



NAXOS  
AudioBooks

COMPLETE  
CLASSICS  
UNABRIDGED

Laurence Sterne

# Tristram Shandy

Read by **Anton Lesser**



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**Note:**

*Tristram Shandy* is filled with visual, typographical and composing jokes – pages that are completely blank, pages that are completely black, misplaced chapters or chapters consisting only of their title, squiggly lines to indicate waving a stick, and much more besides. This audiobook tries in a variety of ways to match Sterne's invention with aural equivalents.

**CD 1**

1	Volume 1 Chapter 1	2:31
2	Volume 1 Chapter 2	2:36
3	Volume 1 Chapter 3	1:21
4	Volume 1 Chapter 4	5:08
5	Volume 1 Chapter 5	1:45
6	Volume 1 Chapter 6	1:50
7	Volume 1 Chapter 7	4:11
8	Volume 1 Chapter 8	3:27
9	Volume 1 Chapter 9	3:31
10	Volume 1 Chapter 10	5:43
11	At different times he would give 50 humorous...	7:06
12	Volume 1 Chapter 11	4:51
13	With all this sail, poor Yorrick...	3:38
14	Volume 1 Chapter 12	10:24
15	Volume 1 Chapter 13	2:44
16	Volume 1 Chapter 14	2:48
17	Volume 1 Chapter 15	7:52
18	Volume 1 Chapter 16	3:15
19	Volume 1 Chapter 17	1:27

**Total time on CD 1: 76:25**

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## CD 2

1	Volume 1 Chapter 18	6:34
2	'Why are there so few palaces...'	5:34
3	Volume 1 Chapter 19	6:35
4	I mention this, not only as a matter of hypothesis...	6:20
5	Volume 1 Chapter 20	4:23
6	Memoire presente a Messieurs les Docteurs de Sorbonne...	5:12
7	Mr Tristram Shandy's compliments...	0:48
8	Volume 1 Chapter 21	5:24
9	It will seem strange...	6:08
10	In any other family dishonour...	4:09
11	Volume 1 Chapter 22	4:21
12	Volume 1 Chapter 23	5:53
13	Volume 1 Chapter 24	2:47
14	Volume 1 Chapter 25	3:09
15	Volume 2 Chapter 1	5:13

**Total time on CD 2: 72:44**

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## CD 3

1	Volume 2 Chapter 2	7:17
2	Volume 2 Chapter 3	5:10
3	Volume 2 Chapter 4	4:15
4	Volume 2 Chapter 5	4:13
5	I have but one more stroke to give to finish...	3:40
6	Your Honour understands these matters...	4:25
7	Volume 2 Chapter 6	3:58
8	Volume 2 Chapter 7	4:01
9	Volume 2 Chapter 8	2:47
10	Volume 2 Chapter 9	4:11
11	Volume 2 Chapter 10	3:01
12	Volume 2 Chapter 11	2:54
13	Volume 2 Chapter 12	6:09
14	– Go – says he, one day at dinner...	5:12
15	Volume 2 Chapter 13	0:22
16	Volume 2 Chapter 14	5:20
17	Volume 2 Chapter 15	2:51
18	Volume 2 Chapter 16	0:53

**Total time on CD 3: 70:54**

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## CD 4

1	Volume 2 Chapter 17	6:03
2	God help him then, quoth my uncle Toby.	6:25
3	'But the converse of the proposition...'	6:29
4	(Here Corporal Trim and my uncle Toby...)	5:44
5	'Blessed is the man, indeed...'	7:23
6	'As, therefore, we can have no dependence...'	6:40
7	My father went on.)' – Consider the nature...	5:26
8	It seems that Yorick, who was inquisitive...	2:34
9	Volume 2 Chapter 18	2:32
10	Volume 2 Chapter 19	5:51
11	Now, as it was plain to my father...	4:26
12	My father, who dipped into all kinds of books...	4:48
13	When my father had got so far...	4:26
14	Volume 3 Chapter 1	6:23

