The questions concerning how a text communicates to its readers have much preoccupied modern academics—editors, bibliographers, and theorists of textuality. As a matter of routine in literary studies, we have become accustomed to differing notions of the term ‘text’, such as those broadly classified by John Mowitt as the semiological, the phenomenological, and the philological. The present essay examines how textuality as such is by no means an exclusively modern or postmodern concern. Through the consideration of a set of eighteenth-century writers, I will examine the implications of a maturing print culture for notions of ‘text’ that are quite familiar to modern literary

1. John Mowitt, _Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object_ (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), pp. 223–24. The semiological has predominated since the emergence of deconstruction in the 1960s. This sense of ‘text’ allows Roland Barthes’s “From Work to Text” to discuss textuality as open-ended free play, “a(n) activity of production”: it cannot be defined or localized. To this Barthes opposes the ‘work’ as a literary object that “can be seen (in bookshops, in catalogues, in exam syllabuses) . . . [and] held in the hand” (Roland Barthes, _Image, Music, Text_, trans. Stephen Heath [New York: Hill & Wang, 1977], p. 157; see also Mowitt, pp. 23–29). The phenomenological text is the basis of a hermeneutic construct, the meaning produced by a reader, which Wolfgang Iser calls the “work”: “the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two. The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized” (Wolfgang Iser, _The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett_ [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974], p. 274). The philological text is that of the “textual critic” and editor who pay attention to the material objects that have carried a work over time into the present. This attention to materiality paradoxically gives way to a Barthesian abstraction (although the terms ‘work’ and ‘text’ have traded places) as the editor attempts to construct an ideal version, regaining the author’s “original” intentions.

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Jonathan Swift, Alexander Pope, and Laurence Sterne were writers who witnessed an unprecedented expansion of print culture, and who took up the philosophical implications of this expansion by engaging with textuality as such (and, in the process, self-consciously creating a tradition of writers acutely aware of bibliographic signification). These authors share a materially embodied style that manifests itself in its very medium and includes ongoing commentary on its own form as it proceeds. This double phenomenon of performance and reflection constitutes what I will call “textual presence.” This essay returns to the much considered literary relationship of Sterne and his immediate satiric forebears, Swift and Pope, with a new focus on their engagement with the particularly modern challenges of a print culture. After a brief survey of classical and Renaissance Menippean satires and their attitude toward textuality, I will examine the rhetorical effect of the mise-en-page of Swift and Pope in relation to this tradition. I will then explore how Sterne’s work develops the Scriblerian notion of textual presence into a device with new philosophical implications for our sense of reading, writing, and the self.

To illustrate the phenomenon, let us begin with the passage in Tristram Shandy (1759–67) from which I take my title: the famous debate between Walter and Toby Shandy concerning Mrs. Shandy’s choice of a female over a male midwife:

2. My approach reflects current interests in the material determinants of the production of meaning. The recent movement in critical editing, represented by the work of D. F. McKenzie (Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts [London: British Library, 1986]) and Jerome McGann (The Textual Condition [Princeton University Press, 1991]), draws attention to a distinction between “two large signifying codes” of any given text: the “linguistic” and the “bibliographic” (McGann, p. 56 and passim). McGann’s attention to this distinction is intended to compensate for the traditional emphasis, in Anglo-American “eclectic” editing, on the “linguistic codes” that supposedly represent the idealized authorial intention behind a text. (This corresponds with Mowitt’s “philological” sense of “text.”) The importance of the new sociological movement in bibliography is to see that content (linguistic code) and form (bibliographic code) are inextricably bound together. As McKenzie puts it, “The book itself is an expressive means. To the eye its pages offer an aggregation of meanings both verbal and typographic for translation to the ear; but we must learn to see that its shape in the hand also speaks to us from the past” (“Typography and Meaning: The Case of William Congreve,” in Buch und Buchhandel in Europa im achtzehnten Jahrhundert, ed. Giles Barber and Bernhard Fabian [Hamburg: Hauswedell, 1981], p. 82). The brief survey of senses of “text” offered in these notes should be supplemented by D. C. Greetham’s Theories of the Text (Oxford University Press, 1999), which takes up at length the variety of approaches to textuality and their implications.
—My sister, I dare say, added [Toby], does not care to let a man come so near her****. I will not say whether my uncle Toby had compleated the sentence or not;—’tis for his advantage to suppose he had,—as, I think, he could have added no ONE WORD which would have improved it.

If, on the contrary, my uncle Toby had not fully arrived at his period’s end,—then the world stands indebted to the sudden snapping of my father’s tobacco-pipe, for one of the neatest examples of that ornamental figure in oratory, which Rhetoricians stile the Aposiopesis.—Just heaven! how does the Poco più and the Poco meno of the Italian artists;—the insensible MORE or LESS, determine the precise line of beauty in the sentence, as well as in the statue! How do the slight touches of the chisel, the pencil, the pen, the fiddle-stick, et cetera,—give the true swell, which gives the true pleasure!—O my countrymen!—be nice;—be cautious of your language;——and never, O! never let it be forgotten upon what small particles your eloquence and your fame depend.  

Tristram draws attention to textuality, here the ambiguity of the asterisks: Are they a deliberate oratorical gesture on the part of Toby? Are they transparent placeholders for a four-letter word? Or is this a sonic grapheme representing the sound of Walter’s pipe snapping? Tristram’s analogies stress the intermingling of physical text and oratorical rhetoric, the concrete uses of abstract language that the concluding reference to the “small particles” of “eloquence” sums up. We encounter here, as so often in Tristram Shandy, the power of the physical text to convey more than the mere words it presents.

This textual presence is a rhetorical phenomenon of Scriblerian provenance, with a long line of notable literary antecedents. In following this trajectory, I am working with the ongoing scholarship that has placed Tristram Shandy within the tradition of Menippean satire, or the anatomy. This body of scholarship traces thematic and moti-


val continuities, describing the genre as a variety of learned wit, a discontinuous collection of intellectual arcana. I wish to add to this description an emphasis on the prevalence in Menippean works of acute self-awareness of their own textual status. Textual presence is in itself a theme or motif that is as definitive of the genre as any of the characteristics—such as digressions, intellectuality, or encyclopedism—hitherto associated with it. Recognizing the genre’s awareness of its own material manifestations can help us better appreciate the unique stylistic device of textual presence made so much of not only in *Tristram Shandy’s* famous blank, black, and marbled pages, but also at a more pervasive systemic level throughout the work.

**LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUNDS**

We should begin by placing the Scriblerians in a tradition of Menippean satire that has always had a self-reflexive interest in its own textuality and in the materiality of language, conceived in terms of a mind-body contradiction. These interests are a concomitant of the genre’s debunking of philosophy and learning by reducing the intellectual to the physical.  

The chain of correspondences I wish to trace here involves a set of analogical reductions: mind to body at the dinner table in symposium scenes; thought to language in expression (parodied in the pun—the reduction of sense to sound); language to graphic writing (and ultimately printing) in the text. For example, just as the banquet scene in Lucian’s *Convivium* represents different schools of philosophers, rhetoricians, and poets becoming the worse for drink and turning debate into apocalyptic battle, so does his interview with Homer in *Verae Historiae* introduce questions of textual scholarship, setting a precedent for satire’s enmity for editors: “I went on to enquire whether the bracketed lines had been written by him, and he asserted that they were all his own: consequently I held the grammarians Zenodotus and Aristarchus guilty of pedantry in the highest degree.”

