(a) **The humorist in the making:**

Sterne's first attempt at humoristic writing is seen in *A Political Romance: The History of a Good Warm Watch-coat* - a pamphlet he wrote in 1758 (and later withheld from publication) to ridicule the greedy Dr. Topham, a legal pluralist of York. Dr. Topham, who held among many offices the important Commissaryship of the Exchequer and Prerogative Courts, and held it for life, wanted the office to come to his son after his death. His disappointment and consequent bitterness brought a war of pamphlets between himself and the Dean of York, and at last provoked Sterne, the Dean's man, to write the *Warm Watchcoat*. This pamphlet, which is in the form of a letter, tells the story of the quarrel through an allegory. The full title is - *A Political Romance: The History of a Good Warm Watchcoat; with which the present possessor is not content to cover his own shoulders, unless he can cut out of it a Petticoat for his wife, and a Pair of Breeches for his son*. The 'watch-coat' is the Commissaryship of Topham (Trim in the *Political Romance*); and

"nothing would serve Trim, but he must take it home, in order to have it converted into a warm under-petticoat for his wife, and a jerkin for himself against winter; which, in a plaintive tone, he most humbly begged his reverence would consent to'.

Trim (quite different from the Trim of the novel) is the 'sexton and dog-whipper' of the parish, whose job was to chase away the stray dogs. The 'parson of the parish' is Archbishop Hutton.
of York, while 'John the clerk' is Dean Pountayne of York. The 'parson' took kindly to the petition of Trim, but being a newcomer and a stranger to the local Church politics, asked Trim to wait a few days

"till I can make some enquiries about it".4

Trim feared enquiries; he

"doubled his diligence and importunity at the vicarage-house - plagued the whole family to death - prest his suit morning, noon and night; and, to shorten my story, teased the poor gentleman, who was but in an ill state of health, almost out of his life about it".5

Trim's importunities caused suspicion in the mind of the good 'parson'. One day, chancing to look into the 'parish register', he found that the old 'warm watch-coat' was meant for 'poor sextons' only; and he told Trim so. Trim now began pleading his case with ever-increasing servility, saying that

"he had blacked the parson's shoes without count, and greased his boots above fifty times".6

But these mean tricks did not work with the 'parson'; and ultimately Trim was

"kicked out of doors, and told at his peril never to come there again".7

At first, Trim

"huff'd and bounced most terribly - swore he would get a warrant - ... and tell the whole parish how the parson had misused him; but cooling of that, as fearing the parson might possibly bind him over to his good behaviour, and ... send him to a house of correction, he lets the parson alone, and to revenge himself falls foul upon the clerk, who has no more to do in the quarrel than you or I - rips up the promise of the old-cast-pair of black-plush-breeches".7

He now raised an uproar in the town over the old story of the breeches, which "had slept ten years". This introduces the eth-
other allegory of the P.R., namely, that of the breeches, link-
ed to the story of the 'watch-coat'. We are told that, ten yea-
rs ago Trim had laid his suit for an old pair of 'black-plush-
breeches'(i.e., the Commissaryship of Pickering and Pockling-
ton), which, however, went to Mark Slender(Dr.Braithwaite), and
shortly after, on Mark's death, to Lorry Slim(Laurence Sterne
himself). The story tells of Trim's raising a noise in the town
against the 'cleric', and of his public disgrace. The
Warm Watch-coat has a 'Postscript', which is a further thrust
at Trim(Topham), who at the close is shown as marching

"off the field without colours flying, or his horns
sounding, or any other ensigns of honour whatever".

The piece concludes with the remark that

"Trim has been so trimm'd as never disastrous hero
was trimm'd before".

Sterne's ridicule of folly in the Watch-coat is sha-

erp, but has not yet acquired the subtlety and refinement of his
later work(T.S.). His humour here has a touch of coarseness. Hi-
s attack is not only personal, but is vitiated by rancour. Trim
is called a 'greedy hound', a cony-catcher, 'a little, dirty,
pimping, pettifogging, ambidexterous fellow', and so on. Ster-
ne's humour in the Watch-coat is not mellowed by the touch of
humanism. The story is merely one of local church politics, and
has no wider human significance that we find in his T.S. Ster-
ne knew this, and so he did not rate his Watch-coat high him-
self. In his personal Memorandum to his wife, he gives it a low
place, and regrets that he ever wrote it.

