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Author(s): Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean

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Of Forceps, Patents, and Paternity: *Tristram Shandy*

DONNA LANDRY and
GERALD MACLEAN

FEW FICTIONAL BIRTHS HAVE BEEN SO OVERWRITTEN, so meticulously “historicized” as *Tristram Shandy*’s. The event is overprepared, that much is certain, and the digressions and dislocations through which Sterne presents Tristram’s conception and delivery could stand as exemplary of all the other narratives which comprise the novel. If, as Shklovsky argued, *Tristram Shandy* is the most typical novel in world literature, such narratives as Sterne’s representation of the midwife, which seems both incidental and crucial, which can never finally be told but which *must* be told, may provide the most typical narrative in novelistic literature.¹ As an effect of discourse, the figure of the midwife in *Tristram Shandy* represents, among other things, a nexus of crucial positions in the early-modern debates about obstetric authority in general and licencing in particular, debates which clearly indicate a strong and persistent male fear of what these women might get up to if left to manage childbirth on their own.

If Sterne’s literary project in the novel can be seen as in some sense a materialist critique of novelistic conventions with respect to the anxious narratives of male history, then the re-situating of characters in relation to their socio-cultural circumstances is likely to involve some demystification of ideal origins in favor of an historical analysis of writing and of birth that will problematize the novelistic construction of “character.” It is thus not surprising that contemporary discourses on midwifery and obstetrics should prove one of the crucial discursive matrices from which this new, demystificatory novel has been written.

Amidst its radical subversions of textual conventions, we shall suggest, *Tristram Shandy* not only satirizes Locke’s influential theory of knowledge,² but does

¹ Victor Shklovsky, “Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*: Stylistic Commentary,” in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: Univ of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 57.

² Sterne’s use of Locke has long been debated. On Sterne’s specifically satiric treatment of Lockean epistemology, see Robert Alter, “*Tristram Shandy* and the Game of Love,” *American Scholar* 38 (1968): 316–23; Peter M. Briggs, “Locke’s *Essay* and the Strategies of Eighteenth-Century English Satire,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*

so by destabilizing, and ambiguously affirming, eighteenth-century gender codes based on mechanistic ideas about character and sexual difference. For in satirizing the languages of obstetrics, Sterne engages most fully the interrelations of class and gender. And it is here, in Sterne's use of obstetric discourse, that we would locate possible strategies of resistance to the forgetfulness which Marx thought was essential to state formation.

Of History, Men, and Midwives

Sterne's text, stylistically and thematically, unhinges any simple male/female gender division in favor of multiplicity and excess. Critics have recently remarked upon the novel's "subversive" femininity, and some have termed Sterne's personae "androgynous."³ But the terms in which Sterne presents the crisis of masculinity peculiar to his times are psycho-sexually dynamic in keeping with his critique of the mechanistic self of Lockean epistemology. Applying the label of "androgyny" attempts a too-easy resolution of the gender instability generated by the text, the substitution of a new cross-gendered identity for traditional masculinity, but a stable identity nonetheless.

In a different sense, the novel is not about femininity, but through its feminizing, or anti-phallogocentric style, it reveals something about the styles

10 (1981): 135–51; and W. G. Day, "Tristram Shandy: Locke May Not be the Key," in *Laurence Sterne: Riddles and Mysteries*, ed. Valerie Myer (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1984), pp. 75–83. For an approach which argues for Sterne's sober imitation of Locke, see Helene Moglen, *The Philosophical Irony of Sterne* (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 1975).