6. This is manifest in the frequent symposium scenes in such satires. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), chap. 4. As Bakhtin suggests (pp. 297–98), the use of food becomes an all-pervasive trope, marking the presence of the bodily throughout literary discourse.

place at the table have a direct correlative in the impositions of the
textual body (by means of editors) on the “work.” We are thus
reminded that, just as philosophical ideas are subject to bodily con-
cerns, the sources of literary authority are frail and fallible docu-
ments, raising questions about the notion of tradition itself.

The locus classicus of the reduction of the intellectual to the physi-
cal is the Cena Trimalchionis in Petronius’s Satyricon, where the nature
of language, representation, and taste are dealt with in bodily terms,
especially in terms of food. Trimalchio is obsessed with forcing sym-

tabolic and linguistic correspondences into a physical form. His *apo-

phoreta* (a variety of wit akin to the rebus in which a riddle punningly
describes a gift given to a guest) undo meaning by a focus on the
physical sounds and letters of words, as in the following riddle, “Mu-
raena et littera,” which corresponds to the gift of “murem cum rana
alligata fascemque betae.” In some sense, the fact that we read about
these puns makes them easier to comprehend, since the connection
is linguistic. At the dinner, the guests are presented with only the ob-
jects that, in themselves, are so distant from the riddle that a full
separation of signifier from signified takes place. Trimalchio’s riddles
violate decorum, the mutual suitability of form and content.

Petronius has framed the problem of a material conception of lan-
guage in terms of relations between the mental and physical, a tech-
nique that gains a much greater range of application as print becomes
the medium for Menippean satire during the Renaissance. In Fran-
çois Rabelais’s Gargantua and Pantagruel, for example, not only a gen-
eral emphasis on the body (well documented by Mikhail Bakhtin) but
also specific attention to the embodiment of meaning are abundantly
in evidence, epitomized in the episode of the frozen words. This
episode has been read as either a celebration or a condemnation of the
materiality of language. In either case, words are treated as matter:

terrible Trimalchio’s puns are; the riddle translates, “a moray-eel and a letter”; the gift
is literally “a mouse tied to a frog and a bundle of beetroot,” which, in the Latin, com-
bines ‘mus’ and ‘rana’ to get ‘muraena’ and adds ‘beta’, both the Greek letter and Latin
for ‘beet’. J. P. Sullivan’s more free translation attempts to convey this in English:
“Lights and letters got a lamprey and some peas” (Petronius, The Satyricon, trans. J. P.

56). Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by book, chapter, and page number as GP.

his Le défi des signes: Rabelais et la crise de l’interprétation à la Renaissance (Orléans: Para-
words and noises uttered during a wintertime battle “froze in the Air; 
And now the rigour of the Winter being over by the succeeding se-
renity and warmth of the Weather, they melt and are Heard.” This is 
unproblematic as a metaphor, but as the episode continues, frozen 
words are literally fished out of the sea: “whole handfulls of frozen 
Words, which seem’d to us like your rough Sugar-Plumbs, of many 
colours . . . and when we had somewhat warm’d them between our 
Hands, they melted like Snow, and we really heard them” (4.56.652).

The print medium encourages such an awareness of words as physi-
cal things. The awareness of physical form, whether in the gestures of 
an orator or the physics of communication suggested by the frozen 
words, ultimately leads to an acknowledgment of the expressive use 
of print. Rabelais’s much-celebrated lists are strung together not in 
continuous prose but in columns, making them distinctly visual fea-
tures of the text. His interest in material language reaches its logical 
fulfillment in the oracle of the bottle in the fifth volume of Gargantua 
and Pantagruel, which is expressed through the physical form of the 
text, printed in the shape of a bottle (GP, 5.45.799; 802).

The incidental manifestations of textual presence in Rabelais are 
given a more systematic treatment in Cervantes’ development of 
metafictional paradoxes out of the Menippean technique we have 
outlined thus far: the highly reflexive examination of the work’s own 
textual status. As in Lucian (whose Verae Historiae is explicitly aimed 
at examining the truth claims of writing), Don Quixote foregrounds 
questions of textual transmission: one manuscript source abruptly 
ends after only eight chapters, and at the height of Quixote’s battle 
with the Biscayan; another, discovered only by accident, is suspect in 
its origins—written by an Arabian (a nationality known, the narrator 
informs us, for lying) and in need of translation.

In part 1 of Don Quixote, the traditional satire on learning is trans-
formed by a focus on the printed aspect of books. The author’s 
preface reveals that the material appearance of the work is more im-
portant than its content, for, as the economic language of the follow-
ing passage shows, the author appeals to a commodity-oriented print 
market rather than a learned readership. As a friend who promises to 
add some humanist learning to the book explains:

I’ll engage to croud your margins sufficiently, and scribble you four or 
five Sheets to boot at the End of your Book. And for the Citation of so 
many Authors, ’tis the easiest Thing in Nature. Find out one of these 
Books with an alphabetical Index, and without any farther Ceremony, 
remove it verbatim into your own: And tho’ the World won’t believe 
you have Occasion for such Lumber, yet there are Fools enough to be 
thus drawn into an Opinion of the Work; at least, such a flourishing
Train of Attendants will give your Book a fashionable Air, and recommend it to Sale; for few Chapmen will stand to examine it, and compare the Authorities upon the Compter, since they can expect nothing but their Labour for their Pains.\footnote{Miguel de Cervantes, \textit{Don Quixote}, trans. Peter Motteux, rev. John Ozell (New York: Random House, 1930), p. [xxiii], roman and italic print reversed. This is the translation (which had reached its seventh edition by 1743) read by Sterne. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by page number as \textit{DQ}.}

It is quite clear that print has a life of its own, independent of both the author, who turns his work over to the cosmetic adjustments of the friend, and the inattentive reader, who is either a skeptic or a fool.

The extent to which print has permeated culture is manifest in Don Quixote's first sally and its repercussions. Not only has print filled the Don's library with the texts of chivalric romances and substituted their fantasy for reality in his mind but, more remarkably, print has reached all of the characters Quixote encounters, from the curate and barber of his own village to the lowly innkeeper and other travelers on the road, who are able to speak the language of romance and accommodate Quixote's delusion. In part 2, the all-pervasive presence of print plays a more direct role as the Don's every action is controlled by the existence of the printed version of part 1. The cumulative significance of the presence of print is revealed in an emblematic scene just before Don Quixote's final defeat, when he encounters a printing shop and learns of a troubling work in press:

They told him 'twas the Second Part of that ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote de la Mancha, written by a certain Person, a Native of Tordesillas. I have heard of that Book before, said Don Quixote, and really thought it had been burnt, and reduc'd to Ashes for a foolish Impertinent Libel; but all in good time. Execution-day will come at last. For made Stories are only so far good and agreeable as they are profitable, and bear the Resemblance of Truth; and true History the more valuable, the farther it keeps from the fabulous. And so saying, he flung out of the Printing-house in a Huff. (\textit{DQ}, pp. 870–71)

Quixote's anger at this spurious continuation of his story (which we encounter here in the authentic continuation) marks his wish to inhabit an honor-bound manuscript-world (in which a single burning can destroy a libelous text)—an impossibility in the modern world of mass printing for profit (starkly juxtaposed to Quixote's Horatian sense of the "profitable"). Robert Alter summarizes the irony of this scene: "At such a moment we can hardly forget that Don Quixote himself is no more than the product of the very processes he observes, a congeries of words set up in type, run off as proof, corrected and
rerun, bound in pages, and sold at so many reales a copy." The self-referential nature of this emblematic scene places *Don Quixote* at the head of a tradition of self-conscious fiction that, I am suggesting here, is an outgrowth of the Menippean tradition of satiric awareness of the mind-body paradox that resides in written, and especially printed language. In part 2 of *Don Quixote*, print has radically transformed reality.

