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A profusion of dashes, a cluster of asterisks, and blank spaces are familiar features of Laurence Sterne's prose, and have attracted comment since his eighteenth-century readers first handled his books. Both *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-67) and *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768) repeatedly manipulate their typographical and rhetorical components to suggest meanings that lie beyond printed words. [1] This, of course, is an apparently hidden meaning left to the reader to unravel; it is he or she who might guess where one of Sterne's many signature dashes might lead, he or she who might attempt to substitute a word where asterisks conceal potential bawdy with seeming delicacy, such as Toby's innocent suggestion that Mrs Shandy prefers a female midwife as she "does not care to let a man come so near her *****". [2] Tristram positively informs us that this is "one of the neatest examples of that ornamental figure in oratory, which Rhetoricians stile the Aposiopesis" (*TS*, II, vi, 116), which whilst apparently saying nothing specific opens up a host of unspoken possibilities. This well-known passage, as William Holtz has suggested, shows "that Sterne was an accomplished rhetorician, playing artfully upon his readers' responses," [3] an artful manipulation of unstated meaning that he sustains not only throughout *Tristram Shandy* but also *A Sentimental Journey*.

It frequently seems that for Tristram, and ultimately for the author who hovers behind his fictional personae in both novels, saying less actually says more. It is significant, furthermore, that such instances of lapse into seeming nothingness surround two principal areas of knowledge and experience: sex and death. [4] In either case, Sterne's narrators present themselves as commentators and observers

who constantly hover on the borders of revelation, yet repeatedly fail to address fully either topic. Ross King argues that “the performance and non-performance of both body and language bear, like most acts in *Tristram Shandy*, conspicuously sexual resonances”, a suggestion that can be extended to *A Sentimental Journey*: in both novels, when talking about their own sexual activities or those of their companions, or when broaching the darker questions of mortality, both *Tristram Shandy* and *Yorick* (the parson who narrates Sterne’s second novel) fall silent at key moments. [5] Sex and death are related as ineffable subjects, about which not everything can be known or experienced, leading to a lapse in the textual conversation, a silence in which only non-verbal indicators (such as a dash or an asterisk) can hint towards a possible meaning.

For Sterne, it seems, no ultimate answers are available to the merely mortal inquirer; instead he or she must pursue a relentless journey of tentative investigation, hovering on the borders of knowledge and fulfilment, but never finally uncovering a truth that can only be revealed once he or she has passed the final boundary separating the known world from the unexplored territory of the next, whose potency is real for this eighteenth-century clergyman-author. Whilst this is most obviously the case for an as yet un-dead narrator, it also holds true for the sexually impotent, or at least incompetent narrators whom Sterne presents. Neither *Tristram* nor *Yorick* seem to find erotic satisfaction in any of the titillating relationships with women they describe, but thereby engender comic frustration rather than angst, trailing the suggestion that desire is ultimately more pleasurable than consummation, less again being more. Likewise, both *Tristram* and *Yorick* seek to avoid the finality that death imposes; as Clark Lawlor and Carol Houlihan Flynn (amongst others) have separately argued, Sterne’s narrators pursue travels in order to escape this spectral figure; the observations and experiences found whilst journeying provide substance for writing which, for both narrators, offers a substitute for failing health. [6] *Yorick* continues to enact *Tristram Shandy*’s notion that “so much of motion, is so much of life, and so much of joy ——— and that to stand still, or get on but slowly, is death and the devil” (*TS*, VII, xiii,

593). Although Flynn suggests the paradox that, “through exertion” in either travelling or writing, Sterne is rashly “exercising his vital animal spirits” and thereby hastening his own demise, for the consumptive traveller and writer to cease either journeying or writing implies a creative death that darkly mirrors his impending physical expiry. [\[7\]](#)

Sterne himself shares with his narrators the concern that reaching a final full stop imposes an ultimatum upon both their creative and actual lives, as the author’s own relentless battle against consumption eventually failed shortly after the publication of his second novel. The timing is important: Sterne left *A Sentimental Journey* apparently incomplete in more ways than that of its ambiguous final sentence (which we shall discuss); its promised tour through Italy is never described, and the further two volumes advertised as following its initial pair were never delivered. *Tristram Shandy* also offers the possibility of incompleteness: Thomas Keymer has demonstrated how its publication in instalments over a seven-year period provided Sterne with the possibility of continuing the novel indefinitely. [\[8\]](#) Its ninth volume certainly supplies an ending that is ambiguous in its finality (Mrs Shandy’s question, “what is all this story about?” is unhelpfully answered by Yorick, “A COCK and a BULL [...] and one of the best of its kind, I ever heard”), perhaps leaving Sterne able to resume the narrative if he chose, and certainly provoking future hotly-contested critical opinions on the subject (*TS*, IX, xxiii, 809). Wayne C. Booth’s important article, ‘Did Sterne complete *Tristram Shandy*?’ argues that he probably did, a conclusion rightly rejected by (amongst others) critics such as Marcia Allentuck and R. F. Brissenden. [\[9\]](#) Whether Sterne intended to add more material to either novel cannot of course be known; in any case, death imposed a full stop upon their continuation, leaving the trailing aposiopesis to wander indefinitely. As Ralph Griffiths summarises in his early review of *A Sentimental Journey*: “A ludicrous hiatus of DEATH put at once a final period to the ramblings and the writings of the inimitable LAURENCE STERNE”. [\[10\]](#)