**Total time on CD 4: 75:22**

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## CD 5

1	Volume 3 Chapter 4	2:54
2	Volume 3 Chapter 5	1:46
3	Volume 3 Chapter 6	1:33
4	Volume 3 Chapter 7	2:17
5	Volume 3 Chapter 8	2:36
6	Volume 3 Chapter 9	1:11
7	Volume 3 Chapter 10	6:13
8	Volume 3 Chapter 11	4:03
9	May the holy choir of the holy virgins...	4:36
10	Volume 3 Chapter 12	6:45
11	Volume 3 Chapter 13	1:43
12	Volume 3 Chapter 14	2:09
13	Volume 3 Chapter 15	1:33
14	Volume 3 Chapter 16	1:23
15	Volume 3 Chapter 17	1:25
16	Volume 3 Chapter 18	5:31
17	Volume 3 Chapter 19	1:10
18	Volume 3 Chapter 20	6:26
19	But then again, as we should all of us be men...	4:54
20	It is by these observations, and a wary reasoning...	6:03
21	I enter now directly upon the point.	4:58
22	Volume 3 Chapter 21	1:42
23	Volume 3 Chapter 22	4:54

**Total time on CD 5: 78:04**

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## CD 6

1	Volume 3 Chapter 23	3:22
2	Volume 3 Chapter 24	4:24
3	My Father, as you have observed...	4:05
4	Volume 3 Chapter 25	3:34
5	Volume 3 Chapter 26	1:00
6	Volume 3 Chapter 27	0:36
7	Volume 3 Chapter 28	1:25
8	Volume 3 Chapter 29	2:19
9	Volume 3 Chapter 30	1:04
10	Volume 3 Chapter 31	3:39
11	Volume 3 Chapter 32	1:10
12	Volume 3 Chapter 33	3:46
13	Volume 3 Chapter 34	5:45
14	Volume 3 Chapter 35	2:00
15	Volume 3 Chapter 36	1:56
16	Volume 3 Chapter 37	2:38
17	Volume 3 Chapter 38	6:27
18	Now Ambrose Pareus convinced my father...	3:08
19	Volume 3 Chapter 39	2:37
20	Volume 3 Chapter 40	2:06
21	Volume 3 Chapter 41	5:17
22	Volume 3 Chapter 42	2:33
23	Volume 4 (start)	3:29

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## CD 6 (cont.)

- |    |  |      |
|----|--|------|
| 24 | The stranger's mule moved on at so slow a pace...    | 4:15 |
| 25 | The stranger had not got half a league on his way... | 5:16 |

**Total time on CD 6: 78:11**

## CD 7

- |    |  |      |
|----|--|------|
| 1  | The nuns of St. Ursula acted the wisest...         | 6:03 |
| 2  | It was demonstrated however very satisfactorily... | 5:45 |
| 3  | – which had decided the point incontestably...     | 6:30 |
| 4  | By God in heaven, cried the Popish doctors...      | 5:41 |
| 5  | The traveller was hastening with all diligence...  | 5:54 |
| 6  | Ode. Harsh and untuneful are the notes of love..   | 4:03 |
| 7  | Volume 4 Chapter 1                                 | 3:23 |
| 8  | Volume 4 Chapter 2                                 | 1:31 |
| 9  | Volume 4 Chapter 3                                 | 0:54 |
| 10 | Volume 4 Chapter 4                                 | 3:29 |



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**CD 7 (cont.)**

11	Volume 4 Chapter 5	0:15
12	Volume 4 Chapter 6	1:22
13	Volume 4 Chapter 7	2:48
14	Volume 4 Chapter 8	2:09
15	Volume 4 Chapter 9	2:19
16	Volume 4 Chapter 10	4:24
17	Volume 4 Chapter 11	0:33
18	Volume 4 Chapter 12	2:00
19	Volume 4 Chapter 13	3:33
20	Volume 4 Chapter 14	3:26
21	Volume 4 Chapter 15	3:37
22	Volume 4 Chapter 16	1:56
23	Volume 4 Chapter 17	3:01
24	Volume 4 Chapter 18	3:09