The literary tradition just outlined develops its metaphysical implications alongside a tradition of philosophical speculation concerning how the immaterial substance mind can interact with the material substance body. As we have seen, Menippean satirists have been working with this problem since Petronius. However, in the post-Cartesian world of the Scriblerians, this problem has particular valences that make print a customary analogy and medium for the problem: textual presence comes to represent the paradoxical condition of thought in language and language in printed form, a means of addressing the fundamental problem of embodiment.

The work of the Scriblerians and Sterne appears within an ongoing exploration of the relation between mind and body, and especially of language as a medium between the two. Unlike René Descartes’s answer to the mind-body problem, which had merely cut the knot by positing an unexplainable correspondence sanctioned by a non-deceiving God, Lockeian empiricism established a materialist relationship between mind and body by founding knowledge upon sensation. As John Yolton summarizes the relationship, "the reason we have simple ideas [the foundation of all knowledge] at all is because there are externally existing objects in the world bombarding our senses with tiny particles." John Locke describes the working of the mind,
moving from sensation to reflection, with the literate and perhaps even typographical analogy of the alphabet: from the building blocks of simple ideas (compared to letters) we develop knowledge, fancies, and opinions (compared to words). Despite the telling material analogy, in his reflections on language Locke is well known to have attempted to remove words from their traditional connection to things, wishing instead to shift the focus to the connection of words to ideas. Nevertheless, as his own philosophy (not to mention the analogy) dictates, the foundations of ideas themselves are absolutely material.

For many, such materiality had an obvious analogue, and perhaps even cause, in printing. Restoration atomism had introduced the analogy of movable type to explain the constitution of physical reality from uncountable material units. As Richard Kroll writes, “the age seems to have delighted in the concreteness of the page impressed by visible marks, ascending atomically from letters to words, to sentences, to entire discourses.” This attitude pervades the period of Scriblerian satire, marking the process of interiorizing print technology, a great shift in consciousness and in attitudes toward language, which Walter J. Ong describes clearly: “the letters used in writing do not exist before the text in which they occur. With alphabetic letter-press print it is otherwise. Words are made out of units (types) which pre-exist as units before the words which they will constitute. Print suggests that words are things far more than writing ever did.” While such an attitude was long anticipated by pre-print Menippean satires, the deep integration of print and consciousness that enabled certain attitudes toward the relationship of mind and matter, artifice and reality, set the stage for the Scriblerians and Sterne to adapt the concerns of the classical and Renaissance Menippean satires to a full-blown print culture.

**THE SCRIBLERIANS**

By the early eighteenth century, the Menippean concern with language and textuality had become an obsession with print culture in all of its

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*Material: Materialism in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), chap. 1. The rest of this book traces the pervasiveness of the idea as it is contested and adapted over the eighteenth century.

aspects. The Scriblerus project was wholly formed upon the presumption of a print culture, not only as its source of satiric butts but also in its method of baiting and mastering these butts by means of print. But what distinguishes the Scriblerian vision of textual presence from its Menippean forebears is the direct and continuous focus on the printed product (in contrast, Don Quixote’s extensive use of printing examines more generally the process and the impact of publication). According to the Scriblerians, print does not so much create a milieu (a “global village” in which knowledge is exchanged) as it isolates individual minds from one another, reifying knowledge and reducing thought to a series of uncommunicative objects called “books.” Scriblerian satire is a parodic mode that is imitative and performative, insistent on producing facsimiles (albeit exaggerated ones) of such objects. The self-reflexive narratives of earlier Menippean satires become, with the Scriblerians, objects that draw attention to their status as such by means of their textual presence.

The key Scriblerian recognition is akin to that of Petronius: the embodiment of thought in language has an effect on thought. This leads to a dilemma inherent in all satire: while showing the world its errors, satire implicates itself in an intimate knowledge of those errors. In Scriblerian satire, this contradiction is manifested textually, for its greatest target is a flourishing print culture. But because it is itself presented in the physical form of a printed text, it necessarily becomes subject to its own critique of the modern condition. The Scriblerian penchant for mocking textual scholarship, the branch of humanist learning most susceptible to losing sight of the ideals of the revival of classical wisdom, reveals an acute awareness of texts as physical things. The figures of scholar-editors such as Richard Bentley and Lewis Theobald are in many ways definitive of Scriblerian satire. As Pope writes in the 1743 Dunciad:

Let standard-Authors, thus, like trophies born,
    Appear more glorious as more hack’d and torn,
And you, my Critics! in the chequer’d shade,
    Admire new light thro’ holes yourselves have made.

The advances of modern editing have only heightened our awareness of the dependence of the “great tradition” on the physical state of

19. The editorial tradition, stemming from Renaissance classical studies and intensifying in the Restoration and eighteenth century with the advent of higher biblical criticism, coincides with the rise of print, which both facilitates and demands textual analysis, but we should not forget the grammarians in Verae Historiae.

texts. Printing, which originated the demand for “perfect” texts of the ancients, has also revealed the impossibility of perfection by magnifying lacunae and drawing attention to cruces of interpretation. What the Scriblerians see as these editors’ excessive attention to the physical body of the text has a corollary in the traditional satiric device of the literalized or reified metaphor. At different levels, both editors and reified metaphors reveal the untranscendable nature of all language in its material structure. The Scriblerians draw the two together in the reduction of ideal “authorship” (a transcendent, logocentric category) to “composition” (a graphocentric activity—literally the setting of type for the printing press).

Swift’s *On Poetry: A Rapsody* (1733) offers a capsule instance of the phenomenon. Swift criticizes what he sees as the materialization of ideas in the medium of print:

In modern Wit all printed Trash, is
Set off with num’rous Breaks—and Dashes—
To Statesmen wou’d you give a Wipe,
You print it in Italick Type.
When Letters are in vulgar Shapes,
'Tis ten to one the Wit escapes;
But when in Capitals express,
The dullest Reader Smoaks the Jest.

In the context of the poem as a whole, this diagnosis of the abuses of print simultaneously reveals how infectious the disease truly is, for Swift’s poem, which contains not a few dashes throughout, concludes with a series of dashes and asterisks and a final "Cætera desiderantur***", suggesting that the only way to convey certain qualities of the satiric object is by means of textual presence. At the presentational level, at the level of the printed book as object, the satiric text itself becomes a communicative object—breaking down (or coming out—there is a definite printerly exuberance at work) into nonverbal, printerly gestures.


23. We should note that part of the satiric force of Swift’s poem stems from the first edition’s opposition of its presentation in an elegant folio pamphlet, spaciously laid out, to the breakdown enacted by its typography.
Such a performance has philosophical roots in the abundance of physical theories of language in Scriblerian works, drawing on traditional Menippean concerns with mind and body, thought and language. Swift’s *Tale of a Tub* (1704–10) as a whole takes place within its narrator’s “Physico-logical Scheme of Oratorial Receptacles or Machines,”24 which is premised upon the following theory of language: “Air being a heavy Body, and therefore . . . continually descending, must needs be more so, when loaden and press’d down by Words; which are also Bodies of much Weight and Gravity, as it is manifest from those deep Impressions they make and leave upon us; and therefore must be delivered from a due Altitude, or else they will neither carry a good Aim, nor fall down with a sufficient Force” (*TT*, p. 60). Although this is clearly a speech-based theory, the Lockean empiricist’s language of “impressions” already points to print, and, in its strong sense of embodiment and mechanism, it is clearly affected by the place in which we find it—a printed book. It is this textual manifestation of traditional Menippean concerns that is unique to the early eighteenth century.