As Griffiths' "ludicrous" epithet indicates, however, the open-ended future for Sterne's novels was not wholeheartedly embraced by many of his contemporary readers, nor indeed those who since their publication have sought to answer whether or not *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* were meant to be continued or whether more was to come, rather than being content that Sterne may have relished the very uncertainty of this indefiniteness. The inconclusive conclusions of both novels are a culmination of the aposiopeses, gaps and trailing ambiguities that fill their narratives as a means of avoiding the ultimately impossible task of answering definitely the more challenging questions of life, namely those surrounding sexual experience and death, which must remain unknowable for the very human individuals that Sterne presents. Besides trying to guess which words might sit behind the constellation of Shandean stars, [11] readers frequently attempted to fill the gaps of Sterne's narratives in more significant ways by continuing and, in some cases, completing them on his behalf, apparently motivated by the desire to assist an author whose actual death prevented his novel's completion. In doing so, however, these reader-authors offer solutions to the questions that Sterne intentionally left open, and so drop the final curtain on the ongoing drama of their lives.

This article examines two early continuations of Sterne's novel, *Yorick's Sentimental Journey, Continued [...] By Eugenius* of 1769, and 'Mr Shandy's' *A Sentimental Journey; Intended as a Sequel to Mr Sterne's* of 1793, which seek to clarify the intentionally ambiguous treatment of such ineffable subjects as sex and death that Sterne projects through typographical devices such as asterisks and dashes, and rhetorical figures such as the aposiopesis. By doing so, these contemporary reader-authors impose a false finality upon a novel whose indefinite ending deliberately avoids saying anything decisive upon matters that the human individual can only imperfectly grasp and know.

One of the most obvious starting points of any such project for the reader who wishes to turn author, and continue an apparently unfinished novel on its absent author's behalf, is the ending of Sterne's second novel. In the last episode of *A*

Sentimental Journey through France and Italy, entitled “The Case of Delicacy”, Yorick’s journey is delayed by a blockage on the road to Lyons; he must lodge at a small inn overnight, and furthermore is obliged to share his room with a fellow, female traveller caught in the same predicament. They erect a flimsy barrier between their beds (which lie in uncomfortable proximity) so as to maintain at least a semblance of decorum, reinforced by several stipulations: amongst these, they must maintain complete silence. However, Yorick finds it impossible to sleep; tossing and turning in frustration, and “Nature and patience both wearing out”, he suddenly ejaculates: “O my God!” The lady rebukes him, Yorick reaches out his hand to protest his innocence, the curtains fall apart. [12] The lady’s maid, “fearing that hostilities would ensue in course”, ventures between the beds to intervene (*SJ*, 165). What follows provides the comically ambiguous climax of the chapter, laden with the erotic undertones of the situation. Yorick relates that the girl

had advanc’d so far up as to be in a line betwixt her mistress and me ——
 So that when I stretch’d out my hand, I caught hold of the Fille de
 Chambre’s
 END OF VOL. II.

Such is the ending with which Sterne provides the reader of *A Sentimental Journey*, but as the final page of the first edition shows, this is an ending without resolution, both in terms of this episode and of the novel. The particulars of Yorick’s unfortunate encounter with the fille de chambre are left tantalisingly unclear: what, precisely, does he catch hold of? Words sink into nothingness as the final sentence remains incomplete, breaking off into an aposiopetic silence that refuses to supply an answer. Furthermore, Sterne uses what appears to be detached paratextual material, the seemingly editorial information that this is the “END OF VOLUME II”, to offer the wondering reader a potential solution with which to fill the gap. Is the word “END” itself one possibility for what Yorick grabs, which whilst bawdy is perhaps cleaner than some readers might otherwise imagine? Alternatively, the sentence’s ambiguous syntax potentially exonerates

the text from the accusation of covert salacity: the comma after “hand” allows the possibility that Yorick might innocently have caught hold of the fille de chambre’s (hand). [13] In either case, the playfully suggestive inconclusiveness of the episode and of Sterne’s novel marries narrative subject-matter and the material format of the printed book: the physical appearance of the final page sustains the author’s play with unstated but implied meaning by providing one possible solution to the riddle posed by the blank space.

Some of *A Sentimental Journey*’s earliest readers, however, failed or chose not to read this conclusion as an intentional manipulation of the interaction of visual effect and meaning on the printed page. Griffiths comments that “the Author abruptly breaks off in the middle of a night-scene at an inn in the road to Turin”, leading to the “ludicrous hiatus [that] ends the book”; the novel’s conclusion seemed to be a disappointing lacuna that mirrored the dissatisfying patchiness of a novel filled with episodic fragments and half-told stories. Some readers were accordingly motivated to complete the episode, and indeed novel, on Yorick’s behalf in the numerous supplements, additional chapters and even volumes that appeared in *A Sentimental Journey*’s wake, often imposing definitiveness upon the irresolute and plural meanings that Sterne seems to favour. Sex and death being the main subjects of ambiguous treatment in *A Sentimental Journey*, these offer the most obvious questions for the continuer to address and clarify by knitting together the novel’s loose narrative threads into a cohesive pattern that leads towards a final conclusion, in which all questions are answered and blank spaces filled.