Nevertheless, the Warm Watch-coat clearly revealed to
its author his sharp powers of ridicule. It is a prelude to his
great work (T.S.), which is to follow soon, and where the humorist finds himself, that is, where his humour attains a higher moral significance.

(b) Nature of Sterne's humoristic genius:

(i) Humour and sympathy. Humour is distinguished by individuality and freedom of mind. Rational conformity will produce wit, which is evoked through reason. The essence of humour is non-conformity, and it is evoked through feeling, through imagination. All great humorists, from Rabelais to Dickens, have hammered at tradition. They imagined greatly and felt intensely. Even as they rebel, they radiate joy; for humour is amusement at any incongruity, or deviation from the norm. Humour is tolerant, indulgent; while wit or satire is critical and condemnatory. Humour comes from sympathy, from love of mankind. Carlyle, who reveals little sense of humour in his own work, knew, however, its character very well.

"The essence of humour" - he said - "is sensibility, warm tender fellow-feeling with all forms of existence ... it (i.e., true humour) is not contempt, its essence is love; it issues not in laughter, but in still smiles, which is lie far deeper. It is a sort of inverse sublimity; exalting, as it were, into our affections what is below us, while sublimity draws down into our affections what is above us ... It is, in fact, the bloom and perfume, the purest effluence of a deep, fine and loving nature".14

Carlyle calls Sterne

"our last specimen of humour, and with all his faults, our best; our finest, if not our strongest".15

Sterne's humour, at its best - as, for example, in his ridicule of the learned folly of Walter Shandy, or in the scene of Tristram's loving communion with the ass, reveals his intense love
of life and his exquisite sensibility.

(ii) Equating of great and small: "True humour", Addison said,

"lies in the thought, and arises from the representation of images in odd circumstances, and uncommon lights".17

This element of 'oddity' and 'uncommonness' in humour is explained best by Coleridge, who said perhaps the most profound words on the nature of humour. According to Coleridge,

"there's always is in a genuine humour an acknowledgment of the hollowness and farce of the world and its disproportion to the godlike within us".18

He finds the 'humorific point common to all that can be called humorous' in

"a certain reference to the general and the universal, by which the finite great is brought into identity with the little, or the little with the finite great, so as to make both nothing in comparison with the infinite. The little is made great, and the great little, in order to destroy both; because all is equal in contrast with the infinite. 'It is not without reason, brother Toby, that learned men write dialogues on long noses' (T.S., III, 37)."19

Sterne's humour in the novel derives mainly from the ridiculous absurdity of life-less learning, or blind conformity to tradition, and its 'disproportion' to the finer values of life.

In his Invocation to the 'Gentle Spirit of sweetest humour' Sterne remembers Cervantes. He says, elsewhere, that

"the happiness of the Cervantic humour arises from ... describing silly and trifling events with the circumstantial pomp of great ones".21

Walter Shandy, the principal comic figure in the novel, sees a profound philosophical significance in every subject on earth - whether it is Tristram's procreation, or his nose or naming, or his breeching. Thus, in the affair of his son's
breeching, Walter not only tries to engage his unphilosophical wife in a learned discussion on the subject (without any success, of course),

"he consulted Albertus Rubenius upon it ... it was Rubenius's business to have given my father some lights. - On the contrary, my father might as well have thought of extracting the seven cardinal virtues out of a long beard, - as of extracting a single word out of Rubenius upon the subject"22;

for, though Rubenius enlightened him upon every article of ancient dress-and shoes, it said little about breeches. So

"almost every distinction of habiliment was lost"23

upon him, but the expression, *Latus Clavus*, caught his fancy. And so, as the tailor was making Tristram's breeches, Walter Shandy stood by his side