³ Critics have placed themselves on one or the other side. William Bowman Piper, pointing toward the resolution of class-specific anxieties of property-owning men, writes in *Laurence Sterne* (New York: Twayne, 1965), p. 82: "Tristram's continued concern with his father and his Uncle Toby should serve society as a constant reminder of sex's vast personal consequences and its family ties." Robert A. Erickson in *Mother Midnight: Birth, Sex, and Fate in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (Defoe, Richardson, and Sterne) (New York: AMS Press, 1986) argues there is a "a feminine matrix for the novel—the mind-womb of the actual author," p. 203, and that the novel is a kind of "midwife book," which "through the double vision of 'Tristram' and 'Yorick,' shows an exceptional *human* sensitivity to the feminine origins of life and creation—physical, mental, and imaginative," p. 204. Erickson also alludes to an "androgynous Tristram" (p. 250), without elaborating what this term might mean. In "Clocks, Calendars, and Names: The Troubles of Tristram and the Aesthetics of Uncertainty," (forthcoming), J. Paul Hunter suggests that despite a professed reverence for his father and the Shandy name, Tristram's writing is an "inheritance" from his mother, whom he hates and fears because of the threat her "subversive creative imagination" poses to linear or patriarchal order, p. 283. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick characterizes Yorick in *A Sentimental Journey* as a sign of "the ideological use of male 'androgyny'" and "the specific homosocial anxieties of the male middle-class intellectual," *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia Press, 1985), p. 72. Sedgwick's Yorick thus figures in curious distinction from Hunter's, whose Yorick represents a credible alternate father for Tristram in "Clocks, Calendars, and Names," pp. 269–70, 274–76.

of masculinity available in Sterne's cultural milieu. In one sense, then, Tristram's narrative resists his father's cut and thrust linearity as a sign of his castration, his effeminacy. Tristram's digressions are at odds with Walter's "skirmishing, cutting kind of a slashing way with him in his disputations, thrusting and ripping" (8.34).⁴ But that textual "femininity" is also re-routed as heterosexual in its coy addresses to female readers, and as homosocial in its complicity with male bonding in the narrative, over and against female silence and enigmatic otherness.⁵

Once Sterne's eponymous hero has begun having difficulty giving birth to himself on paper, once he has started transgressing certain conventions of characterization in the interests of telling the "truth" of what happened in meticulous material and metaphorical detail, female bodies and obstetrical knowledges assume a crucial importance. It proves as difficult for Tristram to narrate the story of the midwife as it is for him to narrate any of the stories that compose, layer, and inflect his own. We are told first that she is "a thin, upright, motherly, notable, good old body of a midwife," (1:7)⁶ that she has "no small degree of reputation in the world" (within a radius of four or five miles), and that she had been left "a widow in great distress, with three or four small children, in her forty-seventh year" (1:7)⁷ when Parson Yorick's wife decided that the parish needed a licensed midwife, for the parish's good as well as this woman's. This is the fullest physical description and socio-historical account of a character we have yet been given, and it is one that enables Sterne to show how birth engages with socio-political institutions from the beginning. Tristram's characterization of the midwife is not, strictly speaking, *interrupted* by the question of the licensing of midwives any more than it is *interrupted* by the discussion of Parson Yorick's life history ending with his death, which occupies three chapters. Rather, this female character is constituted by and within these histories of social regulation, of licensing and clerical authority. "When this is done," we are told at the

⁴ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Ian Campbell Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 474. All quotations are from this edition, which we have compared with the text of the "Florida" edition, ed. Melvyn New and Joan New, 2 vols. (Gainesville, Fla.: Univ. of Florida Press, 1978), 2:722. Subsequent citations will be given to volume and chapter with notes to page references to these editions by "Ross" and "New."

⁵ On the structure of male homosociality ("male bonding") as occupying a continuum of desire with homosexuality, and on the construction of "male homosocial desire" in relation to the exchanging and excluding of women, see Sedgwick, *Between Men*, pp. 1-2, pp. 16-27. Though Sedgwick's work has been criticized for appropriating the discourse of gay male identity politics in the service of feminism and theory ("theoretical abstraction"), her insistence on the need to theorize the complex, incongruent, and non-synchronous effects of multiple oppressions seems indispensable. See David Van Leer, "The Beast of the Closet: Homosociality and the Pathology of Manhood," *Critical Inquiry* 15:3 (1989): 587-605, "Critical Response: Trust and Trade," *Critical Inquiry* 15:4 (1989): 758-63; and Sedgwick's reply in "Critical Response: Tide and Trust," *Critical Inquiry* 15:4 (1989): 745-57.

⁶ Ross, p. 11; New 1:10.