The most familiar continuation of *A Sentimental Journey* is *Yorick’s Sentimental Journey, Continued [...] By Eugenius* of 1769, often supposed to have been written by John Hall-Stevenson, Sterne’s personal friend whom contemporaries identified as the “Eugenius” appearing in both his novels, although his authorship has since been convincingly challenged. [14] On the opening page of his work Eugenius reproduces the ruptured phrase with which Sterne closes his novel, but alters its visual appearance by supplying a dash in the gap; furthermore, he picks

up the conversation into which such an implied question engages its reader where Sterne had apparently left off:

— Caught hold of the fille-de-chambre's —

“What?” says the critic.

Hand.

“No, no, a plain subterfuge, Mr. Yorick,” cries the casuist.

“Yes, 'tis indeed but too plain, says the priest.” [\[15\]](#)

The critic voices the general complaint that the novel is left dissatisfyingly incomplete, and so by offering one answer with which to fill the gap (‘hand’) Eugenius enables Yorick to pursue his promised journey. One reason for censuring *A Sentimental Journey*'s conclusion is that its aposiopesis implies without actually stating bawdy meaning; “hand” seems an innocent destination for Yorick's fumbling grasp. Yet whilst apparently salvaging Yorick's reputation from the possible charge of creative incapacity, the nature of the response Eugenius supplies actually reinforces prevalent critical hostility, for as the continuation goes on to suggest, ‘hand’ is an unconvincing solution for readers attuned to Sternean innuendo through nine volumes of *Tristram Shandy* and two of *A Sentimental Journey*.

Subsequently, Eugenius' vague attempt to clean up the lewd open-endedness of *A Sentimental Journey* completely disintegrates, as he candidly confesses the incident's actual outcome:

— was it criminal in me? was I apprised of her being so situated? could I imagine she would come without covering? for what, alas! is a shift only, upon such an occasion? (Eugenius, I. 3.)

Eugenius lapses into near-explicitness, shedding the rhetorical “covering” of verbal ambiguity to expose as nakedly as the girl the incident's true nature, and the ‘criminal’ substance of Yorick's ambiguously partial conversation; he pushes the encounter that Sterne leaves teetering on the brink of consummation to an erotic climax.

Other readers besides Eugenius demonstrate a tendency to detect and foreground a latent eroticism in *A Sentimental Journey*, which they similarly develop in their continuations of its story. *A Sentimental Journey; Intended as a Sequel to Mr Sterne's*, published in 1793 under the pseudonym "Mr. Shandy", also uses Sterne's open-ended sentence as its starting point. The narrator describes how

I caught hold of the fille-de-chambre's —: the world could not help it; 'twas a chance-making conjunction. [16]

This author, like Eugenius, plays upon the notion that "the world" and its readers detect salacious meaning in a narrative that could potentially be read as entirely innocent, but which actually prompts less chaste interpretations; the text itself predetermines such a response by encouraging the reader (who cannot "help it") to infer indecency (enhanced by the elision of text and body in the ambiguous 'conjunction' and visually prompted by the suggestive typography, "—:."), for which Sterne is implicitly made responsible.

Both Eugenius and Shandy pursue the urge to foreground the sexualised sub-text which potentially underlies the ambiguous delicacy of Sterne's novel agenda throughout their narratives. They appropriate and rework episodes found in *A Sentimental Journey* whose ambiguity leave them open to multiple readings, of which eroticism is one possibility that they choose to emphasise. One example that reappears in Eugenius' volume is a story entitled "The Gloves". In Sterne's narrative, when lost on the streets of Paris Yorick pauses in a shop to ask for directions; whilst his conversation with its female owner could be entirely innocent, it might equally be read as a patchwork of double entendres that throb an erotic beat literalised when Yorick takes the woman's pulse, apparently so as to measure the "good nature" that runs in her blood. As Yorick tries on various pairs of gloves, he and the grisset enjoy a silently charged interchange of looks:

The beautiful Grisset look'd sometimes at the gloves, then side-ways to the window, then at the gloves — and then at me. I was not disposed to

break silence — I follow'd her example: so I look'd at the gloves, then to the window, then at the gloves, and then at her — and so on alternately.

I found I lost considerably in every attack — she had a quick black eye, and shot through two such long and silken eye-lashes with such penetration, that she look'd into my very heart and reins — It may seem strange, but I could actually feel she did — (*SJ*, 74-5)

Bawdy innuendo enhances the eroticism of this battle of the looks between Yorick and the woman, whose military language euphemistically presents the encounter as a non-tactile series of manoeuvres: the grisset becomes the besieger, her customer the defenceless (but nonetheless willing) victim; her penetrating eye acquires an almost tangible sexual potency which Yorick fantasises into being “actual” contact.