"reading him as he sat at work a lecture upon the Latus Clavus"24

Earlier, the splenetic Dr. Slop's firing of curses at Obadiah excites the learned curiosity of Walter Shandy. Though Walter himself seldom curses or swears ("I hold it bad"), yet if he falls into it by accident, he sees to it that the curse answers its purpose. For this reason, he has

"the greatest veneration in the world for that gentleman, who, in distrust of his own discretion in this point, sat down and composed ... fit forms of swearing suitable to all cases, from the lowest to the highest provocation which could possibly happen to him - which forms being well considered by him, and such moreover as he could stand to, he kept them ever by him on the chimney-piece, within his reach, ready for use".25

Walter's learning really has become funny; it has clouded his awareness of the realities and the finer values of life. Thus, though he loves his servant Obadiah and would not like him to be cursed, he suffers Dr. Slop to read the long list of curses.
from Ernulphus and apply them to poor Obadiah, while the un­
learned Toby recoils from this outrage on humanity. Humorist St­
orne, equating the two - learning and levity (that is, 'finite
great' and 'little'), shows their equal unimportance before
the infinite great, namely, the sentiments of love and sympathy
which bring supreme bliss and fulfilment to life.

Sterne's humoristic genius is revealed in this fre­
quent equating of the high and the low, of the serious and the
ludicrous. We note the parallel existence of the high and the
low in the Shandy family itself. Every 'high' discussion in the
parlour is accompanied by a 'low' one in the kitchen - thanks
to the bad hinge of the parlour door (left unrepaired for ten
years), which prevented full closing of the door and made it
possible for the servants to get easy scent of the parlour ta­
lks. Thus, the philosophic oration of Walter in the parlour
on the death of Bobby, and the lay oration of Trim on the sa­
me subject in the kitchen, go together. Then again, as servant
Obadiah hears of the death of Bobby, his mind at once goes to
his master's Oxmoor project, to which his master will put him,
now that his other project of sending Bobby abroad has misca­
rried. The petty scheme of land reclamation is placed by the
sombre circumstance of death. During Trim's speech, again, the
serious business of fighting is subtly equated with the trifl­
ing one of driving a coach. Death, corporal Trim says, has no
terrors for him in the battle-field; it is only dreadful in
the house. And Jonathan, the coachman, at once puts in -

"I never mind it myself ... upon the coach-box".33

Elsewhere, love - the preserver of life, is equated to war,
which destroys life — 

"Love, an' please your honour, is exactly like war, in this; that a soldier, though he has escaped three weeks complete o' Saturday night, — may nevertheless be shot through his heart on Sunday morning". 34

And so it happened to Uncle Toby. As the amorous wadman leaves the sentry-box, the good Toby confesses to his emotional disturbance, to his faithful Trim —

"I am in love, corporal! quoth my uncle Toby. In love! — said the corporal — your honour was very well the day before yesterday, ... She has left a ball here — added my uncle Toby — pointing to his breast. —35

But perhaps the finest illustration of Sterne's humour is provided by the Maria scene in T.S. Traveller Tristram meets poor Maria at Moulins. She is in deep distraction for her disappointment in love, caused by the intrigues of the curate. She is

"sitting upon a bank playing her vespers upon her pipe, with her little goat beside her". 36

Tristram, who is deeply moved, comes out of his chaise, and seats himself between Maria and her goat.

"Maria looked wistfully for some time at me, then at her goat — and then at me — and then at her goat again, and so on, alternately — Well, Maria, said I softly — What resemblance do you find?" 37

Here the humorous equation of man and beast preserves the balance of sentiment, and saves it (sentiment) from running into waste — as Herbert Read appropriately points out ("the goat saves the situation"). It should be noted that Sterne, as narrator Tristram, reminds us immediately after the Maria-Tristram meeting, that his idea of the 'resemblance' of man and beast was not 'an unseasonable pleasantry in the venerable presence of Misery', but it came from his
"numblest conviction of what a Beast man is".39

The humorous equation of man and beast drives home to us the unity of creation and their equal insignificance before the Supreme Being. The humorous reversal is thus really a straightening up. Sir Leslie Stephen, who saw in the Maria scene 'the pathetic' melting 'into the ludicrous', missed its true 'humorous' significance.

