseth most, and inflames him above the rest”),
Burton first records the possibilities—“some said the forhead, some the
teeth, some the eyes, cheekes, lips, necke, chinne, &c.”—and then cites
Lais of Corinth, a famous courtesan and favorite Burtonian example:
“But shee smiling, said, they were a company of fooles; for suppose they
had her where they wished, what would they first seeke?” (3.84). Burton
is so eager to pass over the suggestion made by Lais's question that he
nearly stumbles over his own prosle in moving on to another part, that
which proves to be Widow Wadman's best weapon against Uncle Toby:
“Yet this notwithstanding I doe easily grant, neque quis vestrum negaverit,
opinor, All parts are attractive, but especially the eyes, . . . which are Loves
Fowlers, . . . the hooks of Love” (3.84). 42 Although the gaps in Burton are
less obviously crafted, less elaborately constructed than those in Tristram
Shandy, the techniques are analogous: the blank sheet on which we may
draw a picture of the beautiful Widow Wadman may have its origin, not
in a physical space, but an imaginative space in Burton.

Indeed, what may have been a mild tendency in Burton becomes
one of Sterne's favorite devices, richly present in a text full of gaps and
spaces for the imagination, gaps in the story, the language, and the time
sequence. Sterne leads us to imagine Uncle Toby's wooing of the Widow

Wadman, then leaves a gap in which it takes place, then enters the narra­
tive in the middle, then urges his reader, “Now give me all the help you
can” (9.20); only after the intervention of an invocation and the story of
Maria the goatherd does he finally return to the original narrative line.
Not only are digressions the very substance of Tristram Shandy; so also
are gaps, crevices, covered ways, omissions, dashes, misunderstandings,
implications, etc., which have their antecedent in the numerous et ceteras
and indeterminacies of Burton, seen in those instances in which he in­
vites us to make up our own minds or to treat the text as text rather than
as truth: “Whether this bee a true story, or a tale, I will not much con­
tend, it serves to illustrate this which I have said” (3.122). Of many that
might be cited, one anecdote from Burton may suggest how much he
and Sterne share in method and subject matter. Recounting the stringent
confinement of a Turkish seraglio, Burton speaks of wives “so penned up
they may not conferre with any living man, or converse with younger
women, have a Cucumber or Carret sent in to them for their diet but
sliced, for feare, &c.”; he concludes, “and so live and are left alone to
their unchast thoughts all the dayes of their lives” (3.301).

The unchaste thoughts that now and again emerge in Burton's text,
sometimes camouflaged in Latin, become, like Burton's fondness for dig­
gressions, the life and soul of Tristram Shandy. In Sterne, of course, the
narrative persona and the narrative structure are much more fully devel­
oped, and bawdiness is much more conscious and explicit. 43 But not only
Burton's matter and his sources find their way into Tristram Shandy; so
does his manner. Sterne lifted a good deal from many texts besides The
Anatomy of Melancholy; his strong resemblance to Burton consists in the
handling of that material, in his flamboyant following of associations,
and his use of persona. Both Burton and Sterne take a pronounced inter­
est in matters, not so much of the heart, as of the body and the psyche;
in both there is a fascination with words, a delight in them for their own
sake, a sense of their power; in both the stream of ideas and instances
goes where it will; both demonstrate the power of the incomplete narra­
tive; and both manipulate the reader and the text.

One of the consequences of Sterne's emphasis on interruption and
digressiveness is, as we have seen, to divert attention from the content
of a narrative to its method, to problems and techniques of narrative
itself. As with several of the techniques they share, this too is developed
more strongly by Sterne than by Burton. Most dramatically, by erecting
a series of frames around an incident or a narrative sequence, Sterne pro-
gressively recontextualizes a given event or passage, presenting it first from one and then from another point of view as it is reseen in a subsequent remark or chapter: “In the beginning of the last chapter, I informed you exactly when I was born; — but I did not inform you, how” (I:6): “To my uncle Mr. Toby Shandy do I stand indebted for the preceding anecdote, to whom my father, who was an excellent natural philosopher, and much given to close reasoning upon the smallest matters, had oft, and heavily, complained of the injury” (I:3). Such interruptions may serve to tantalize the reader, but they also resolutely draw our attention to the narrative process itself, even as they make evident to the reader the degree to which his reactions to the text are being manipulated.

A prime example is the account of the death of Le Fever (I:6-10), an inserted and extended narrative in which the unambiguously kind-hearted and generous Uncle Toby stars and in the course of which Sterne cultivates the vein of sentimentality. But just as we get to the end of the story, and in the chapter that follows, Sterne makes it apparent that he is playing with the reader. It has been suggested that Sterne himself realized he had gone too far in the sentimental mode and so drew back, but it is precisely when the story is at its most sentimental that Sterne draws our attention to the process of cultivating emotional response, by turning it on and off again: “the pulse fluttered — stopped — went on — throb’d — stopped again — moved — stopped— shall I go on? — No” (I:10).