In Eugenius' continuation, following the episode involving the Piedmontese lady Yorick retraces the route through France to Paris, where he seeks out the “Marchand de Gands” visited in *A Sentimental Journey*. He likewise engages in a titillating exchange with the saleswoman that combines material goods and sexual vibes; now, however, the eroticism of Yorick's account is more scantily clad:

But softly: — there lives my beautiful Marchande des Gands. — Those silken eye-lashes! there she is at the door — the nets of love fabled by the poets are surely realized by them. — (Eugenius, I. 65)

They retreat into a back room so that she might relate “the news of the day”, a confection of society gossip that underscores the scandalous nature of their conversation. The purchase of gloves borrowed from Sterne's narrative now becomes an explicitly sexual matter. Yorick learns of the ‘new manufacture’ of so-called “gands d'amour” created by “Mr. le Duc de —”, a contraceptive sheath used to prevent catching venereal diseases. Their real purpose is only thinly veiled, accompanied by the grisset's overtly seductive role as their vendor and, effectively, procuress to Yorick's pleasure:

“I hope,” continued she, casting a most amorous leer through those beautiful eye-lashes, which penetrated farther than I thought it possible for a single look to perforate, “that you’ll be a customer! — you’ll certainly wear them when they are so universally the fashion.” (Eugenius, I. 69-70)

Sterne’s phrases (“silken eye-lashes”, “penetration”) reappear but are also altered to emphasise the heightened sexuality of Eugenius’ prose: “beautiful eye-lashes” and “perforate” resonate strongly with the grisset’s ‘most amorous leer’. The glove-fitting in *A Sentimental Journey* appears innocently vague by comparison.

Although Mr Shandy’s narrator journeys through Italy after the misunderstanding on the road to Lyons, this Yorick is also involved in a series of erotic encounters that surpass the boundaries of suggestive implication observed in Sterne’s novel. One scene in particular reveals this design, in which Shandy conflates two separate episodes from *A Sentimental Journey*. In the first of these, “The Temptation”, Sterne’s Yorick is visited by the fille de chambre whom he had previously met at a bookseller’s shop, and whose mistress has sent her to enquire after him. Innocently seated on the bed (“and how it happened I can give no account”, Yorick claims) the girl shows him the purse she has made to hold a coin he had previously given to her in recognition of her virtue:

I’ll just shew you, said the fair fille de chambre, the little purse I have been making to-day to hold your crown. So she put her hand into her right pocket, which was next me, and felt for it for some time — then into the left — “She had lost it.” — I never bore expectation more quietly — it was in her right pocket at last — she pulled it out; it was of green taffeta, lined with a little bit of white quilted sattin, and just big enough to hold the crown — she put it into my hand — it was pretty; and I held it ten minutes with the back of my hand resting upon her lap — looking sometimes at the purse, sometimes on one side of it. (*SJ*, 123)

The repeated pattern of alternating looks (“sometimes at the purse, sometimes on one side of it”) places Yorick in a more suspiciously predatory role than his

seemingly innocent, patient ‘expectation’ suggests. When Yorick stoops to fasten the buckle of the fille’s shoe, which becomes undone as she prepares to leave, she unexpectedly loses her balance and tumbles backwards onto the bed, leading to the episode’s ambiguous climax:

— I could not for my soul but fasten the buckle in return, and putting in the strap — and lifting up the other foot with it, when I had done, to see if both were right — in doing it too suddenly — it unavoidably threw the fair fille de chambre off her center — and then —

The chapter closes and a fresh episode begins, whose title (‘The Conquest’) seems to imply that “and then —“ was followed by some form of decisive action, a hint that nonetheless remains unconfirmed in Yorick’s reluctance to define exactly the nature of his “triumph”: the conquest of virtue over “Temptation”, or sexual gratification?

In the second episode that Mr Shandy appropriates from *A Sentimental Journey*, Sterne’s Yorick is now visited at his hotel by a grisset selling a variety of items from her band-box:

she open’d her little magazine, laid all her laces one after another before me — unfolded and folded them up again one by one with the most patient sweetness — I might buy — or not — she would let me have every thing at my own price — (*SJ*, 128)

Yorick, won over by her “simple and caressing” manner, invests in “a pair of ruffles”; as in the glove-buying scene, his role as purchaser of (ostensibly material) goods hints at the sexualised dimensions to the commercial transaction. Mr Shandy’s narrator melds these two scenes together but makes their ambiguous sexual tension explicit, affirming the suspicion that any outcome to these encounters was of a physical nature. In the *Sequel*, the fille and grisset are united in a female fruit-seller and the scene changed to a hotel room at Turin, where the strongly sexual undercurrent of the mercantile operation surfaces even more prominently:

She held the basket in her lap, while I looked into it. I laid my hand first on some cherries - - - “No,” said I, “I’ll have plums - - - No, I’ll have cherries,” I could not tell what I would have. I put my hand on this side, then on that: the deuce was in me, I could not make a choice.