Watts-Dunton, noting the varied nature of Sterne's humour, finds it in

"the irony of man's intercourse with himself and with nature, the irony of the intercourse between man the spiritual being and man the physical being - the irony, in short, of man's position amid these natural conditions of life and death".41

He goes on to say -

"It is in the apprehension of this anomaly - a spiritual nature enclosed in a physical nature - that Sterne's strength lies ... There is nothing incongruous in the condition of the lower animals, because they are in entire harmony with their natural surroundings, ... but imagine a spiritual being so placed, so surrounded, and so functioned, and you get an absurdity, compared with which all other absurdities are non-existent".41

Referring to the ass-scene in T.S.'(Bk.VII, Ch.32), Watts-Dunton says that

"to Yorick it is not so much the donkey who is absurd, as the fantastic creature who made the panniers(on the back of the Mor ass) and cooked the macaroons".41

Man, who is a spiritual creature, 

"is out of harmony with everything; he advances till at last he turns all the other creatures into food or else into weight-carriers, and outstrips them so completely that he forgets he is one of them".41

Indeed, Toby, who lets the disturbing fly go, saying that
the world is 'wide enough to hold both thee and me', has less right to patronise the fly than the fly Toby himself. Watts-Dunton then comes to the conclusion that Sterne's humour derives from the

"abiding sense of the struggle between man's spiritual nature and the conditions of his physical nature". 43

This 'struggle', or 'anomaly', or sense of incongruity of the ideal, spiritual state of man with his actual condition provides - according to Watts-Dunton - the comic amusement in Sterne. But this apparent 'anomaly' or incongruity is only a revelation of harmony. The reversal of the accepted order is not in reality a reversal, but a revelation of universal harmony. It only appears to be a reversal, because of 'the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude' covering our minds - as Coleridge would say. Humour, by reversing the accepted order or convention, by the equation of the high and the low, helps us to see life in its true, universal perspective.

(iii) Humour, folly, indecency. Many of the so-called indecencies in T.S. can be explained by this humoristic device of equating the high and the low. When asked about his identity by the Count de B-, at Versailles, the author

"took up Hamlet (which was lying on the Count's table), and turning immediately to the grave-diggers' scene in the fifth act, I laid my finger upon YORICK, and advancing the book to the Count, with my finger all the way over the name - Ne voici! said I". 45 (i.e., 'Here I am').

Yorick Sterne saw 'Every thing in this world' 'big with jest'; and, as in the case of Shakespeare's fools, some of our Yorick's jests, too, have a higher meaning. The episode of the
hot chestnut - the grotesque prelude to the conference of the learned divines, for example, is Sterne's comic device to drive home the hollowness of the Clerical debate over Tristram's name. Powys, who wishes that the scene of the Visitation Dinner had better been omitted from the novel, fails to note that the Church scholars' discussion on the validity of baptism - a discussion entirely irrelevant to the present question (of changing Tristram's name), with their supreme unconcern with human values (they arrive at the strange, ridiculous conclusion that "the mother is not of kin to her child"), is really as ridiculous as the fall of the hot chestnut into the trousers of Phutatorius. Traill, too, did not note this humoristic significance of the scene when he described it as a 'piece of low comedy'. The high and the low are put side by side, to reveal the insignificance of both. The vulgar accident of the windowsash is similarly inserted in the novel to serve as an equation to the futile philosophy of Tristram's father, who, immediately after the accident, gathers up his books on circumcision and begins discussing learned theories from them. The chapter on Whiskers (T.S., V, 1), which shows how 'the extremes of delicacy, and the beginnings of concupiscence' meet, is the author's rapier thrust at the false sense of delicacy among the society ladies, whose sense of chastity is often finical, rather than fine.

(iv) Humour, whimsicality. We have said, humour is happy indulgence at folly, and its essence is freedom and non-conformity (p. 266, ante). Humour is perpetually hitting at cant. And
"Of all the cants which are canted in this canting world ... the cant of criticism is the most tormenting!"  