**Total time on CD 7: 78:08**

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## CD 8

1	Volume 4 Chapter 19	6:28
2	Volume 4 Chapter 20	1:58
3	Volume 4 Chapter 21	3:06
4	Volume 4 Chapter 22	1:38
5	Volume 4 Chapter 23	1:38
6	Volume 4 Chapter 25	6:38
7	Volume 4 Chapter 26	2:44
8	Volume 4 Chapter 27	6:04
9	It is not my business to dip my pen...	5:51
10	This conceit awaken'd Somnolentus...	2:05
11	Volume 4 Chapter 28	3:18
12	Volume 4 Chapter 29	5:50
13	The administration being thus...	3:51
14	Volume 4 Chapter 30	1:08
15	Volume 4 Chapter 31	5:00
16	However, as neither the purchasing...	3:45
17	Volume 4 Chapter 32	4:47
18	Volume 5 Chapter 1	6:02
19	The excellency of the figure...	7:20

**Total time on CD 8: 75:51**

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## CD 9

1	Volume 5 Chapter 2	4:43
2	Volume 5 Chapter 3	6:31
3	Where is Troy and Mycanae...	6:10
4	Volume 5 Chapter 4	0:44
5	Volume 5 Chapter 5	1:03
6	Volume 5 Chapter 6	3:29
7	Volume 5 Chapter 7	6:51
8	Volume 5 Chapter 8	1:07
9	Volume 5 Chapter 9	2:09
10	Volume 5 Chapter 10	4:42
11	Volume 5 Chapter 11	1:27
12	Volume 5 Chapter 12	3:39
13	Volume 5 Chapter 13	1:59
14	Volume 5 Chapter 14	0:36
15	Volume 5 Chapter 15	2:15
16	Volume 5 Chapter 16	4:34
17	My father was hugely pleased with this theory...	2:36
18	Volume 5 Chapter 17	1:32
19	Volume 5 Chapter 18	1:03

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**CD 9** (cont.)

20	Volume 5 Chapter 19	2:12
21	Volume 5 Chapter 20	1:40
22	Volume 5 Chapter 21	2:48
23	Volume 5 Chapter 22	1:04
24	Volume 5 Chapter 23	0:42
25	Volume 5 Chapter 24	1:13
26	Volume 5 Chapter 25	0:42
27	Volume 5 Chapter 26	2:18
28	Volume 5 Chapter 27	2:14
29	Volume 5 Chapter 28	4:50

**Total time on CD 9: 77:18**

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## CD 10

1	Volume 5 Chapter 29	2:52
2	Volume 5 Chapter 30	1:35
3	Volume 5 Chapter 31	4:01
4	Volume 5 Chapter 32	3:19
5	Volume 5 Chapter 33	2:17
6	Volume 5 Chapter 34	1:29
7	Volume 5 Chapter 35	1:58
8	Volume 5 Chapter 36	1:28
9	Volume 5 Chapter 37	2:17
10	Volume 5 Chapter 38	2:44
11	Volume 5 Chapter 39	1:16
12	Volume 5 Chapter 40	3:03
13	Volume 5 Chapter 41	0:25
14	Volume 5 Chapter 42	4:23
15	Volume 5 Chapter 43	3:00
16	Volume 6 Chapter 1	1:25
17	Volume 6 Chapter 2	4:35
18	Volume 6 Chapter 3	2:20
19	Volume 6 Chapter 4	0:22
20	Volume 6 Chapter 5	4:28

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## CD 10 (cont.)

21	Volume 6 Chapter 6	5:29
22	Volume 6 Chapter 7	4:32
23	I thought, said the curate...	5:58
24	Volume 6 Chapter 8	3:47
25	Volume 6 Chapter 9	0:16
26	Volume 6 Chapter 10	2:32
27	Volume 6 Chapter 11	6:42

**Total time on CD 10: 78:54**

## CD 11

1	Volume 6 Chapter 12	3:09
2	Volume 6 Chapter 13	1:58
3	Volume 6 Chapter 14	1:53
4	Volume 6 Chapter 15	0:10
5	Volume 6 Chapter 16	1:36
6	Volume 6 Chapter 17	4:26
7	Volume 6 Chapter 18	3:45
8	Volume 6 Chapter 19	3:37
9	Volume 6 Chapter 20	1:00

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**CD 11** (cont.)