“Yes,” said I, looking full under her bonnet, “I’ll have cherries:” so, putting my hand to some that lay on one side the basket, I was going to bargain for them, when the girl asked me if I did not like citrons; “Yes,” said I, “and melons too.” — “I’ll show you some,” said she, so uncovering the side the basket next to herself, she shewed me some - - -

I would have given the world, could I have commanded it, for a word of approbation suitable to the favour. There was nothing, in effect in it, after all — it was, simply, shewing me her fruit: but she did it in a manner superior to any I had met with in the course of my journeying.

I was ready to have said many a civil thing to her. (Shandy, I, 34-5)

Shandy recycles and alters already equivocal phrases found in Sterne (“I put my hand on this side, then on that”) and places them alongside more easily decipherable euphemisms (“the deuce was in me”). The suggestive connotations of the fruit are far from subtle (cherries, citrons, melons), but the extended break provided by the fragmented dash implies that the revelation involves more than “shewing me her fruit”, crowned with the closing gesture towards criminal conversation (“I was ready to have said many a civil thing to her”).

Although “ready” to achieve the climax of the scene at its “critical hour” the narrator, moved by the girl’s “untutored” innocence, apparently refrains from consummating his desire in a manner that vaguely recalls the more innocent reading of Yorick’s “conquest”. Meeting the fair fruiterer again at a later stage in his journey, however, the purely non-physical satisfaction of their earlier interview is made questionable:

Resting my left hand on her lap, with all the virtuous freedom of a brother, I asked her if she remembered my bargaining for her cherries in the Hotel-del-Ponto!

She said she remembered it, for two reasons: first, that I could hardly be satisfied with all the fruit she shewed me; and, in the next place, for the choice I made in the end. (Shandy, II, 137-8)

The symbolic resonance of the cherries reinforces the impression that the lessons by which this self-styled “brother” previously instructed the “untutored” girl were far from virtuous, their physical nature signalled by the conclusive “end” Shandy imposes on the story, an italicised glance towards the delicately unfinished ending of Yorick’s narrative.

It has been observed by numerous commentators that *A Sentimental Journey* offers a double-sided approach towards the sensibility its narrator embodies: Yorick’s apparently benevolent actions could be motivated by selfish altruism, his encounters with women might possess an erotic rather than innocent dimension. [17] Sterne encodes sexuality as a mysterious riddle entwined between the lines of an ambivalent narrative, which his readers are challenged to decipher; yet rather than favouring and forwarding the potentially innocent interpretation certain episodes may hold, Eugenius and Shandy expose their seedier undertones to clarified view. Yorick the sentimentally innocent parson trembling with overpowering sensation mutates from being the victim of too much sensibility to that of too much sensuousness. These two continuations close the gap of Yorick’s open-ended suggestions as to what exactly he might catch hold of in any of his titillating accounts of contact with women, revelling in the heavily eroticised quality with which they enhance their appropriations from Sterne’s text. As such, they privilege one particular reading from a purposely obscure range of possibilities, which ambivalence is central to Sterne’s treatment of sentimentalism; as Patricia Meyer Spacks suggests, his fiction exemplifies “fully and insistently the tension and balance between desire to reveal and desire to

conceal”. [18] Sterne maintains this balance with dexterous skill, allowing several possible readings to be upheld simultaneously; choosing and promoting one amongst these, as Eugenius and Shandy do, runs counter to *A Sentimental Journey*’s approach to its central concept.

Furthermore, sex and virtue need not necessarily be opposed in Sterne’s narrative, the former concealed so as to promote the latter: both readings can be sustained simultaneously to present Yorick as a rounded human being in whom innocence and sexuality are contiguous rather than in conflict, his encounters bringing out all aspects of humanity, of which the sensible traveller has a particularly heightened awareness. As R. F. Brissenden suggests, Yorick’s “capacity for benevolence, compassion and sympathy” is “intimately if sometimes ironically” related to his “sexual responsiveness”. [19] In his role as man of feeling this parson intellectualises his physical longing to consolidate the union of sentimental virtue and natural bodily urges so that, Paul Goring argues, “through Yorick, Sterne makes an argument for the inseparability of sentiment and erotic desire”. [20]

In Yorick’s self-appointed identity as a “sentimental traveller”, moreover, whilst human beings are deserving objects of observation their attraction lies in the detached perspective from which the traveller views them; actual contact, consummation of the desire they inspire, would destroy the fantasised pleasures characterising the sentimental traveller’s experiences. The decisiveness with which these continuers treat Yorick’s sexuality ignores the possibility that his erotic adventures in *A Sentimental Journey* might involve missed opportunities rather than satisfied desire, a disappointment (or impotence?) which the narrator, apparently motivated by decency, chooses to conceal by not brazenly describing his adventures. Sterne’s Yorick may repeatedly hover on the verge of erotic excitement, but by withholding a complete account of these escapades, such as in “The Temptation” or the “Case of Delicacy”, he might simply be communicating the truth: his erotically sentimental journeys remain as incomplete as his projected tour through France and Italy.