In this sequence the question “shall I go on?” may be seen first as a response to the reader’s sympathy, which Sterne insinuates must be well-nigh intolerable, but it is quickly reseen as a question about whether the narrator should continue to play with our emotions. Sterne speedily finishes the narrative at the beginning of the next chapter but then sets it off with additional information and comments that in effect provide an ever-expanding series of frames for the simple story. First we hear that the governor of Dendermond paid Le Fever military honors, then that Yorick paid him ecclesiastic honors, and next that Yorick preached a funeral sermon; but the series is here disrupted and framed, for mention of this sermon leads to an account of Yorick’s habit of commenting on the rhetorical merits of his work and his use of musical terminology to do so. In the further frames provided for this story, in an extended sequential description of the manuscript, Sterne, step by step, elaborates the description of the insignificance of the comment that puts the whole prior performance, the narrative of Le Fever’s death, in doubt. He tells us in a series of ever more definitive phrases—that the comment “Bravo!” had been written “at two inches, at least, and a half’s distance from, and below the concluding line of the sermon, at the very extremity of the page, and in that right hand corner of it, which, you know, is generally covered with your thumb; and, to do it justice, it is wrote besides with a crow’s quill so faintly in a small Italian hand, as scarce to solicit the eye” (I:11). The result of this carefully punctuated string of minute designations is to place the original experience at such a remove that we can no longer regard it seriously. Comment upon comment and comment upon context frame and distance narrative, in a process that is elaborate, extended, teasing, and playful.

Advancing, retreating, retracting at great length and with many complexities what has been rather startlingly advanced, Sterne repeatedly modifies our vision and perception of this narrative, focusing our attention first on the tale and then on the framework, then on the many possible refinements in our understanding of it. Thackeray’s remark, that Sterne is always standing at our side, to see how we react to his art, is appropriate here, but this passage is less a leering authorial intrusion into a pure emotionalism than vintage Sterne, who is part sentimental, part anatomist of his own art, and who cultivates the first in the service of the second. Tristram’s comment, that Yorick “has left us the two sermons marked Moderato, and the half dozen of So, so, tied fast together in one bundle by themselves” (I:11), implies that what we have for a moment been led to regard as fact within fiction, as a narrative in its own right, is now to be regarded as performance, and that it is by the author himself so regarded.

These suspicions are borne out by the revelation that Yorick has marked this very sermon, which “seems to have been his favourite composition”—It is upon mortality, with the applause of “Bravo!” Sermons on mortality, like sermons on any other subject, are judged in this novel as rhetorical performances. Sterne draws attention to Yorick’s self-congratulation, partly to shock, partly to amuse; but the thought of mortality, like the related thought of sexuality, brings out the rhetorical streak in Sterne, whose writing of this novel was a race against death (I:1-2). Although he speaks of “that particular sermon which has unaccountably led me into this digression” (I:11), the linking of death and performance is as characteristic of Sterne as it was of his seventeenth-century predecessors.

Laurence Sterne, who took more than one leaf from Burton’s book,
creates a text that is apparently spontaneous yet artfully constructed, a text of which he said: "My work is digressive, and it is progressive too,—and at the same time" (1.22). Like Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, *Tristram Shandy* is shamelessly dependent on its predecessors and yet idiosyncratic, indeed unique. In both works the persona thrusts himself upon the reader, drawing us into the text as collaborators and co-conspirators. This interactive quality of the text, in which Burton and Sterne invite, even demand, response from readers, to whom they issue both invitations and challenges, is one of the most basic features of the two works. Moreover, Burton and Sterne interact with what they have written: they modify and revise, whether over a period of years or on the instant, responding and adding to what they have written. These are texts that call attention to the process of generation, texts that leave the scaffolding up so that we may admire the intricacy and skill of the construction. Thus, although Sterne has written a novel or private history and Burton a systematic medical treatise, there is a similarity in the process by which these texts are generated and in the nature of the result, a similarity of attitude and method as determinative of their essential qualities as questions of fiction and nonfiction, novel or scientific treatise.

Although the direct influence of one author on another is not the primary concern of this study, the way in which Sterne drew on Burton for the materials as well as for the methodology of his text underscores my contention that genre is not only, as Fowler argues, a matter of familial resemblances rather than a set of minimum requirements but something that develops with time. Sterne’s novel is not only profoundly reliant on Burton’s text for source material but also profoundly analogous in approach; indeed, it represents a further elaboration of Burton’s rhetorical technique. Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*, like Donne’s *Devotions* and Browne’s *Religio Medici*, is not only a text powerful in itself but one whose generative pattern operates again, I would submit, in its lively progeny.

**VIII**

**QUESTIONS OF HISTORY**

Damn Sir T. Browne, a writer I never got much kick from: I suppose it is a reminiscence, though I was thinking of the Ballet.

—T. S. Eliot, writing to John Hayward

Eliot in exasperation puts his finger on one of the questions that may be raised by this book: what is reminiscence, what is new invention; what is influence, what analogy; what, exactly, is the relation between the pairs of writers considered here? In the case in point, Eliot’s line in *Little Gidding* on the raising of the ghosts of the past—“Nor is it an incantation / To summon the spectre of a Rose” —is part of an assertion that the past cannot be recaptured:

We cannot revive old factions
We cannot restore old policies
Or follow an antique drum.

But of course Eliot makes the statement in the context of a linking of past, present, and future, following hard upon images that join the death of Charles I with that of Christ, preceding the linking of apostolic and martial flame, of dove and rocket. He finds himself caught in the act of using even what he does not remember, an unintentional effect in the midst of his extraordinarily deliberate craft. Eliot, who drew so heavily on seventeenth-century writers, would here reject, if he could, this particular borrowing.

The texts that I have considered are, as I noted at the outset, also marked by reminiscences, borrowings, memories, allusions, parodies, and distortions, many of which have been noted by other readers and critics. But more important than the issue of whether Eliot or the other post-Renaissance writers considered or made use of Browne, Donne, or Burton is the question of whether they adopted the same rhetorical strategies, the same mode, the same method; it is the similarity of conception — of the nature of the persona or voice, the nature of the quest, the nature of the inquiry — and of the structure that emerges to which I have