⁷ Ross, p. 11; New 1:10.

end of Volume I, Chapter Ten, "if nothing stops us in our way, we will go on with the midwife" (1.10).⁸

The midwife is crucial to Sterne's theory of the novel. When Chapter Thirteen picks up the thread, we are reminded in a characteristically Shandean way of the midwife's function, and Tristram reassures himself that his forgetful readers need reminding of the midwife's crucial place at the scene of his birth in the following way: "—'twas right to take care that the poor woman should not be lost in the mean time; — because when she is wanted we can no way do without her" (1.13).⁹ Since the figure of Sterne's midwife is a character in a novel, an effect of writing, she at once stands for more and less than this narrative typicality, since her very specificity as a midwife is far from irrelevant to understanding her narrative function. Indeed, while the midwife's story could be understood as no more than a digressive interruption of Tristram's autobiography, an effect of a peculiarly non-linear, subversively "feminine," anti-cutting and thrusting narrative style, such a reading wouldn't get us very far in understanding Sterne's constructing his novel from contemporary debates about midwifery and birthing practices. Like the detailed narrative of Tristram's birth, she belongs to a class- and gender-specific discourse concerning birth, with which *Tristram Shandy* directly engages.

Sterne was shrewdly observant of how, amidst the socio-technical developments of his day, birth had come to have rather more to do with male anxieties and social regulation than it did with biology or medicine. After all, marriage in the novel remains a social institution largely concerned with negotiating property relations and only secondarily with matters of romantic love and sexual affection. Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen are largely devoted to Mrs. Shandy's marriage settlement, Chapters Sixteen and Seventeen to Mr. Shandy's deciding to act upon it—disciplining his wife for her previous false pregnancy by decreeing that, pregnant with our hero, she is to lie in at Shandy Hall rather than in London—and it is only by the end of Chapter Eighteen that the scene is set for Tristram's delivery. In lieu of the "famous Dr. *Maningham*" (1:18)¹⁰ of London, Mrs. Shandy insists on having the female midwife and not the local man midwife, or "*Accoucheur*,—if you please, quoth Dr. *Slop*" (2:12)¹¹ to assist in Tristram's delivery:

—notwithstanding there was a scientifick operator within so near a call as eight miles of us, and who, moreover, had expressly wrote a five shillings book upon the subject of midwifery, in which he had exposed, not only the blunders of the sisterhood itself,——but had likewise superadded many curious improvements for the quicker extraction of the foetus in cross births, and some other cases of danger which belay [sic] us in getting into the world; notwithstanding all this, my mother, I say, was absolutely determined to trust her life and mine with it, into no soul's hand but this old woman's only. (1.18)¹²

⁸ Ross, p. 20; New 1:24.

⁹ Ross, p. 31; New 1:39.

¹⁰ Ross, p. 38; New 1:50.

¹¹ Ross, p. 90; New 1:130.

¹² Ross, p. 38; New 1:50–1.

Sterne's portrait is of a child seemingly preoccupied by and unnaturally mindful of the material conditions of its birth. (This is, as we shall argue more fully later, not unlike the capitalist state in Marx's account, that becomes neglectful of the agents which brought it into being.) But in Tristram's rather begrudging tone, we are invited to notice how that remembering is heavily gender-inflected in favor of male theory and "expertise" at the expense of female "experience." This passage reenacts its historical moment in detailing how professional medical assistance at the birth requires a compromise between Walter Shandy's scientific experimentalism and his wife's commonsensical empiricism; she wants the experienced hands of a woman, he wants the authority of a male narrator of obstetrics. Tristram understands the economic and social terms of this negotiation which, he explains, results in a compromise that brings both midwife and Slop onto the scene: "In a word, my mother was to have the old woman,—and the operator was to have licence to drink a bottle of wine with my father and my uncle *Toby Shandy* in the back parlour,—for which he was to be paid five guineas" (1.18).¹³ And so, amidst the gendered languages of obstetric activity, Slop and the midwife are introduced as mutually constitutive socio-technical agents of Tristram's birth-history.

When Arthur H. Cash, Sterne's most recent scholarly biographer, ponders the lines we just quoted, he finds evidence to support his view that Dr. Slop "is" Dr. John Burton, the York physician.¹⁴ Burton was a Tory accused of Jacobitism during the Forty-Five, and the author of several works on midwifery, including an attack on Dr. William Smellie (whom Cash and others have identified with Sterne's *Adrianus Smelvogt*¹⁵), a Lanarkshire man with a London practice who wrote a three-volume treatise on midwifery which became a standard reference work.¹⁶ Cash is on solid ground in thinking Sterne knew Burton, since

¹³ Ross, p. 42; New 1:55–6.