In *The Dunciad*, the satiric reduction of the ideal to the material can be seen in the altar of books that Bays (Colley Cibber) raises in order to burn his own works:

A folio Common-place
Founds the whole pile, of all his works the base:
Quartos, octavos, shape the less’ning pyre;
A twisted Birth-day Ode completes the spire.

(1.159–62)

But it is more explicit (and pedantic) in Martinus Scriblerus’s dunci cal annotation to the conclusion of this passage—after the goddess Dulness has extinguished the literary fire with “a sheet of Thulè” (1.258). Scriblerus glosses Thulè as follows: “An unfinished poem of that name, of which one sheet was printed many years ago, by Amb. Philips, a northern author. It is an usual method of putting out a fire, to cast wet sheets upon it. Some critics have been of opinion that this sheet was of the nature of the Asbestos, which cannot be consumed by fire: But I rather think it an allegorical allusion to the coldness and heaviness of the writing” (1.258n). We may thank Scriblerus for making clear the satiric reduction of content to form.

Such attention to the material uses of writing is accompanied by the alienation of the author from his work and his reader. As Cervantes noted with regard to the question of textual transmission, the author of a printed work is in many ways only its stepfather (DQ, p. [xix]), and the prolegomena to *The Dunciad* describes it as an “Orphan.” This sense of the material independence of writing results in the frequent images of monstrous generation and degeneration associated with print in Scriblerian works. At the opening of *The Dunciad*, in the midst of the uncontrolled linguistic generation of primordial Chaos, the goddess Dulness peers in and sees:

> How hints, like spawn, scarce quick in embryo lie,
> How new-born nonsense first is taught to cry,
> Maggots half-form’d in rhyme exactly meet,
> And learn to crawl upon poetic feet.

(1.59–62)

A variety of abuses follow before we are given a vision of generic miscegenation (undoing Horace’s advice on decorum in the *Ars Poetica*): “How Tragedy and Comedy embrace; / How Farce and Epic get a jumbled race” (1.69–70). The monstrosity of textuality is demonstrated in the power of form itself to take over from the more important abstract distinctions that, according to Augustan decorum, ought to dictate form. In the works of Dulness we find “Prose swell’d to verse, verse loit’ring into prose” and discover that “Prologues into Prefaces decay, / And these to Notes are fritter’d quite away” (1.274, 277–78). These phenomena are demonstrated on the very page where we read about them. In the first pages presenting the verse of *The Dunciad*, for example, the editorial matter is wholly taken up with the absence of the letter *e* from the title of the work, in a footnote discussion ranging over the first three pages of the text. The result is that verse 1, printed on page 39, is not glossed until page 41 (which prints verses 5–6), and verse 2 (also on p. 39), not until page 42 (which prints verses 7–16) (see fig. 1a, 1b). The disruption of reading forces the reader’s attention to the physical presence of the text as he or she either flips forward and back between text and gloss, always playing catch-up, or deliberately defers reading either gloss or text, fragmenting any sense of a coherent whole.

The visual presence of the text often represents the use of other aspects of print culture. The fifth edition of *A Tale of a Tub*, for example, plays print culture for all it is worth by incorporating criticism of the first four editions in the form of footnotes, and thus turning

Figure 1a. Page 39 of Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad, in four books* (1743). Reproduced by permission of Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.
The Dunciad, Book I.

I sing, say you, her instruments the Great!

Call'd to this work by Dulcin, Jove, and Fate;

REMARKS.

To which method of pronouncing, I can never enough praise my good friends, the exact Mr. The. Horace; who in my word occurs, which to him and all mankind is evidently wrong, yet keeps he it in the Text with due reverence, and only remarks in the Margin, ft. Mis. In like manner we shall not amend this error in the Title itself, but only note it silent, to evince to the learned that it was not our fault, nor any effect of our ignorance or inattention.

This Poem was written in the year 1728. In the next year an imperfect Edition was published at Dublin, and reprinted at London in twelve; another at Dublin, and another at London in octavo; and three others in twelve the same year. But there was no perfect Edition before that of London in quarto, which was attended with Notes. Scult. Vty.

It was expressly confided in the Preface to the full edition, that this Poem was not published by the Author himself. It was printed originally in a foreign Country. And what foreign Country? Why, the notorious for blunderers, where finding blanks only instead of proper names, their blunderers filled them up at their pleasure. The very Hero of the Poem hath been mislaid to this hour; so that we are obliged to open our Notes with a discovery, who he really was. We learn from the former Editions, that this Piece was presented by the Queen of Sir Robert Walpole to King George II. Now the author directly tells us, his Hero is the Man who brings the Smithfield Mattock to the ear of Kings.
the attack of rivals into the self-parody of pedantic annotators. The
incorporative nature of Swift’s parody is facilitated by print in the
manner systematically put to use by the Scriblerus club: the first edi-
tion attracts material used in subsequent editions that neutralize criti-
cism by demonstrating authorial control over it.\footnote{Sterne would achieve something similar by means of the serial publication of his work.} At the same time, the apparent damage done by \textit{A Tale of a Tub} to Swift’s career indicates the danger of print in extending an author’s words beyond his control (this is a constant refrain of the “Apology” appended to the fifth edition). Such ambivalence about the nature of print is a part of Swift’s difficult relationship to modernity; he is a part of it, yet sees its degradation. Nowhere is this ambivalence more present than in his use of print.

The extent of Swift’s parody is so deeply ironic that it is difficult to
detect where he stands. The sheer exuberance of his use of print sug-
gests a deeper engagement than the parodic. It is at this level that the
presence of the text has its greatest impact. In the full fifth edition, \textit{A Tale of a Tub} is replete with the printed trappings of scholarship. The
crowded title page alone suggests this, with its desperate attempt to
lay claim to authority by mentioning everything except the author
(fig. 2). In addition to the expected title, place, and date of publica-
tion, the title page announces, “Written for the Universal Improve-
ment of Mankind,” and adds mention of the appended account of the
battle of the books, a description of the material added to the fifth
edition (explanatory notes and the author’s apology), and no fewer
than three tags in ancient languages. The monstrosity of the printed
work is made manifest by the work itself: its uncontainable grotesque
textual excrescences provide a print culture version of “The Lady’s
Dressing Room,” illustrating the modern corruption of supposedly
scholarly ideals.