Sterne's free jesting spirit, mixed up with the mischievous propensity "to pluck at your (i.e., the 'graver gentry's') beards", and in a non-chalant mockery of tradition, introduces the technical oddities in the novel, which have been dismissed as mere whimsicalities by the orthodox critics. These oddities are - insertion of the 'Author's Preface' in Book III (between chapters 20 and 21), his blank page (Bk. VI) - put in, as he says, to enable the reader to paint widow Wadman's beauty to his own mind (the blank page is followed by the author's curious comment -

"Thrice happy book! thou wilt have one page, at least within thy covers, which Malice will not blacken, and which Ignorance cannot misrepresent".

his blank chapters 18 and 19 in Book IX and their later insertion (after chapter 25), his omitted chapter (24 of Bk. IV) with the explanation that the omission was necessitated by considerations of artistic balance in the whole work, his various figures - such as, that of the black marble slab on Yorick's tomb, the graph of his technique, and so on. These are eccentricities indulged for the sake of shocking our sense of tradition, our blind faith in conformity. The business of humour - we have pointed out - is to delightfully reverse the accepted order, and to shock us out of our complacency. Sterne's technical oddities curiously reveal to us the folly of rigid adherence to set rules in a work of art. He has his digs frequently at critics, who would judge a work of art by fixed rules and make no allowance for imagination in it -
"And how did Garrick speak the soliloquy last night? — Oh, against all rule, my Lord, — most ungrammatically! ... he suspended his voice in the epilogue a dozen times three seconds and three fifths by a stop-watch, my Lord, each time. — Admirable grammarian! — but in suspending his voice — was the sense suspended likewise? Did no expression of attitude or countenance fill up the chasm? — Was the eye silent? Did you narrowly look? — I looked only at the stop-watch, my Lord. — Excellent observer!"61

Sterne's occasional freaks of form may thus be taken to be his comic thrusts at his 'canting' critics — the blind followers of set rules, who would not

"let people tell their stories their own way".62

Sterne's occasional pretensions of conformity to rules are part of the same game with the diehards of tradition. For example, at the end of Book VI of the novel, after a spate of digressions, the narrator feigns to relent, and promises to improve. He says that he has digressed too much, and that he will now tell the story in hand ('my uncle Toby's story') 'in a tolerable straight line'. But actually, a whole Book(VII) of 45 chapters intervenes between his pious promise and its execution. Again, even as he digresses — by introducing a conversation with friend 'Eugenius' about a monk and a nun — in the midst of his story of running away from Death, he tells his reader —

"there is nothing in this world I abominate worse, than to be interrupted in a story".65

Sterne's comic baiting of critics is seen still in another way — namely, in his occasional pleading of difficulties as narrator. As corporal Trim tells Walter Shandy that Dr. Slop is making a bridge (for the broken nose of the just-born Tristram), Toby, who is immersed in his hobby-horse, takes the
word to mean the bridge of his bowling-green; for a little while ago Trim had brought the 'mortars' for the siege, and he (Trim) was also at the time busy making a new 'bridge'(draw-bridge) – the existing one having been broken in an accident. Now, in order to explain why

"my uncle Toby mistook the bridge",66

the narrator has to tell the story of Toby's bridge and of Trim's adventure in it 'much against my will'; because the story will be out of place here;

"by right it should come in, either amongst the anecdotes of my uncle Toby's amours with widow Wadman, in which corporal Trim was no mean actor - or else in the middle of his and my uncle Toby's campaigns on the bowling-green - for it will do very well in either place";66

but if he does so,

"I'll ruin the story I'm upon; and if I tell it here - I anticipate matters, and ruin it there".66

He asks his readers and critics -

"-What would your worships have me do in this case?"66

He imagines the reply of some -

"Tell it, Mr. Shandy, by all means"66;

and of others -

"You are a fool, Tristram, if you do"66.