¹⁴ Cash's article, "The Birth of Tristram Shandy: Sterne and Dr. Burton," first appeared in *Studies in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. R. F. Brissenden (Canberra: Australian National Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 133–54. Cash repeats his argument that Slop equals Burton in his biography, *Laurence Sterne: The Early & Middle Years* (London: Methuen, 1975), *Laurence Sterne: The Later Years* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), and *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Paul-Gabriel Boucé (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 198–224. The resemblance between Slop and Burton was noticed as early as Alban Doran's "Burton ('Dr. Slop'): His Forceps and His Foes," *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of the British Empire* 23 (1913): 3–24 and 65–86, cited by Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg in "Is Childbirth Any Place for a Woman? The Decline of Midwifery in Eighteenth-Century England," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 10 (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1981), pp. 393–408, a comprehensive guide to the scholarly recovery of early-modern debates on obstetrics. Most recently, the matter has been taken up by Erickson in *Mother Midnight*.

¹⁵ See Cash, "The Birth of Tristram Shandy" in Brissenden, p. 137, n. 5. Further citations by page number in the text refer to this version of the article.

¹⁶ On Smellie's importance in the history of obstetric science, see R. W. Johnstone, "Professor-Emeritus of Midwifery and the Diseases of Women, University of Edinburgh," *William Smellie, The Master of British Midwifery* (Edinburgh and London: E & S Livingstone, 1952) and the essays by Roy Porter, Angus McLaren, Adrian Wilson, Edward Shorter, and L. J. Jordanova in W. F. Bynum and Roy Porter, eds., *William Hunter and the Eighteenth-Century Medical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985).

they had run against each other in the York by-election of 1741 (p. 134). To the biographer, the evidence then speaks for itself. Sterne evidently knew the man and doubtless consulted his writings on obstetrics. But Cash takes a reductive approach. He does not argue but states positively that "the reference is to Burton's *Essay towards a Complete New System of Midwifery*, 1751" (p. 134). Since the *Essay* concludes with an appendix describing the benefits to mankind of Burton's recently invented forceps, Cash entertains no doubts that Slop and Burton are the same, that they somehow share an identity. When the historical record seems to dispute the identification, he ingeniously contrives to argue around it. Since Burton, although sympathetic to the Jacobite cause, was a Protestant, Cash must somehow account for Slop's Catholicism; he suggests Sterne was making "a very serious charge against Dr. Burton"—that he was a Catholic.¹⁷

If we were inclined to accept the kind of literary history in which characters and situations from Sterne's fiction point to real historical characters and situations from the author's life, *and nowhere else*, we might also think that Sterne's engagement with the debates about midwifery can lead us no further than the, by now rather well-known, historical shift from female midwifery as folk practice to male midwifery and obstetrics as medical science: the historical defeat of the female sex, as Engels called it, enacted yet once more. This is pretty much where Cash's 1966 article and 1975 biography leave us, with the scene of Slop/Burton taking over from the incompetent midwife, another victory in the progress of male scientific authority. But a materialist-feminist reading of the early discourses on midwifery, deployed through Sterne's characterizations and the events that condition Tristram's birth, will reveal a more complicated texture of socio-historical allusion than a verdict of strictly gendered political struggle would allow.¹⁸ It will also enable us to correct a fairly authoritative

¹⁷ Cash, "The Birth of Tristram Shandy," p. 148. The identification also leads Cash into having to address false problems, as when he informs us that: "Within medical history . . . the birth of Tristram makes no chronological sense. In 1718, the year of Tristram's birth, forceps were unknown in England and Dr. John Burton was only 8 years old" (p. 138, n. 7). The celebrated Chamberlen family had been using them in England since the seventeenth century; Cash may be referring to the published descriptions of these forceps in the writings of Butter (1733), Chapman (1735), and Giffard (edited posthumously by Hody, 1734); see Adrian Wilson, "William Hunter and the Varieties of Man-Midwifery," in Bynum and Porter, eds. *William Hunter*, p. 346. Burton's age is only a problem if we insist that Slop "is" Burton.