The complicity of scholarship and printing, which may have once
had a sense \textit{in bono}, as both are concomitant facts of the Renaissance
revival of learning, here takes on its Grub Street sense \textit{in malo} of the
proliferation of useless and meaningless texts. This is manifested im-
mediately following the title page in what seems to be a publisher’s
advertisement: “Treatises wrote by the same Author, most of them
mentioned in the following Discourses; which will be speedily pub-
lished” (p. 2). Prefatory material abounds, illustrating the sheer bulk
that print is capable of producing without any guarantee of mean-
ing. Before we come upon the \textit{Tale} proper, we must first encounter:
“An Apology for the, &c,” a dedication from the bookseller to Lord
Figure 2. Title page of Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub* (1710). Reproduced by permission of Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.
Sommers, a notice from the bookseller to the reader, the author’s dedication to Prince Posterity, and “The Preface.” The Tale itself begins with an introduction. This prolegomena has its counterpart elsewhere in the volume: although printed in a continuously paginated single volume, each of The Battle of the Books and The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit has its own title page, a notice from the bookseller, and a preface or dedication from the author.27

Within these texts we encounter the scholarly apparatus of both marginal notes and footnotes. These add to the number of voices heard in the volume, for they incorporate the published criticisms of William Wotton and purport to represent others. Their role is to create the sense of scholarly dialogue found in a “variorum” edition, although the parodic mode of this volume draws attention to the lack of communication in such a practice, for many a note says, “I do not well understand what the Author aims at here” (TT, p.159n).28 It is exactly this lack of understanding that lies at the heart of Swift’s critique of print culture. As the excessive prefatory material demonstrates, its sheer quantity defies understanding. The hack who writes the Tale displays much index-learning but is unable to comprehend it, to put it to proper use, or even to distinguish learning from quackery. It is his ultimate ambition to engage in an “experiment very frequent among Modern Authors; which is, to write upon Nothing; When the Subject is utterly exhausted, to let the Pen still move on” (TT, p. 208). This sense of hollow writing is magnified by the multiplying powers of print, which proliferates meaninglessness.

It is here, in the very absence of meaning, that the independent presence of the text makes itself felt. This is especially the case with the frequent supposed lacunae in this volume—the continual absences of the source-text itself. Through the various ways of representing these absences, A Tale of a Tub becomes, in many ways, a study in the valence of the hiatus.29 In the “Digression Concerning Madness” we find the hack entering upon an abstract philosophical discussion intended to “search till we can find, from what Faculty of the Soul the Disposition arises in mortal Man, of taking it into his Head, to advance new Systems with such an eager Zeal, in things agreed on all hands impossible to be known” (TT, p. 166). The argument proceeds

27. These features are more striking in the 1710 edition than in a modern reprint.
28. The Guthkelch-Smith introduction classifies the variety of the notes (pp. xxiv-xxv).
29. In this light, the Latin on the title page, “Diu multumque desideratum” (“long and much desired”), appears to echo the marginal explanation of lacunae: “hic multa desiderantur” (“here there is much to be desired”) (TT, p. 170n), suggesting that the work as a whole marks a large, cultural hiatus.
by means of the outward trappings of scholarly discourse, such as reference to ancient and modern authorities, technical terms, Latin quotations, and postulata, until the speaker announces his conclusion to be imminent: “The present Argument is the most abstracted that ever I engaged in, it strains my Faculties to their highest Stretch; and I desire the Reader to attend with utmost Pervency; For, I now proceed to unravel this knotty Point” (TT, p. 170). The next paragraph begins, “THERE is in Mankind a certain,” and ends, “And this I take to be a clear Solution of the Matter,” but, in between, it is fragmented by several rows of asterisks and a marginal note marking the absence of the argument—“hic multa desiderantur” (TT, p. 170n): there is much wanting here indeed (fig. 3).

The effects of this textual event—and it is neither the first nor the last within the volume—are multiple. Clearly it is a commentary on the dependence of abstract thought upon physical means of communication. It is also, as the pedantic footnote at the bottom makes clear, a comment on the impossibility of abstract thought in such a medium (therefore questioning the validity of such thought in the first place): “Here is another Defect in the Manuscript, but I think the Author did wisely, and that the Matter which thus strained his Faculties, was not worth a Solution; and it were well if all Metaphysical Cobweb Problems were no otherwise answered” (TT, p. 170n). The refusal of the annotator to go along with the fiction of the corrupt manuscript draws attention to the distance that the printed text imposes between the author and his reader, and the advantages that an unscrupulous author may thus take.

Each set of asterisks in the Tale of a Tub volume (there are eleven major interruptions) is accompanied by a marginal note informing the reader of the state of the manuscript. The number of lacunae is greatest in The Battle of the Books, which concludes with asterisks and “desunt cætera” (TT, p. 258). The manuscript first becomes faulty just as the battle is beginning. However, if the narrative within the text (at the level of the linguistic code) is lacking, we may also trace a solely textual narrative (at the level of the bibliographic code) in the commentary on the lacunae. In figure 4 a single page presents a sequence of three lacunae. The marginal commentary traces a narrative, increasing with the pitch of the battle: “Hic pauca desunt [here a little missing]. . . Desunt nonnulla [some missing]. . . Ingens hiatus hic in MS [here a vast chasm in the MS]” (TT, p. 244nn). The final instance in this sequence of asterisks is also an illustrative textual gesture, as it follows upon the death of Descartes at the hands of Aristotle: “The Torture of the Pain, whirled the valiant Bow-man round, till Death, like a Star of superior Influence, drew him into his own Vortex. * * *
* THERE is in Mankind a certain *
* * * * * * * * *
He nula
* * * * * * * *
* * * * * * * *
* * * * * * * *
* * * * * * * *
* * * * * * * *

And this I take to be a clear Solution of the Matter.

HAVING therefore so narrowly past thro’ this intricate Difficulty, the Reader will, I am sure, agree with me in the Conclusion; that if the Moderns mean by Madness, only a Disturbance or Transposition of the Brain, by Force of certain Vapours issuing up from the lower Faculties; Then has this Madness been the Parent of all those mighty Revolutions, that have happened in Empire, in Philosophy, and in Religion. For, the Brain, in its na¬

* Here is another Defect in the Manuscript, but I think the Author did wisely, and that the Matter which that strained his Faculties, was not worth a Solution; and it was well if all Metaphysical Cobweb Problems were no otherwise answered.
Figure 4. Page 281 of Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub* (1710). Reproduced by permission of Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.
whether these asterisks are “the Sentiments of all Philosophers, like so many lesser Stars in [Descartes’s] Romantick System” described elsewhere in the Tale (p. 167) or the Vortex itself, the text is making a gesture toward communication that transcends (or subverts) verbal reference. This is the effect of the presence of the text in Scriblerian satire. The marginal glosses to these passages declare absence (desunt). However, in the very act of noting absence, the text has manifested its own presence through asterisks and notes. While this marks the Scriblerian sense of print as monstrous and self-generating, the Scriblerians’ view of modern culture is contradicted by their use of modern forms, for, no matter how parodic in intent, the sheer weight and extent of textuality has an impact beyond mere critique.

All of the techniques employed in A Tale of a Tub turn up in Pope’s Dunciad, especially the incorporation of criticism into its own body of notes and appended commentaries. What distinguishes The Dunciad, and perhaps points to its greater complicity with print culture, is its systematic approach. In its engagement with other publications, its continuous evolution over fifteen years, and its incorporation of many voices (not only of critics but also of fellow Scriblerians), this work comes closest to realizing the grand satiric project of the Scriblerus club’s ongoing attack on modernity.30 Pope’s systematic engagement with the public sphere of printing is also reflected in the final product of The Dunciad in Four Books. Unlike A Tale of a Tub, which manifests its textual presence in local irruptions of typography, The Dunciad presents itself in toto as a monument of (to?) print.31 James

30. Pope’s careful collection of attacks upon himself, and his specific baiting of the critical public with Peri Bathous (1728) in order to generate material for the notes variorum, is well known. See James Sutherland’s introduction to The Dunciad in The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope, John Butt, gen. ed., 11 vols. (London: Methuen, 1939–69) vol. 5 (2d ed., 1953), pp. xxvi, xvi. Indeed, perhaps the most Scriblerian feature of The Dunciad is the way in which, even after Pope’s death, the work continues to accrue further variorum notes, beginning with Warburton’s contributions to the last lifetime edition (1743) as well as his 1751 edition in which he adds notes “to castigate his own personal opponents” (Sutherland, p. xxxvii). Sutherland’s own edition in its several versions (1943–63) continues this process, placing his own voice (albeit in hooks) among those of Pope’s duncical commentators (noted by James McLaverty, “The Mode of Existence of Literary Works of Art: The Case of the Dunciad Variorum,” Studies in Bibliography 37 [1984]: 82–105, 104).