So, crossed between them, in a comic cry of authorial distress, narrator Tristram prays to the gracious 'Powers' presiding 'over this vast empire of biographical freebooters', to "set up a guide-post" at the point where

"three several roads meet ... as they have done just here".67

The narrator knows, of course, what to do – namely, to tell it
here; and he does so too. But as a humorist he must shake his 'cap and bells' at his critics. Indeed, he never leaves his 'fool's cap' in telling his story. He says at one place

"Pray reach me my fool's cap ... I'll put it on." 68

Thus, Sterne conceives his relationship with his critics - the advocates of orthodoxy - in the same comic light in which he sees all life. Humour, according to Coleridge, suggests 'some peculiarity of individual temperament and character'. Tristram Shandy provides a most fitting illustration of it.

(v) Humour and plagiarism. Sterne sometimes turns his comic spirit even on the authors, from whom he borrows.

"Shall we for ever make new books, as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring only out of one vessel into another?" 70

- he says in the novel. Critics, like Walter Scott, who charge our author with the same fault as he (Sterne) ridicules in the simile of the apothecaries, ignore the fact that Sterne in his comic gaiety often completely alters the significance of his 'stolen' passages, in a manner which would be shocking to the source-author. Walter Shandy's oration, for example, on the inevitability of death and on the transitoriness of existence, is taken from Burton, in whose Anatomy of Melancholy Sterne found a ready stock of philosophical sayings on the subject. Burton gives an account of the different ways of bereavement of the ancients, some of whom discharged their grief by philosophizing upon it. Burton was here suggesting a philosophical remedy for the melancholy arising out of bereavement; Sterne, the
humorist and apostle of feeling, on the other hand, suggests the futility of such philosophic, or intellectual, solace. Burton reminds us that wise men should be temperate, constant, free from passion, and so, without sorrow. Death should be rather a matter for happiness, and birth for sorrow; and so he (Burton) quotes the example of the Thracians, who

"wept ... when a child was born, feasted and made mirth when any man was buried: and so should rather be glad for such as die well, that they are so happily freed from the miseries of this life"74

Sterne found in this idea matter for amusement. And so, even as he sets his philosophic Shandy on the track of Burton (Walter Shandy says too -

"The Thracians wept when a child was born ... ")75, he puts this comic comment immediately afterwards, in the mouth of the unlearned, but human, Toby Shandy -

"and we were very near it"75

- a reference to Walter Shandy's grief over the broken nose and the misnaming of the just-born Tristram. Sterne takes the illustrations and the words of philosophic grief from Burton, and uses them for his own comic purpose. Thus, even as he transcribes passages from his 'original', he laughs him out of his wisdom. This is seen in another - a smaller, but no less interesting - example. Philosopher Shandy's faith in astrology and in the working of unseen forces in man's life leads him to discuss the position of the stars and planets at the time of Tristram's birth, and thus explain his (Tristram's) ill luck. Thus Walter Shandy tells parson Yorick -

"Astrologers ... know better than us both: the trine and sextil aspects have jumped awry, - or the opposite of their ascendants have not hit it, as they
should, - or the lords of the genitures (as they call them) have been at bo-peep, - or something has been wrong above, or below with us".76

Now, this reference to the 'trine and sextil aspects' (i.e., the position of the stars) going 'awry', and 'the lords of the genitures' playing 'bo-peep', has been taken again from Burton. Burton, in his analysis of love-melancholy, gives different explanations of why persons dote on their pleasant objects of love. He says -

"The physicians refer this to their temperament, astrologers to trine and sextile aspects, or opposite of their several ascendants, lords of their genitures, love and hatred of planets".77

Humorist Sterne, while using Burton's words, makes fun of this astrological explanation of man's life and personality, or temperament, which - according to Sterne - is governed by subjective factors.