¹⁸ The debates about operating together Marxist and feminist analyses of class and gender oppression have shifted since the 1970s onto the wider terrain of materialist—Marxist-inflected or post-Marxist—debates concerning the political effects of other forms of subject-constitution and oppression, involving questions of race, ethnicity, imperialism, nationalism, and sexuality in the context of a "postmodern," multinational-capitalist international division of labor. See our entry, "Feminism IV: Materialist Feminisms" in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, eds. Michael Groden and Martin Kreiswirth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, forthcoming 1990/1). For a recent critique of "materialist feminism's" failure to move beyond a "dual systems" approach which privileges gender, see Rosemary Hennessy and Rajeswari Mohan, "The Construction of Woman in Three Popular Texts of Empire: Towards a Critique of Materialist Feminism," *Textual Practice* 3:3 (1989): 323–59; they argue for a critique "directed as much against new imperialism, white supremacy, homophobia, and class exploita-

biographical-historical account of Sterne's use of this discourse while indicating some problems with traditional literary-historical method.¹⁹

Recent scholarship in women's history and in the history of science can help us resituate our reading of both the discourse on obstetrics and Sterne's novel. There is, in the first place, a certain concatenation of gender and social class to be considered when (upwardly mobile, usually middle-class, male) obstetricians and (downwardly mobile, working-class, female) midwives contest who has authority to manage births and regulate reproduction. This social disjunction is particularly acute in the English case, since in England, as Anne Summers puts it, "The office of midwife was not, of course, as it was in contemporary France or Prussia, an officially regulated and respectable profession which attracted educated or genteel women in any large numbers."²⁰ In her groundbreaking study of women in pre-capitalist economic production in England, Alice Clark had classed midwifery among the professions traditionally practiced by women, but which began to slip from their control. Thus, Clark argued, "The fees charged by successful midwives were very high, and *during the first half of the [seventeenth] century* they were considered in no way inferior to doctors in skill"²¹ [emphasis added]. As Jean Donnison observes, however, "the bulk of midwives" were limited by their lack of education and rank "to lowly paid attendance on the Poor."²² These historians of women's work agree that accounts of the history

tion as it is against patriarchy," p. 325. What we are endorsing as materialist feminism attempts to provide just such a critique.

¹⁹ It might at first seem as if Erickson's *Mother Midnight*, the most recent study to discuss *Tristram Shandy* and obstetrics, had done this work. Although he wishes to read Slop as a figure for obstetric science rather than simply John Burton, Erickson reproduces some traditional prejudices in his reconstruction of that eighteenth-century discourse, displaying an unreflective reliance on previous accounts of relations between midwives and physicians (pp. 234, 228, 229–30). See, for example, Erickson's belated "cautionary note," after two paragraphs of rather indiscriminate use of sources to emphasize midwives' poverty, ignorance, and general culpability: "[Thomas] Forbes [in *The Midwife and the Witch* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1966)] does not suggest that all midwives were witches, nor do I wish to imply here or in what follows that midwives, witches, and bawds are all interchangeable functionaries," pp. 17–18.

²⁰ Anne Summers, "The Mysterious Demise of Sarah Gamp: The Domiciliary Nurse and Her Detractors, c. 1830–1860," *Victorian Studies* 32:3 (1989): 365–86; this passage on p. 371. See also Irvine Loudon, *Medical Care and the General Practitioner, 1750–1850* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 91–92, and Jean Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men: A History of Inter-Professional Rivalries and Women's Rights* (London: Heinemann, 1977), pp. 53–54.

²¹ Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1919; rpt., 1982), with an Introduction by Miranda Chaytor and Jane Lewis, pp. 242–43; p. 268. See Chaytor and Lewis's introduction; Mary Prior, ed., *Women in English Society 1500–1800* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985); and Bridget Hill, *Women, Work, and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

²² Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men*, p. 33.

of midwifery tend to be biased against such shadowy lower-class women, taken "in bulk," even when books by midwives like the celebrated Louise Bourgeois, "Midwife to the Queen of France," Jane Sharp, Elizabeth Cellier, and Elizabeth Nihell give ample evidence that women could form a self-regulating professional body, circulating its own self-critical discourses.²³