31. William Kinsley’s wide-ranging exploration of “The Dunciad as Mock-Book,” Huntington Library Quarterly 35 (1971): 29–47, suggests that A Tale of a Tub, “partly because it is always focused on the process of authorship, is a much more detailed and thoroughgoing parody of the form of the book than is the Dunciad, but it does not bring into play so many of the positive metaphorical associations of the tradition of the book,” namely the sacred “Book of Nature” (p. 37).
McLaverty suggests that Pope’s *Dunciad Variorum* is a work whose “mode of existence” is inseparable from its physical appearance in print. In particular, it adopts the entire format of editions such as Bentley’s “Amsterdam Horace” and even more so the Geneva Boileau. These are works fraught with textual apparatus such as prefaces, indexes, and notes of different varieties, often crowding the poem off the page: the editor is as important as the author—exactly the leveling of distinctions to which Pope objects.

McLaverty argues that the pomp of this edition allows Pope simultaneously to satirize textual scholarship and to claim importance for his poem. It is this double game that makes the presence of the text such an important feature of Scriblerian satire. *A Tale of a Tub* parodies the productions of typographic man, as does *The Dunciad*, yet Pope is also quite explicitly using the format of his work to ennoble its content. This is a technique he employed frequently with works not directly criticizing print culture. David Foxon’s study of Pope’s careful imitation of “classicizing” typography traces his efforts to make his works more elegant by removing obvious signs of printing. The paradox is, of course, that these are merely substitutions of newer printing conventions for older ones. Pope’s meticulous care for bibliographic detail suggests an attempt to raise a debased medium, yet he is also, as McLaverty has suggested, using the medium to make a claim for his own importance.

If the very presence of the notes in *The Dunciad* simultaneously mocks scholarship and ennobles Pope’s poem, the content of the notes reinforces this double imperative. It is well known that not all of Pope’s notes are parodic. Often he is supplying information that he could expect no reader to have. Other notes provide classical allusions one might expect a learned audience to perceive. This aggrandizing feature may place Pope among the learned classic authors,

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33. Ibid., p. 99.
34. Ibid., p. 101.
36. After reading the first, relatively unannotated version of *The Dunciad*, Swift wrote to Pope: “The Notes I could wish to be very large, in what relates to the persons concerned; for I have long observed that twenty miles from London no body understands hints, initial letters, or town-facts and passages; and in a few years not even those who live in London.” *The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963–65), 3:293.
yet at the same time, as J. Paul Hunter has noted, it defeats the need for the humanist ideal of the learned reader. In flagrant contradiction of the work’s satiric motivations (to warn against the decline of learning), the text takes over, substituting itself for the reader’s knowledge and appreciation: “Index-learning turns no student pale, / Yet holds the eel of science by the tail” (1.279–80). The very textual gestures that crowd the poem off the page also crowd the reader out of the book. In a fashion analogous to the Hack’s desire to write upon nothing, *The Dunciad* becomes a text that, in the absence of the banished author and reader, independently writes and reads itself.

**STERNE**

This self-reflexive phenomenon is a product of a satirical critique of print culture that survives in Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, a work that openly states: “For my own part, I am resolved never to read any book but my own, as long as I live” (8.5.661). The kind of self-reference implicit in Scriblerian uses of the textual condition becomes, with Sterne, more open, more paradoxical, yet in many ways less tortured about its contradictions. *Tristram Shandy* appears a full half-century after *A Tale of a Tub*, in a literary scene much more comfortable with print culture. The emergence of the *Monthly* and *Critical* reviews (in 1749 and 1756, respectively) exemplifies new attitudes toward print: these became organs for the legitimation of new publications and indeed demanded a constant flow of reviewable material. Swift’s sense of sin in a Grub-street life of writing for money, and the emptiness of that writing, has lost its apocalyptic urgency. Another aspect of this comfortableness with print is the rise of a new culture of literary celebrity in which the author becomes a commodity as much as his work. Sterne embraced this culture wholeheartedly, rushing to London to be feted by the arbiters of taste and to take advantage of the moment by putting two volumes of sermons (as advertised in *Tristram Shandy*, 2.17.167) into press. As Sterne puts it in a letter, “I wrote


not [to] be fed, but to be famous.”

The serial publication of *Tristram Shandy* allowed Sterne to play to the market by addressing reviewers—directly responding to or anticipating criticism—or shifting his aesthetic to accommodate the growing taste for sentimental writing.

One indication of shifting aesthetics between the ages of Swift and Pope and that of Sterne is the new valuation of fragmentary texts. Whereas the Scriblerians use textual presence to enact the failure of the mental to free itself from the material, Sterne’s period in some ways celebrated this failure as an indication of finer feelings, the inexpressibility of which protected them from the compromising materiality of the text. Samuel Richardson’s representation of Clarissa’s trauma by printing her “mad papers” as strewn about the page in a nonlinear fashion is an early, and isolated, example of this aesthetic, which comes into a more abstract sense of the fragment in Henry Mackenzie’s use of the found manuscript trope to avoid the necessities of a connected narrative and to present a series of discrete moments of heightened emotion.

It is especially Sterne, however, who maintains attention to the material text itself in this new affective context. Drawing on the Scriblerian tradition, combined with the more recent aesthetic speculations on sensibility and the sublime, as well as a comfortableness with print culture, he is ultimately able to present an integrated aesthetic of textuality. Various scholars have examined the literal manifestations of textual presence in Sterne.


trace Sterne’s direct application of the Scriblerian phenomenon I have been discussing as examine where he takes it, how it is developed in his attention to the ontological paradoxes of textuality and their implications for ideas about authorship and reading.

Let us begin with something of a Sternean tribute to the tradition we are discussing—his early, unpublished “Rabelaisian Fragment.” In this satire upon sermon writing, Homenas reacts to his own sermon rhetoric:

_Homenas_ burst into a Flood of Tears which falling down helter skelter, ding dong, without any kind of Intermission for Six Minutes and almost twenty five seconds, had a marvellous Effect upon his Discourse; for, the aforesaid Tears, do you mind, did so temper the Wind that was rising upon the aforesaid Discourse,—but falling for the most part perpendicularly, & hitting the Spirits at right Angles which were mounting horizontally all over the Surface of his Harrangue, they not only play’d the Devil and all with the Sublimity—But moreover, the said Tears, by their nitrous Quality did so refrigerate, precipitate, & hurry down to the Bottom of his Soul, all the unsavory Particles which lay fermenting (as you saw) in the middle of his Conception, That He went on in the coolest & chastest Stile (for a Soliloquy, I think) that ever mortal Man utter’d.—42