By presenting unfinished accounts of his amours Yorick can at least gain partial fulfilment from fantasising (thinking and writing) about them, activating Barthes' notion that "the pleasure of the text" consists in "the hope of seeing" rather than actual revelation. [21] He uses suggestiveness to offer his reader a similar satisfaction by imagining what might have taken place, which when realised (as in these continuations) is diminished. By making the sexualised nature of Yorick's adventures explicit, and moreover by suggesting that he achieves erotic satisfaction, Eugenius and Shandy's continuations push his titillatingly irresolute narrative towards decisive action to impose closure upon its loosely plural possibilities. Ralph Griffiths' early review, worth recalling here, certainly connects sexual innuendo and the finality of bodily death:

The volume before us concludes with a dash of somewhat bordering rather on sensuality than sentiment. — A ludicrous hiatus ends the book: which the whimsical Writer had scarce closed before the fatal hiatus of DEATH put at once a final period to the ramblings and the writings of the inimitable LAURENCE STERNE.

By resolving Yorick's elusive and illusive sexual adventures into a decisive track Eugenius and Shandy visit a form of stasis upon his wandering narrative that involves achieving the destination rather than enjoying the journey's continuance, and which instils a form of creative death through halting the activities of travelling, writing and living that Yorick (like Tristram Shandy) conflates and seeks to sustain.

The metaphorical death Eugenius and Shandy impose upon the open-ended eroticism of Sterne's narrative is, appropriately, reinforced by their centralisation of the unavoidable presence of death itself. In Eugenius' continuation, Yorick shortens his journey and hurriedly returns to England upon news of his best friend's illness, being the very same Eugenius who now offers the reader the "completed" version of Yorick's journey (Eugenius, II, 165). This provides a means of curtailing travels that otherwise provided material for Yorick's fictional

enterprise: Eugenius' threatened bodily demise precipitates that of the Journey's narrative, which in the continuation prefigures the actual death of the narrator. Whereas Eugenius himself soon recovers, Yorick is cast into restless ennui and relapses into physical illness; he experiences a sleeping "vision" so perturbing that, on waking, he feels the approaching grip of death, hitherto avoided whilst travelling. Yorick's demise must now be communicated by the final hand that Eugenius will insert in his friend's narrative:

He's gone! for ever gone!*

Poor Yorick! he was a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy!
Where be your gibes now? — Your flashes of merriment, that were
wont to set the table on a roar? — not one now — quite chap-fallen?

Alas! Alas! Alas! poor Yorick.

This with the spontaneous flood of friendship your Eugenius signs.

* Mr. Sterne died in March 1768, soon after the publication of his
Sentimental Journey. (Eugenius, II, 176)

As though Tristram Shandy's (and Shakespeare's) lament for Yorick were somehow insufficient, Eugenius multiplies the plaintive 'alas' in a 'spontaneous' effusion of emotion, its rhetorical excess tempered by the sober factual information provided in a footnote that apparently stamps the eulogy with authoritative dignity. Indeed, Eugenius emphatically denies fraudulence in his preface, stating that "The following sheets are not presented to the Public as the offspring of Mr. Sterne's pen". By shaping and adding to materials purportedly already in existence according to "his friend's stile and manner" he can simulate a near-authentic version of what might have been written; the original author's death not only sanctions such friendly interference but makes it indispensable:

The abrupt manner in which the second volume concluded, seemed forcibly to claim a sequel; and doubtless, if the author's life had been spared, the world would have received it from his own hand, as he had

materials already prepared. [...] The work may now, however, be considered as complete; and the remaining curiosity of the readers of Yorick's Sentimental Journey, will at least be gratified with respect to facts, events, and observations. (Eugenius, I, iv-v)

Eugenius was in some sense convincing in his ability to 'imitate' Sterne's style to "complete" his novel, as the continuation was frequently published as the "genuine" volumes III and IV alongside the existing volumes I and II; [\[22\]](#) the hack-writing author enjoys a degree of financial and artistic success at his forerunner's expense, permitted by his absence through death, a blank he steps in to fill by literally filling in the blank spaces of his 'unfinished' narrative.

The preface to Shandy's volume similarly impresses the inescapability of mortality, advertising Sterne's actual death some years earlier as a legitimate justification for the present enterprise:

The Author (a base-born son of YORICK, but no more like his father than he to HERCULES) has attempted, in the following pages, to trace the path his fire had marked out, and to speak of incidents that would, in all probability have happened in his way, had he lived to have trod the ground himself.

The Author, well knowing that many have run through the journey before him, and that so numerous are the footsteps in this beaten path, that there is no treading on new ground, may say he has little of originality to recommend him to the public – But, it being acknowledged that there is merit in a good imitation, he hopes that he who thinks for himself, and speaks but what he thinks, will allow him a portion of that praise (whatever may come of the profit) his wayfaring fancy has sought after. (Shandy, I, iii-vi)