The struggle was not simply a matter of male treatises eventually triumphing over female heuristic practice. We need to understand the interconnections between shifts within seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discourses on midwifery, by now fairly accessible to literary scholars, and the institutional power struggles within which they were produced, a context into which literary scholars have not yet ventured very far. As Elaine Hobby has most recently argued, it is "difficult to disentangle the history of the struggle for control of midwifery in the seventeenth century" because:

standard accounts of the events side firmly with the College of Physicians, dismissing the 'ignorance' of generations of women's acquired experience, and presenting the midwives' resistance to a male takeover as a stubborn refusal of progress. The major advantage male physicians had was their superior knowledge of anatomy, gained from the two compulsory dissections they had to attend before receiving a medical degree. On the other hand, as the midwives pointed out . . . , men's experience of the events of a normal labour—and the great majority of labours *were* normal—was slight, since they were only called for in cases of extremity.²⁴

"Standard accounts," in this case, would include Cash and Erickson, who think in terms of scientific progress without avoiding its gender bias.

Crucially, the available evidence concerning most midwives' obstetrical knowledge is discernible, as Sterne himself indicates, in the discourse of licensing. On the evidence of licenses that were issued, before applying to the bishops who granted them, an aspiring midwife would most typically have served an unregulated but extensive apprenticeship as a "deputy" to a certified midwife who was bound never to leave her assistant alone at a birth. "It seems that in London, at least," Hobby writes, "women would sometimes train for up to seven years, the standard length of a craft apprenticeship, before applying to a bishop for a licence." Midwives were far from being, as standard accounts imply, an

²³ See *The Compleat Midwives Practice . . . With instructions of the midwife to the Queen of France (L. Bourgeois) . . . touching the . . . said art*, by T. C. [Thomas Chamberlayne], I. D., M. S., T. B., Practitioners (London: Nathaniel Brooke, 1656) for the first English edition of one of the most popular midwives' manuals of the period, featuring Louise Bourgeois's "instructions" to her daughter. See also Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book. Or the whole Art of Midwifery Discovered. Directing Childbearing Women how to behave themselves* (London: Simon Miller, 1671); Elizabeth Cellier, "A Scheme for the Foundation of a Royal Hospital," *Harleian Miscellany*, volume 4, 1745; Elizabeth Nihell, *A Treatise on the Art of Midwifery. Setting forth Various Abuses therein, Especially as to the Practice with Instruments* (London: A. Morley, 1760).

²⁴ Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women's Writing 1649–88* (London: Virago, 1988), p. 183. See also Jane B. Donegan, *Women and Men Midwives* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978), pp. 13–14.

“ignorant” group of women who had been licensed without any regard for their medical knowledge. Although the terms of the oath required before a woman could be granted a license do, indeed, show a far greater concern for her honesty than her knowledge of either medicine or anatomy, the charge of ignorance misses the point, since experience of normal labors has already been assured. What was primarily at stake in licensing was the protection of paternal privilege and property-rights:

Midwives were required to swear an oath which bound them to ensure that no false charges of paternity were brought, no babies swapped, hidden or killed and not to assist at secret confinements (provisions designed to protect primogeniture, dower rights and the life of the infant); to make sure that babies were properly baptised according to Anglican ceremonies, and not to use witchcraft or other devilish arts themselves; and to provide their expertise equally for rich and poor, not using a woman’s pain in childbirth to extort money from her that she would not have given freely.²⁵

Standard historical accounts tend to be blind to questions of gender and sexual ideology in the regulation of reproduction. Ironically, swapped infants and bedside extortions resurface in relation to the two major late seventeenth-century confrontations between midwives and the men who wished to control them, the regulation of midwives and the debates concerning their relative scientific authority.

In both 1616 and 1634, the Chamberlen family, of secret forceps fame, were involved in controversies over the regulation of midwives. In 1688, the family again figures controversially in the obstetrical drama of James II and Mary of Modena’s alleged “warming-pan” infant, to which we shall return. In 1616, midwives, supported by the Chamberlens, petitioned the king to allow them to form a society. When the matter was referred to the College of Physicians, the College suggested instead that midwives should be trained and licensed by physicians, but neither plan went into effect.²⁶ Peter Chamberlen was denied the power

²⁵ Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity*, p. 183.