There are obvious foreshadowings of the Shandean style here (and indeed borrowings from this fragment turn up in the first four volumes of _Tristram Shandy_).43 There are also echoes of the language of satire, most apparent in the use of height and weight (here personalized, in miniature), which dominates the opening section of _A Tale of a Tub_ in its discussion of the “Physico-logical Scheme of Oratorial Receptacles or Machines” (p. 61). The minute and particular “physico-logical” nature of the description of the writing process presages the consistent focus of _Tristram Shandy’s_ investigation into the nature of communication: “never let it be forgotten upon what small particles your eloquence and your fame depend” (2.6.116). This phrase encapsulates Sterne’s insistence on the physical presence of language, what we can see throughout _Tristram Shandy_ as the rhetoric of the particulate and the pendent. The geometrical language, the language of measurement and mechanism, in the “Rabelaisian Fragment” is

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43. Noted by Melvyn New in ibid., pp. 1085–86.
ever-present in *Tristram Shandy*, drawing attention to the intermingling of mind and matter, theory and practice in Sterne’s work. 44

The rhetoric of *Tristram Shandy* is fully embodied—in its metaphors as well as in its presentation by means of printer’s devices. Tristram’s “Preface” often explicitly labels aspects of communication in physical terms, as in his defense of illustrations over arguments: “the main good these things do, is only to clarify the understanding, previous to the application of the argument itself, in order to free it from any little motes, or specks of opacular matter, which if left swimming therein, might hinder a conception and spoil all” (3.20.227–28). Later in the preface, Tristram describes writing as “placing a number of tall, opake words, one before another, in a right line, betwixt your own and your readers conception” (3.20.235). The combination of embodiment—the opacity of words—with the abstract theoretical bias implied in the “right line,” juxtaposed to the human communication situation (“your own and your readers conception”) encapsulates the issues continuously confronting all of the characters in *Tristram Shandy*. It also captures Scriblerian satire’s treatment of textual presence, the intermingling of the rhetorical workings of the text and its physical presentation. This intermingling demands that attention be paid to the nonverbal aspects of the text that reveal the performative nature of the book as object.

One problem frequently troubling Tristram is how to represent accurately the events he is attempting to narrate. This often appears in his detailed accounts of the physical bodies of his characters in their oratorical stances and gestures, such as Trim as he delivers Yorick’s sermon, or Walter during his various harangues. As a supplement to Tristram’s often frustrated attempts to use language, I suggest that we may look to the physical text as a means of communication. For all the bodies in the text of *Tristram Shandy*, it is the body of the text itself that is often eloquent. Let us return to Sterne’s use of asterisks and consider an argument between Uncle Toby and the man-midwife Dr. Slop, as they debate the ability of Slop’s expertise to aid Mrs. Shandy, who is upstairs giving birth. Slop employs a rhetorical gesture to achieve an apparent victory: “Nor . . . do I know, Captain Shandy, what might have become of the garrison above stairs . . . but for the subordination of fingers and thumbs to ******—the applica-

tion of which, Sir, under this accident of mine, comes in so a propos, the cut upon my thumb might have been felt by the Shandy family, as long as the Shandy family had a name” (3.13.217). In this highly rhetorical situation (which Tristram goes on to gloss by reference to Cicero), Dr. Slop makes an oratorical gesture, one that requires an entire chapter of explanation (“Let us go back to the *****———-in the last chapter” [3.14.217]). When the text returns to the argument between Slop and Toby it is now explained that Slop, “when he foresaw the sentence would end in his new invented forceps, he thrust his hand into the bag in order to have them ready to clap in, where your reverences took so much notice of the *****, which he had managed,—my uncle Toby had certainly been overthrown” (3.15.219). There appears to be a simple substitution of the asterisks for the object. However, Slop’s victory of volume 3, chapter 13, is only apparent, for it is now revealed to be a defeat: “but Dr. Slop fumbled so vilely in pulling [the forceps] out, it took off the whole effect, and what was a ten times worse evil (for they seldom come alone in this life) in pulling out his forceps, his forceps unfortunately drew out the squirt along with it” (3.15.219). This allows Toby the upper hand: “‘Good God!’ cried my uncle Toby, ‘are children brought into the world with a squirt?’” (3.15.219).

Uncle Toby’s victory is a relief to the reader who has had suspended his or her full understanding of the six asterisks. However, in another sense, no suspension has occurred at all, for the text itself has sided with Uncle Toby from the beginning. After all, had Slop been successful, the text would have been obliged to print seven asterisks for the seven letters in ‘forceps’, rather than the six asterisks printed for the six letters in ‘squirt’. The text ensures that Slop’s error has been present from the beginning. The reader is given three chances, with the repetition of “******,” to catch onto the game. The seeming transparency of the text, which would allow Slop to “clap in” his forceps, foils Slop because the opacity of the text, the illegible asterisks, simultaneously conceals and contains the knowledge of the outcome of the argument that corresponds to that which Toby “claps in,” the squirt.45

In this passage the tension of ideas about what constitutes a “text” is at full play. The supposed transparency of the text to its referents gives way to the opacity of the text’s own medium—in this case, the

asterisks. The tension between visual and aural modes of communication is at play here as well. The ear, at an oral reading of these chapters, must await the author’s revelation of the meaning of the gesture represented by the asterisks. In visually apprehending the text, the eye has the opportunity to perceive Slop’s rhetorical failure at the moment it happens. Of course, quite a bit of flipping through pages 66–70 of the original volume 3 is required to apprehend this event in the text, but this should remind us of the spatial aspect of visual, book-based reading: the reader manipulates the relationship between space and time by controlling the turning of the pages. Ironically, the physical book has the capacity for transparency through the reader’s ability to turn pages. 46

We have here been examining the bibliographic surface of the text—the presentational level. At another level, the linguistic, or representational, Tristram Shandy offers many playful—but no less important—figurations of the crossover between form and content that contribute to our sense of textual presence. For example, when Phutatorius seeks an anodyne for his burned member (after his encounter with the hot chestnut), he is advised to “send to the next printer, and trust your cure to such a simple thing as a soft sheet of paper just come off the press” (4.28.386). 47 More is at issue than the soothing quality of the ink in the available work, Phutatorius’s de Concubinis retinendis. It is essential that “there is no bawdry” in its contents, the presence of which would have an effect opposite to that of cooling. When it is learned that the chapter in question is “de re concubinariâ” (“On the thing of a concubine”), it is agreed that Phutatorius must “keep out of that chapter” (4.28.387) for fear its bodily subject matter should counter the effect of its material embodiment. This is a readerly dealing with presence in both medium (the “sanative particles” of the cooling ink) and message (the “inflaming” topic of the treatise). As a writer, Tristram addresses these levels of presence when he considers rendering some naughty French words: “———My ink burns my

46. Tristram often uses this feature of the book in order to refer the reader back to places he or she has already been, for example, the well-known instruction to Madam reader, “I do insist upon it, that you immediately turn back, that is, as soon as you get to the next full stop, and read the whole chapter over again” (1.20.65), or the more specific discussion between Eugenius and Tristram, with reference to “the fifty-second page of the second volume of this book of books” (3.31.258).

47. We should note the particular detail of this proposal: “if the type is a very small one . . . the sanative particles, which come into contact in this form, have the advantage of being spread so infinitely thin and with such a mathematical equality (fresh paragraphs and large capitals excepted) as no art or management of the spatula can come up to” (4.28.387).

48. This is the Florida editors’ translation.
finger to try—and when I have—‘twill have a worse consequence—it will burn (I fear) my paper” (7.20.605). Medium and message are inseparable.