10	Volume 6 Chapter 21	3:22
11	Volume 6 Chapter 22	3:50
12	Volume 6 Chapter 23	3:50
13	Volume 6 Chapter 24	3:26
14	Volume 6 Chapter 25	2:44
15	Volume 6 Chapter 26	2:18
16	Volume 6 Chapter 27	1:35
17	Volume 6 Chapter 28	1:13
18	Volume 6 Chapter 29	2:06
19	Volume 6 Chapter 30	1:31
20	Volume 6 Chapter 31	3:01
21	Volume 6 Chapter 32	6:02
22	Volume 6 Chapter 33	1:35
23	Volume 6 Chapter 34	4:05
24	Volume 6 Chapter 35	1:44
25	Volume 6 Chapter 36	3:13
26	Volume 6 Chapter 37	1:35
27	Volume 6 Chapter 38	1:07
28	Volume 6 Chapter 39	2:17
29	Volume 6 Chapter 40	2:54
30	Volume 7 Chapter 1	3:25

**Total time on CD 11: 78:48**

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## CD 12

1	Volume 7 Chapter 2	2:18
2	Volume 7 Chapter 3	0:42
3	Volume 7 Chapter 4	2:07
4	Volume 7 Chapter 5	5:12
5	Volume 7 Chapter 6	0:50
6	Volume 7 Chapter 7	2:07
7	Volume 7 Chapter 8	2:52
8	Volume 7 Chapter 9	3:19
9	Volume 7 Chapter 10	0:39
10	Volume 7 Chapter 11	0:14
11	Volume 7 Chapter 12	1:32
12	Volume 7 Chapter 13	2:36
13	Volume 7 Chapter 14	2:07
14	Volume 7 Chapter 15	0:55
15	Volume 7 Chapter 16	3:52
16	Volume 7 Chapter 17	2:41
17	Volume 7 Chapter 18	3:41
18	Volume 7 Chapter 19	2:03
19	Volume 7 Chapter 20	1:59



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**CD 12 (cont.)**

20	Volume 7 Chapter 21	3:19
21	I declare I am interested in this story...	3:55
22	Volume 7 Chapter 22	0:35
23	Volume 7 Chapter 23	1:02
24	Volume 7 Chapter 24	1:54
25	Volume 7 Chapter 25	2:26
26	Volume 7 Chapter 26	1:57
27	Volume 7 Chapter 27	4:21
28	Then he had been as great, said my uncle...	3:25
29	Volume 7 Chapter 28	1:23
30	Volume 7 Chapter 29	3:42
31	Volume 7 Chapter 30	3:00
32	Volume 7 Chapter 31	3:27

**Total time on CD 12: 76:38**

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## CD 13

1	Volume 7 Chapter 32	4:37
2	Volume 7 Chapter 33	0:54
3	Volume 7 Chapter 34	2:58
4	Volume 7 Chapter 35	2:37
5	Volume 7 Chapter 36	1:22
6	Volume 7 Chapter 37	1:31
7	Volume 7 Chapter 38	2:10
8	Volume 7 Chapter 39	1:35
9	Volume 7 Chapter 40	0:55
10	Volume 7 Chapter 41	2:31
11	Volume 7 Chapter 42	1:52
12	Volume 7 Chapter 43	3:18
13	'Twas in the road betwixt Nismes and Lunel...	3:53
14	Volume 8 Chapter 1	1:45
15	Volume 8 Chapter 2	1:55
16	Volume 8 Chapter 3	1:40
17	Volume 8 Chapter 4	1:06
18	Volume 8 Chapter 5	2:11
19	Volume 8 Chapter 6	3:08

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### CD 13 (cont.)

20	Volume 8 Chapter 7	0:27
21	Volume 8 Chapter 8	2:00
22	Volume 8 Chapter 9	3:36
23	Volume 8 Chapter 10	1:05
24	Volume 8 Chapter 11	2:24
25	Volume 8 Chapter 12	0:16
26	Volume 8 Chapter 13	1:41
27	Volume 8 Chapter 14	1:12
28	Volume 8 Chapter 15	1:40
29	Volume 8 Chapter 16	5:02
30	Volume 8 Chapter 17	1:49
31	Volume 8 Chapter 18	1:42
32	Volume 8 Chapter 19	5:38
33	– It was a little before the time...	3:05
34	The Story of the King of Bohemia...	4:13