²⁶ In 1634, Peter Chamberlen tried to procure for himself the sole power of licensing all London midwives and attending at their difficult cases, in response to which the midwives strategically petitioned the College of Physicians, claiming that Chamberlen, an ambitious and energetic “young man,” was plotting to establish a monopoly on deliveries from which physicians as well as midwives would suffer: “That through the molestation of a Doctour in Physick by appointing them to meet at his house once every month without authority, and with intention, as they suppose, to bring about a project of his to have the sole Licensing of them or approving of all such as shall hereafter be Licensed, out of an opinion of himself and his own ability in the Art of Midwifery, implying a necessity of using him and no other both in those cases, and in all other occasions that shall happen to women with Child, presuming that he hath more exact skill than all the grave and learned Physicians in the Kingdom in those cases; for he threatneth that he shall not repair unto such Women as are distressed, whose Midwives have refused to conform themselves to him.” Charles Goodall, *The Royal College of Physicians of London Founded and Established by Law . . . And An Historical Account of the College’s proceedings against Empiricks and unlicensed Practisers in every Princes Reign from their first In-*

to form a monopoly over all London midwives by the College of Physicians. The College's reply, which the midwives sent to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London, by whose authority they had been licensed, upheld the midwives' claim, denying that Chamberlen had any special knowledge, "unless he understand it by the use of Iron instruments," and even those had been used by others "with as good success and dexterity as himself."²⁷ The seventeenth-century disputes resonate with the debates between William Smellie and Elizabeth Nihell in the 1750s, to which Erickson alludes,²⁸ and indicate the frequency with which the eighteenth-century debates repeat earlier discourses, and the continuation well into the eighteenth century of popular midwifery treatises at odds with official scientific opinion, but present in Sterne's text with a vengeance.

Recent scholarship tends to agree that a shift occurred in the discursive representation of reproduction and sexuality sometime during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There seems to have been no clean epistemological break, but rather a class division and proliferation of discourses, a movement which is replicated in obstetric practices as well. The older organic views of women's and men's mutual pleasure being necessary to conception, of an active female sexuality centered on the clitoris, and of the foetus as a preformed or miniature adult, whether the egg or the sperm was primarily responsible, are eventually to be associated with popular manuals and the working classes, while the high discourse becomes mechanically scientific. Sexuality becomes the object of scientific inquiry; reproduction is medicalized; pleasure and procreation become separable, if not mutually exclusive, leading to the mystified idealization of motherhood on the one hand, and to the Marquis de Sade's advocacy of sodomitical sex without progeny, on the other.²⁹ Yet texts like *The Compleat Midwife's Practice*, Nicholas Culpeper's *A Directory for Midwives*, and *Aristotle's Master-Piece* and *Aristotle's Compleat and Experienc'd Midwife*, innocent of the new embryology and presupposing mutual pleasure in copulation, continue to be reprinted and circulated.³⁰ They continue to be reprinted, but if Sterne's novel provides any indication of their reception, they continue to be misremembered and misquoted; when Tristram mentions *Aristotle's Master-Piece* (2:7),³¹

corporation to the Murther of the Royal Martyr, King Charles the First (London: M. Flesher for Walter Kettilyb, 1684), pp. 463–64. See Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity*, pp. 183–84.

²⁷ The College also put forward the midwives' accusation that Chamberlen refused to attend the poor, and denied his services to the rich until they had agreed to his fee. Goodall, *An Historical Account*, pp. 465–66.

²⁸ Erickson, *Mother Midnight*, p. 212.

²⁹ See L. J. Jordanova, "Naturalizing the Family: Literature and the Bio-Medical Sciences in the Late Eighteenth Century," in *Languages of Nature: Critical Essays on Science and Literature*, ed. L. J. Jordanova (London: Free Association Books, 1986), pp. 86–116.

³⁰ *The Compleat Midwife's Practice* appears from 1656, Culpeper's *A Directory for Midwives* from 1651, and the Aristotle treatises from about 1690. *Aristotle's Compleat and Experienc'd Midwife*, made English by W. S[almon] (London, 1700), for instance, appears in its fourteenth edition as late as 1782.