Shandy exploits the metaphor of life and writing as types of journey to saturation ("trace the path", "trod the ground", "beaten path" and so on), which warns of the absence of subtlety that permeates his narrative. Yet whilst Eugenius imposes a

figurative death upon Sterne's novel by supplying it with an irrevocable conclusion, for Shandy death becomes almost irrelevant as the Sequel will carry on regardless. The original author's actual absence, now at the temporal remove of some years (in contrast to the short space between *A Sentimental Journey*'s publication and that of Eugenius' continuation) is a recognised factor in the Sequel's composition but neither encourages nor prohibits its progress. Yorick is, like old Hamlet's ghost, the shadow who haunts Shandy's pages and demands the perpetual remembrance of continuation; but this author, implicitly the piece's Prince Hamlet, is not hampered by his precursor's shady presence: he explicitly disclaims attempting to be like him using a mangled allusion ("no more like his father than he to HERCULES") and so exonerates himself from the Herculean labour of living up to his deceased parent, freed to pursue his own "wayward", rather than the "beaten" track. He chooses a pseudonym that openly acknowledges the Shandean influence and pre-empts accusations of plagiarism; in contrast to Griffiths' assertion that Sterne is "inimitable", and as Eugenius' preface claims, imitation can be a commendable way of revivifying an author's "stile and manner", but now it also permits Shandy to exhibit his own "*originality*", manipulating *A Sentimental Journey*'s material to gain whatever "profit" (financial or of critical praise) the Sequel may earn.

G rard Genette credits the continuer of an apparently inconclusive work with benevolent intentions: "When a work is left unfinished by reason of the death of its author or some other cause of final abandonment, continuation consists in finishing the work in the author's stead". [23] Sterne's death requires another writer to imagine how he intended to pursue and complete *A Sentimental Journey*, exerting his own creative talents by finishing it for him. Genette contrasts the continuation to the sequel, which "performs an entirely different function" by "exploiting the success of a work that in its own time was often considered complete, and in setting it into motion again with new episodes". [24] He ascribes noble intentions to the continuation, which is not a "defilement" of the earlier work but salvages its "patchy intentions" and compensates for its inadequacies,

whilst remaining consistent with its “style and movement”. The sequel is, by contrast, akin to the “fraud”, manipulating the original for mercenary ends, which attempts to “capitalize” on and to “exploit or modify a current of success” by “jumping on the bandwagon” of a work’s popularity. [25]

When considering Eugenius and Shandy’s additions to *A Sentimental Journey*, however, Genette’s subtle distinctions require modification. Although according to their title-pages one is a continuation and the other a sequel, both perform similar operations upon Sterne’s novel. By emphasising the original writer’s mortality, diminishing any claim to being an immortal author-figure, both continuers suggest he depends on subsequent assistance to complete a work left unfinished at his death to justify their own assumption of this task. These apparently disinterested motives are tinged by the form of their continuations; rather than producing additions that harmonise with the nature of *A Sentimental Journey*’s narrative episodes, these authors create versions that are distinctly their own, both in style and subject-matter. They privilege an erotic dimension of sentimentalism that Sterne preferred to leave latent, and moreover centralise the mortality that Tristram and Yorick eagerly attempt to escape, both by pursuing actual journeys and in their metaphorical equivalence in the incomplete travel account. More importantly, they work on the assumption (supported by Genette) that Sterne’s work is, indeed, unfinished, and so requires such friendly assistance, rather than accepting its “ending” as a deliberately vague gesture towards the unknowable realm of the emotions, thoughts or experiences it broaches.

Imposing closure rather than privileging open-endedness need not, of course, produce a creative failure; after all, many journeys and the narratives they inspire achieve conclusions that bring satisfaction to the reader and, perhaps, author. Yet, not to mention the considerable shortcomings of either Eugenius or Shandy’s continuations on artistic grounds, as professedly imitative homages to Sterne’s novel these volumes incur an aesthetic disjuncture with their ostensible model. *A Sentimental Journey*, as a novel that repeatedly proffers unfinished episodes, encounters, fragments, stories, and descriptions as a means of perpetuating its

journeys through life and life-writing, should be “continued” by narratives that sustain this onward movement and resist achieving a definite ending. Such finality inevitably incurs a sense of loss; as Gillian Beer writes, for the reader, reaching the end of a novel can be its most unenjoyable aspect: “Most conclusions are disappointing, not only because we have come to the end, but because of the inadequacy of any one chosen pathway from the many mapped out”. [26] The aposiopesis “closing” *A Sentimental Journey* avoids this by inviting possibilities but evading final answers to the most urgent, but most ineffable questions the narrator encounters in his life-journey, those surrounding his sexuality and his mortality; the reader is permitted to indulge in fantasy, and to exert his or her imagination and to avoid contemplating the uncomfortably unknown condition of death, but must avoid considering any suggestion to be definitive. As Genette claims, the “incompleteness” of the “mutilated text” can in fact sometimes constitute “the very truth of a work”. [27] Those narratives that close the gap by selecting, developing, and privileging a single route amongst the many available alternatives destroy the pleasure of the multiple, indefinite conclusions that Sterne offers his reader surrounding the mysterious knowledge about the facts of life that most pervasively preoccupy the human individual.