**Total time on CD 13: 78:17**

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## CD 14

1	I am far from controverting...	5:57
2	The heart, both of the master and the man...	4:00
3	Volume 8 Chapter 20	5:53
4	Volume 8 Chapter 21	0:56
5	Volume 8 Chapter 22	3:48
6	Volume 8 Chapter 23	1:59
7	Volume 8 Chapter 24	2:34
8	Volume 8 Chapter 25	2:22
9	Volume 8 Chapter 26	3:34
10	Volume 8 Chapter 27	0:41
11	Volume 8 Chapter 28	3:43
12	Volume 8 Chapter 29	0:13
13	Volume 8 Chapter 30	1:05
14	Volume 8 Chapter 31	2:06
15	Volume 8 Chapter 32	2:03
16	Volume 8 Chapter 33	4:37
17	Volume 8 Chapter 34	6:10
18	Shave the whole top of thy crown clean...	3:31
19	Volume 8 Chapter 35	1:24

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**CD 14** (cont.)

20	Volume 9 Chapter 1	4:02
21	Volume 9 Chapter 2	3:23
22	Volume 9 Chapter 3	1:11
23	Volume 9 Chapter 4	2:03
24	Volume 9 Chapter 5	2:31
25	Volume 9 Chapter 6	2:46
26	Volume 9 Chapter 7	3:06
27	Volume 9 Chapter 8	2:55
28	Volume 9 Chapter 9	0:14

**Total time on CD 14: 79:07**

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## CD 15

1	Volume 9 Chapter 10	2:39
2	Volume 9 Chapter 11	3:07
3	Volume 9 Chapter 12	2:57
4	Volume 9 Chapter 13	3:01
5	Volume 9 Chapter 14	2:14
6	Volume 9 Chapter 15	0:39
7	Volume 9 Chapter 16	1:30
8	Volume 9 Chapter 17	1:33
9	Volume 9 Chapter 18	0:08
10	Volume 9 Chapter 19	0:07
11	Volume 9 Chapter 20	2:35
12	Volume 9 Chapter 21	2:01
13	Volume 9 Chapter 22	2:43

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**CD 15 (cont.)**

14	Volume 9 Chapter 23	1:29
15	Volume 9 Chapter 24	3:29
16	– For my uncle Toby's amours...	5:16
17	Volume 9 Chapter 25	5:52
18	'Chapter The Nineteenth'	2:06
19	Volume 9 Chapter 26	5:48
20	Volume 9 Chapter 27	0:10
21	Volume 9 Chapter 28	2:32
22	Volume 9 Chapter 29	1:44
23	Volume 9 Chapter 30	1:23
24	Volume 9 Chapter 31	4:11
25	Volume 9 Chapter 32	2:34
26	Volume 9 Chapter 33	5:30

**Total time on CD 15: 67:37**

**Total time on CDs 1–15: 19:02:18**

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# Laurence Sterne

(1713–1768)



Portrait by Joshua Reynolds,  
courtesy of the Laurence Sterne Trust

## Tristram Shandy

*'...I live in a constant endeavour to fence against the infirmities of ill health, and other evils of life, by mirth; being firmly persuaded that every time a man smiles, but much more so, when he laughs, that it adds something to this Fragment of Life.'*

– from Sterne's dedication to William Pitt in the second edition of *Tristram Shandy*.



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There is a case to be made that Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* is one of the most extraordinary novels ever written. It could also be argued that it is not a novel at all, as almost none of the stories it tells are ever completed, their resolutions being forever deferred, as some new thought strikes the author and he heads off on a digression that can last from a few lines to whole chapters. On this basis, Dr Johnson decided that, despite its popularity, it would have no future, as 'nothing odd will do long'. He was right that it was odd; he was wrong about its durability.

Since the first volumes of the book were published in 1759, it has influenced writers whose work is considered post-modern because of the way in which it subverts the accepted conventions of 'the novel'. The author talks directly to his audience; the audience occasionally responds or interrupts; there are discussions about how the book is progressing; paragraphs are replaced by asterisks; chapters are deliberately missed out; some are inserted at a later point; and there are visual and compositing jokes

that surprise the reader's expectations – diagrams, pointing fingers, a swirling line on the page to indicate a swishing cane.