In addition to these crossover moments linking form and content, Sterne also figures the problem of physical language in a simpler way through the running motif of writing as an object susceptible to the vagaries of embodiment. We find books subjected to alternative uses, such as Phutatorius’s treatise; or to violent “readings” such as Walter’s mutilating exegesis of a sentence of Erasmus by means of a penknife, to try “experiments upon the sentence, to see if he could not scratch some better sense into it” (3.37.272); or the total annihilation of Yorick’s sermon, which is used to light a pipe (4.26.376). Even Tristram’s own remarks are used as curling papers upon the head of the French chaise-vamper’s wife, where they evoke a comment upon the crossover of form and content: “‘tis well, thinks I, they have stuck there—for could they have gone deeper, they would have made such confusion in a French woman’s noddle” (7.38.641). Writing, it would seem, by its very physical nature, cannot command the respect it supposedly deserves.

This brings us to the larger issue implicit in Sterne’s attention to the physical nature of writing, which we may label the paradox of the monumentum aere perennius—Horace’s “monument more lasting than bronze.” The ontological issue here is the notion of what constitutes the literary object. The very concept of “book” contains the contradictory notions of both the abstract “text” of a work and its physical embodiment. This tension is the source of the irony in Horace’s phrase. What claim do immaterial words have to monumental status? Furthermore, how can they outlast brass when they are dependent on perishable media for the continuance of their existence?

We have already noted a number of vulnerable writings described in Tristram Shandy, but there is another set of references that places these in the context of the larger tradition of early modern textual scholarship that has been a subject for Menippean satire since the time of Lucian. Within the satiric context of Tristram Shandy, Walter

49. The Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of ‘book’ identifies the tension in the concept itself: “Since either the form of the book or its subject may be mainly or exclusively the object of attention, this passes on either side into . . . the material article so made up, without regard to the nature of its contents . . . [or] a literary composition such as would occupy one or more volumes, without regard to the material form or forms in which it actually exists” (OED, s.v. “book,” 3a, b, c). One of Sterne’s favorite sources, Ephraim Chambers’s Cyclopaedia, 2d ed. (London, 1738), draws attention to this discrepancy by separating its entries into ‘book’ (abstract) and ‘bookbinding’ (material).
Shandy is the *philosophus gloriosus* who brings this tradition into play. The elegiac tone of his oration upon Bobby’s death brings home the way that language constitutes reality for this tradition, for names and places are granted equal ontological status here: “The fairest towns that ever the sun rose upon, are now no more: the names only are left, and those (for many of them are wrong spelt) are falling themselves by piecemeals to decay, and in length of time will be forgotten, and involved with everything in a perpetual night: the world itself, brother Toby, must—must come to an end” (5.3.422). Although Walter Shandy is not a mock editor-hero such as Martinus Scriblerus or those attacked in *The Battle of the Books*, he shares their vision, that texts constitute reality, whether it be the history of humankind or the immediate present in which his faith in writing overrides everything else.

Walter’s absence from worldly reality while engrossed in texts should remind us that the editor’s sense of the text is one of loss, highly aware of intermediaries between us and the original. One such moment of awareness occurs as Tristram goes out of his way to point to a lacuna: “—If I was you, quoth Yorick, I would drink more water, Eugenius.—And, if I was you, Yorick, replied Eugenius, so would I.” Tristram comments: “Which shews they had both read Longinus—” (8.5.661). The passage paraphrased (and parodied) by Yorick and Eugenius is from a lost portion of Longinus’s text. Tristram’s coy comment deliberately draws attention to itself: it is rather that they had both read into Longinus, that is, performed an editorial emendation. The note to this passage in William Smith’s popular eighteenth-century translation of Longinus reads, “There is a great gap in the original here after these words. The sense has been supplied by the editors, from the well-known records of history.” Clearly, the text has suffered from its embodiment in the form of a book. Such deliberate attention to a textually corrupt passage serves to remind us of the fleeting worldly existence of thought.

The editor’s worldview is one of absence, of the lacunae that separate us from the source, questioning the accessibility of origins. In
Sterne’s hands, this observation leads toward an aesthetic conclusion, as opposed to Pope’s defensive judgment of editors and their holes. Sterne’s use of his satiric inheritance has moved the tradition from a parodic textual presence that exaggerates the errors and dangers of print culture to one that opens up aesthetic questions that Sterne’s period addressed by various means, including debates about copyright, original genius, and the sublime. The ontological problems of a text producing effects independent of its referents seems to offer the playful freedom for which Sterne is often celebrated, but these problems also create difficulties when they come up against aesthetic questions about subject and object in the act of perception or the developing notion of authorship, which is linked to the legal question of ownership.52

These problematic areas might all be brought to the nexus of origins and originality. At the ontological level, Tristram Shandy as material book, published at the dawn of the age of mechanical reproduction, is a studied attempt to problematize issues of originality, using the very physical form of the book to question the technology that produces identical copies of a supposed original. In addition to perplexing readers about its meaning within Tristram Shandy, the marbled page (3.36.269) is the locus classicus for the problem of identicality and originality with regard to the nature of the print medium, for eighteenth-century marbling never produced the same result twice. Diana Patterson describes this phenomenon: “highly individual results create truly unique ‘copies’ of Volume 3 of Sterne’s novel. No two readers could have precisely the same experience of reading Volume 3 because of that leaf, and no reader without a leaf could have had a proper experience of the novel.”53 Thus the marbled page, with its “monumental” associations duly noted, suggests that the individual book is the original rather than the abstract, generalized “text” of the novel. So, it is each specific copy that possesses this quality of originality—something that modern reprints fail to reproduce, committed as they are to an idea of originality as disembodied.54 These

54. This problem is the essence of McGann and McKenzie’s critique of the eclectic editorial method (see n. 2 above). McKenzie treats the marbled page and the problem it poses to modern editors in Bibliography, pp. 28–29.
are questions about our notion of “text” that Sterne will not let us settle: manuscript uniqueness is placed at odds with printed repetition, and furthermore, no editor’s collation can abstract an ideal, intentional version from this antilingualistic “motly emblem of my work” (3.36.268).

I have argued here not only that the texts of both Sterne and the Scriblerians draw attention to the mediacy of language by the physical embodiment of the text but also that, in doing so, they are creating effects independent of and supplemental to their referents, whether those referents be the fictional characters, the dramatized narrator, or even the real author. In other words, such works manifest a presence through their self-reflexive awareness of their supplementary status at both the presentational and representational levels. These works simultaneously present the problem of communication as well as a discursive mode for exploring it. They thus all offer what I have termed “textual presence”, a rhetorical self-reflexivity ranging from conspicuously hidden tropes to open discussions of communication while communicating, from the idealizing textualization of reality to the reifying opacity of the text that denies transparent reference.

Sterne’s work employs such textual presence to engage notions of origins and originality, bringing the problem of communication to bear on ontological issues, problematizing ideas about the literary object. These questions about the ontology of the text have implications for existential issues as well, for the originality paradox bears upon ideas about the perceiving subject and the self, and thus the notion of textual presence might be a useful rubric for exploring the early development of concerns more often associated with Romanticism. Just as the marbled page forces us to recognize that no two copies of *Tristram Shandy* are identical, Tristram is frequently forced to confront the Lockean possibility that he may not be identical with himself, as with his multiple simultaneous journeys through Auxerre (7.28). It is one of the profound observations of *Tristram Shandy* that writing enables the apparent freedoms of the multiple self. However, such freedoms come at the cost of a stable identity. Sterne’s insistence upon the “bibliographic codes” thwarts an easy transcendence toward any such disembodied notions. This is one message in Sterne’s medium. The small particles in the printed texts of the eighteenth century have lasting implications for the way we read and consider literature, literary history, and perhaps even reality itself.