Endnotes

[1] Sterne’s typography and rhetorical style have attracted much attention, from early readers and later critics alike. Amongst these comments, important discussions are found in William Holtz, “Typography, Tristram Shandy, the Aposiopesis, etc.,” *The Winged Skull: Papers from the Laurence Sterne Bicentenary Conference*, ed. Arthur H. Cash and John M. Stedmond (London: Methuen, 1971), 247-257; Roger B. Moss, “Sterne’s Punctuation,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 15 (1981-2): 179-200; “Tristram Shandy as aesthetic object,” *Word & Image*, 4.1 (1988): 388-92; J. Paul Hunter, “From Typology to Type: Agents of Change in Eighteenth-Century English Texts,” *Cultural Artifacts and the Production of Meaning: The Page, the Image, and the Body*, ed. Margaret J. M. Ezell and Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe (Michigan: Michigan University

Press, 1994), 41-69; Thomas Keymer, *Sterne, the Moderns, and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[2] Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Melvyn New and Joan New, 3 vols (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1978-84): II. vi, 115. All references are taken from this edition, cited as TS, vol, chapter, page.

[3] Holtz, in Cash and Stedmond, 255.

[4] The charge that he wrote about "nothing" was often levelled at Sterne with respect to both novels; for instance Owen Ruffhead, *Monthly Review* XIII (1761): 101-16 (*CH*, 119-24); *Yorick's Mediations upon Various Interesting and Important Subjects* (London: R. Stevens, 1760), 3; *A Supplement to the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.* (London, 1760), 81; Richard Griffith, *The Posthumous Works of the Celebrated Dr. Sterne, Deceased* (London, 1775), 170.

[5] Ross King, "Tristram Shandy and the Wound of Language," *Studies in Philology* 92 (1995): 291-310; repr. *Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy: A Casebook*, ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 123-146 [131].

[6] Clark Lawlor, "Consuming Time: Narrative and Disease in Tristram Shandy," *Yearbook of English Studies* 30 (2000): 46-59; Carol Houlihan Flynn, "Running Out of Matter: The Body Exercised in Eighteenth-Century Fiction," *Laurence Sterne*, ed. Marcus Walsh (London: Longman, 2002), 112-18.

[7] Flynn, in Walsh, 113.

[8] Thomas Keymer, "Dying by Numbers: 'Tristram Shandy and Serial Fiction'", published in two parts in *The Shandean* 8 (1996): 41-67 and 9 (1997): 34-69.

[9] Marcia Allentuck, "In Defense of an Unfinished Tristram Shandy: Laurence Sterne and the Non Finito", and R. F. Brissenden, "'Trusting to Almighty God':

Another look at the Composition of Tristram Shandy”, both repr. in *The Winged Skull*, 145-53 and 258-69 respectively.

[10] Ralph Griffiths, *Monthly Review*, xxxviii (1768): 309-19.

[11], An activity which is inevitably always frustrated, as de Voogd (1988) points out, 387.

[12] Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*, ed. Melvyn New and W. G. Day, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 164. Future references in footnotes are to *SJ*.

[13] Melinda K. Rabb makes pertinent observations on the role of hands in *SJ* in “Engendering Accounts in Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey*”, *Johnson and his Age*, ed. James Engell (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), 531-58 (533).

[14] Karl F. Thompson, “The Authorship of Yorick’s ‘Sentimental Journey Continued’” *Notes and Queries* 195 (1950):318-9; Lodwick Hartley, “Yorick’s Sentimental Journey Continued: A Reconsideration of the Authorship”, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 70. 2 (1971): 180-90; Cash, *Later Years*, 331; W. B. Gerard, “The First ‘Temptation’ of Yorick, or, a Pirate Tale”, *The Shandean* 15 (2004): 107-16.

[15] ‘Eugenius’, *Yorick’s Sentimental Journey, Continued: To which is Prefixed, Some Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. Sterne; By Eugenius*, 2nd edn, 4 vols in 2 (London, 1769): I. 1-2. Hereafter cited as Eugenius.

[16] ‘Mr. Shandy’, *A Sentimental Journey: Intended as a Sequel to Mr Sterne’s*, 2 vols, (Southampton: T. Baker, and London: S. Crowder, 1793), I. 1. Hereafter cited as Shandy.

[17] For early readings of *A Sentimental Journey* as a satire of sentiment, see Rufus Putney, “The Evolution of *A Sentimental Journey*”, *Philological Quarterly* 19 (1940): 349-69; Ernest Nevin Dilworth, *The Unsentimental Journey of*

Laurence Sterne (New York: King's Crown Press, 1948). More recently, Robert Markeley has seen Yorick to be complicit in a bourgeois economy that suppresses the poor, "Sentiment as Performance: Shaftesbury, Sterne, and the Theatrics of Virtue", *The New Eighteenth-Century*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), 210-30. Paul Goring provides one reading amongst many of the eroticised sub-text of Yorick's sentimentalism, see *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[18] Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Privacy: Concealing the Eighteenth-Century Self* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2003), 79.

[19] R. F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (London: Macmillan, 1974), 222.

[20] Goring, 199.

[21] Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (Oxford: Blackwell, repr. 1990), 10.

[22] J. C. T. Oates, *Shandyism and Sentiment, 1760-1800* Cambridge Bibliographical Society Publications (Cambridge, 1968): 13-14.

[23] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 162.

[24] Genette, 162.

[25] Genette, 174; 177.

[26] Gillian Beer, *Arguing with the Past* (London: Routledge, 1999), 8.

[27] Genette, 174.

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