Humour entered Sterne's creative spirit so entire, because of his abounding love of life. Humour was no mere trick of writing with him; it was an essential element in his personality. A 'loving humour' - Thackeray said - is 'a genial writer's habit of being'.78

(c) The humorist on the wrong tack:

*Tristram Shandy* has been called an unchaste book by some critics. In reply to a correspondent, Sterne refers to such charges of immorality against his work with incisive iron-

"... for the chaste married and chaste unmarried part of the sex - they must not read my book! Heaven forbid the stock of chastity should be lessened by the *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* - yes, his Opinions - it would certainly
The eminent Richardson, while noting - or regretting - the great popularity of *Tristram Shandy* in London, charged it with 'uncommon indecencies'. Goldsmith found in *Tristram Shandy* (though he did not name the work) 'pertness' and 'the bawdy'. In the next century, Thackeray saw in Sterne's work 'a latent corruption - a hint, as of an impure presence', 'the foul satyr's eyes' leering 'out of the leaves constantly'. Bagehot called *Tristram Shandy* 'an indecent novel', and noted in it 'indecency for indecency's sake'. And Leslie Stephen, echoing the great Thackeray, said that Sterne was "always peeping into forbidden corners".

Walter Scott, however, denied that "the licentious humour of *Tristram Shandy* is of the kind which applies itself to the passions or is calculated to corrupt society";

but he added that "it is a sin against taste, if allowed to be harmless as to morals".

While much of this criticism against Sterne is unfair to our author - arising, as it does, out of his critics' overbearing sense of morality on the one hand, and disregard of the true nature of Sterne's humoristic writing (see ante, sec. (b)(iii)) on the other, it cannot be denied that *Tristram Shandy* contains some grotesque hints and low jests, which cannot apply to the author's comic intention. They seem to be indulged for sheer fun, and to issue out of a spirit of irresponsible gaiety - a mischievous propensity to tickle our subdued longing for the forbidden. The overflow of the author's free, gay
spirits led him to this indiscretion. A few examples will make it clear.

Early in the novel, in the Shandy parlour the joke on the scientific instrument of Dr. Slop is turned into an indecent suggestion of the forceps taking out the foetus at the hip and the consequent risk of a vital accident. The idea, of course, emanates from the foolish Slop, who has a ridiculously low sense of humour (see ante, Chap XI, character-sketch of Dr. Slop); and he whispers it 'very low to my father'. Equally vulgar is the suggestion of the cure to the burn of Phutatorius. Sterne at times indulges in 'double entendres'. Referring to Walter Shandy's idea of sending his elder son to foreign travel for education, the author says -

"It had ever been the custom of the family ... that the eldest son of it should have free ingress, egress, and regress into foreign parts before marriage - not only for the sake of bettering his own private parts, by the benefit of exercise and change of so much air - but simply for the mere delectation of his fancy, by the feather put into his cap, of having been abroad".89

The play with the words 'foreign' and 'private parts' is certainly not an evidence of refined taste; and it has little thematic, or artistic, significance. Such double meaning also attaches to the word 'spouts' in Yorick's statement to Trim -

"You have cut out spouts enow".90

This 'double entendre', with its occasion - namely, the accident of Tristram by the window-sash, comes in between two delightful scenes of comedy - that of the parallel learned and lay orations on Bobby's death by Walter and Trim respectively, and the other of Walter's learned discourses arising out of...
his Tristramhshire. In such cases, we feel inclined to agree
with Leslie Stephen who said that Sterne puts 'filth into a
scent bottle'. Though the amorous episode of Uncle Toby and
widow Wadman has been delightfully rendered (Bks. VIII & IX),
the author throws in, here and there, a few unchaste hints,
in their conversation - as, for example, where references are
made to Toby's wound in the groin and Mrs.Wadman's inquisi-

tiveness about it, motivated by her considerations of matrimony.
That 'just balance betwixt wisdom and folly', which marks his
humour, is lacking in such cases. Perhaps his Renaissance sym-
pathies (as evident in his treatment of the theme of procreati-

philosophic

on, which is traditionally looked upon with disdain) laughed to
scorn the squeamish code of morality made by 'Prudes and Tartu-
fs', - a code which strains at gnats while swallowing camels.
Even so, his comic genius could as well steer clear of such low
jests and innuendoes, however fragmentary they may be. Here St-
erne was like his Yorick, who, with all his good qualities,
"had but too many temptations in life, of scattering
his wit and his humour, - his gibes and his jests about him".97