Sterne also plays with the fact that, despite the book being written in the first person, the 'I' of the narrative (Tristram Shandy) is not actually the author. The book shares with the reader a knowingness about what is being written and read, but this is complicated by the fact that the story he is ostensibly writing never really gets told. To tell the tale, the writer has to explain who all the characters are, how they relate to one another and what they are thinking, and these extensive offshoots are complemented by the author's own digressions and considerations, with the result that the plot can't progress because each new idea generates others of its own, as a kind of literary Hydra.

This inventive subversion of conventions and self-awareness was to be a mark of writers in the 20th century – such as Joyce, Flann O'Brien, B.S. Johnson – and the French *nouveau roman* movement. But all these avowed literary iconoclasts wrote almost 200 years later,

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in an attempt to reinvent the novel, whereas Laurence Sterne was a provincial priest, writing not long after the birth of the novel itself.

There had been little to suggest that he was a genius in waiting in the 45 years of his life prior to the publication of the first volumes. The son of an ensign in the British army, Sterne was born in 1713 in Clonmel, in what is now the Republic of Ireland. For the first 10 years of his life he lived the customary existence of military personnel, moving frequently between barracks, and between England and Ireland. But by the age of 10 he was at school in Halifax, never to see Ireland or his family again. His father died eight years later as a result of a wound inflicted in a duel, apparently provoked by an argument about a goose. Sterne's cheerful fatalism about death seems to mirror this combination of the tragic and the farcical. Indeed, after his own death his body was secretly disinterred and used at a demonstration by an anatomy professor, much to the surprise of one of Sterne's friends, who recognised his face.

In 1733 Sterne was granted the

status of an exhibitor at Jesus College, Cambridge, where a relative had been Master, and while there he ran up substantial debts and displayed the first signs of the consumption that would eventually lead to his death. He was not much taken with the curriculum at Jesus, but he was an enthusiastic reader of the classics and was attracted by the ideas of the tradition of the 'learned wit'. In this, his writing was to be a supreme example – his career was not.

Later, he was ordained and entered the Church of England in Yorkshire, serving in various rural parishes for 20 years; but he was never really suited to the task, any more than he was to his marriage to Elizabeth Lumley. They had two children, though only one – Lydia – survived. Sterne's affections wandered, however, and after learning of an affair he had had with a maid, his wife fell into a state of temporary insanity. Both he and Lydia also suffered illnesses, but in 1759, despite this melancholic situation, he started to write *Tristram Shandy*.

A major educational influence on his life as a writer and social being, more

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so than the conventional schooling he had received, was his friendship with the witty and convivial minor poet and satirist John Hall-Stevenson. They met at University and their friendship encouraged the development of those elements of Sterne's character that were not fed by his life as a parson. Sterne also found his intellectual and personal appetites awakened by authors with a wilder and parodic bent, such as Rabelais, Swift and Cervantes. Apart from his sermons, Sterne also wrote political pamphlets, and his only major work before *Tristram Shandy* – *A Political Romance*, which mocked the spiritual courts – was banned by his own Church. It must have been a significant initiation to discover that he could create such an effect through writing, even at the expense of his career.

But the Church would never meet Sterne's ambitions. He wanted to be famous, an aspiration that was to be fulfilled almost immediately when *Tristram Shandy* was published, and not just in Britain. Sterne became a major literary figure, fêted at home and abroad, enjoying the celebrity. The European

critics, however, were generally more enthusiastic and more profoundly touched by the moral nature of the story than their British counterparts, who were either hugely amused by the novelty or deeply offended by the jokes.

They had a point. The whole book (its various volumes were published between 1759 and 1767) is ripe with bawdy passages, *double entendre*, coarse slang and innuendo, sly suggestiveness and mock innocence. At the same time, though, it is full of intellectual mockery and parody, political satire, sideswipes at critics, genuine learning, *faux* erudition, burlesque and warm comedy – an endless pool of ideas being stirred and tasted. There is also a profoundly moral and touching humanity running through all this swirling invention. For such a stylised novel, it is still illuminated by the characters: Tristram's endlessly opinionated father, Walter; the gentle warrior, Uncle Toby and loyal Corporal Trim with their extraordinary determination to act out every siege in Europe on a bowling green; and Parson Yorick, a character who bears a close resemblance to Sterne himself.

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So close in fact that Sterne published his own sermons and his other major work, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, under the name of Yorick.

This journey was largely an attempt to bolster his failing health, which was in as parlous a state as his marriage. His wife's mental health had improved, but she too was affected by consumption. Meanwhile, he had fallen in love with several other women, and after the trip she opted to stay in France. Eventually, in August 1767, they decided on a permanent separation. It proved even more permanent than they had planned – Sterne caught influenza and died on 18 March 1768. He had laughed away the inevitability of death in *Tristram Shandy*; but he had been physically aware of it all his adult life.

As a writer, he was not the first to try to do something original with the novel, and he will continue to be succeeded by writers addressing the complex relationship between a work of art, its creator and the audience. Some of the satire in *Tristram Shandy* is occasionally too specific to its time to be easily accessible to modern readers; its language can be

opaque and dense; and Sterne can be maddeningly over-allusive to forgotten authors and their works, for immediate understanding. But these reservations fade beside the sheer delight, humour, wit, characterisations, brilliance of invention and astounding narrative voice that continue to make *Tristram Shandy* one of the most extraordinary novels ever written. If it *is* a novel...

### **Notes by Roy McMillan**

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## SHANDY HALL

*'I am as happy as a prince, at Coxwoud – and I wish you could see in how princely a manner I live – 'tis a land of plenty. I sit down alone to venison, fish and wild fowl, or a couple of fowls or ducks, with curds, and strawberries, and cream, and all the simple plenty which a rich valley under Hambleton Hills can produce – with a clean cloth on my table – and a bottle of wine on my right hand to drink your health. I have a hundred hens and chickens about my yard--and not a parishioner catches a hare, or a rabbit, or a trout, but he brings it as an offering to me...– I am in high spirits – care never enters this cottage'* – Letter by Laurence Sterne, June 1767

It was Laurence Sterne's imagination that created Shandy Hall to house his collection of characters in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*. Inside the house the characters rub along together, climb on and off their hobby-horses, argue, apologise, misunderstand each other and live the celebrations and disappointments of the day-to-day activities that govern all our lives.

The name *Shandy* was taken (*perhaps* – many things connected with Sterne are not *completely* certain) from a Yorkshire dialect word meaning 'odd' or 'crack-brained' so the name is appropriate when things don't necessarily work out as planned – and life is sometimes reduced to a series of unfortunate events. But like the inhabitants of Shandy Hall, we have to bear up and get on with it.

It was December 1759 when the first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy* were printed and put on sale in York. The author's name is conspicuous by its absence. By the following year, Sterne and his hero Tristram were both equally famous. Sterne's portrait had been painted by Joshua Reynolds (see page 24) and the Sermons he had given in his earlier life were now also in print but under the name of Yorick –

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the fictional Parson Yorick of the novel. Sterne was known as both Tristram and Yorick and the difference between reality and fiction were becoming blurred.

And then Shandy Hall itself became a reality as Sterne moved from nearby Stillington to the mediaeval hall in Coxwold and he took on the duties of Vicar of this delightful village. He preached in the pulpit which can still be seen in the church and his bones (or rather *some* of his bones) are buried in the churchyard alongside generations of local North Yorkshire families. But that's another story.

His new home was christened by his friends as Shandy Hall and it has remained so to this day.

Sterne's house is now a lived-in museum containing the finest collection of editions of his works and related prints and paintings. It is open to the public on Wednesdays and Sunday afternoons from May to September, but group visits can be arranged at any time. Exhibitions and events take place regularly and details can be found on **[www.shandean.org](http://www.shandean.org)** or by contacting **[shandyhall@dsl.pipex.com](mailto:shandyhall@dsl.pipex.com)**.

**Written by Patrick Wildgust (Curator – Shandy Hall)**

The Laurence Sterne Trust



Shandy Hall, Coxwold, York, North Yorkshire, YO61 4AD



One of Britain's leading classical actors, **Anton Lesser** has worked extensively at the National Theatre, and is an associate artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company. His many television appearances include roles in *The Cherry Orchard*, *King Lear*, *The Politician's Wife*, *Vanity Fair*, *Perfect Strangers*, and *Dickens*. Films in which he has appeared include *Charlotte Gray*, *Fairytale – A True Story*, *Imagining Argentina*, *River Queen* and *Miss Potter*. He is a familiar voice on radio, and has become particularly associated with his award winning readings of Dickens for Naxos AudioBooks.

## Credits

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