³¹ Ross, p. 82; New 1:117.

he means something else, though the text seethes with reproductive lore. As Angus McLaren argues, the continued reprinting of seventeenth-century works well into the eighteenth century kept the older ideas in circulation, but they were increasingly relegated to popular or "low" cultural status:

What one finds is that a new 'high' culture of scientific embryology emerged that severed the traditional linking of pleasure and procreation: what had been the common culture became the 'low' culture. As indicated by the reprintings of traditional works such as *Aristotle's Masterpiece*, the older interpretations did not disappear, but they were increasingly viewed by the educated and respectable as aspects of the mind of the lewd and vulgar.³²

Erickson observes that Walter Shandy's notions of copulation and conception combine elements of both old and new views in such a way that he is a "victim as well as satirical personification of a change in perspective. . . . Built into his predicament is the difficult question . . . of how calmness and serenity of mind can coexist with the violent genital congress [the seventeenth-century reproductive theorists] consider necessary for conception."³³ Thus, the more mechanistical Walter's views, the more cultivated and scientifically genteel his class-identification. To find him echoing Nicholas Culpeper and *The Compleat Midwife's Practice*, as well as *Aristotle's Master-Piece*, on the act of generation, while advocating Slop's assistance at the birth, places him in a complicated position, figuratively and socially.

Walter's attitude towards generation may be strikingly passionless and methodically medical, but it is also simultaneously embedded in the older folkloric discourse, with some peculiar class implications. The "bad timing" of Mrs. Shandy's question during Tristram's putative conception is bad because it scatters Walter's "animal spirits," interrupts their flow, and thus jeopardizes the child's intellectual soundness. According to the Culpeper section from later editions of *The Compleat Midwife's Practice*, the reason parents produce disappointing children is "that Parents apply not themselves to the act of generation, with that order and diligence that is required by nature, that their Children may prove wise and judicious."³⁴ The text's four-part answer to this dilemma is as follows:

³² Angus McLaren, *Reproductive Rituals: The Perception of Fertility in England from the Sixteenth Century to the Nineteenth Century* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 22. McLaren reports that in the eighteenth century there were more editions of *Aristotle's Master-Piece*, first published in the late seventeenth century, "than of any other medical text," p. 19. We have examined two copies at the William Andrews Clark Library, differently prefaced and organized, *Aristotle's Master-Piece: or, the Secrets of Generation Displayed* . . . (London: W. B., 1695) and *Aristotle's Compleat Masterpiece. In Three Parts: Displaying the Secrets of Nature in the Generation of Man*, the twenty-second edition (London, 1741).

³³ Erickson, *Mother Midnight*, pp. 225–26.

³⁴ *The Compleat Midwife's Practice Enlarged, In the most weighty and high Concernments of the Birth of Man. . . . With a further Discovery of those Secrets kept close in the Brest of Mr. Nich. Culpeper* . . . (London: Nathaniel Brook, 1663), p. 249.

The first is to shew the natural qualities and temperatures which man and woman ought to possess, that they may use generation. The second, what diligence the Parents ought to imploy, that their children may be Male, and not Female. The third, how they become wise, and not fools. The fourth, how they are to be ordered after their birth for preservation of their wit.³⁵

This summary is so close to Walter Shandy's theories, and fears, regarding generation that we would have to read his hypotheses as in danger of becoming rapidly "popular" and declassé.

Class divisions in obstetric discourse, which in turn produce class ambiguities in the novel, figure in another way, as well, to which the character of Slop is crucial. Since both the forceps and male obstetric practice extend back into the seventeenth century, and since the eighteenth-century evidence gives us considerable debate *among* men-midwives themselves, as well as between female and male midwives, class relations produce divisions in the practices of the so-called "revolution in obstetrics."

The emergence of the fashionable male *accoucheur*, with which Dr. Slop so vehemently yet vainly identifies, can be traced back to the Chamberlens' supervision of royal births; but not entirely. Among those aspiring to gentility, having an *accoucheur* attend even normal deliveries became increasingly popular during the eighteenth century. Wilson distinguishes between the upwardly-mobile William Hunter of the 1760s—whose practice included Queen Charlotte, as well as many aristocratic clients, and who, specializing in normal births, emphasized a policy of non-intervention—and his teacher, William Smellie, famous for his forceps, who specialized in difficult births, the traditional province of the male practitioner: "The role of the forceps was primarily in emergency work; fashionable practice involved onset and advance calls. What Smellie was for the obstetric surgeon, the emergency practitioner, Hunter was for the physician-man-midwife."³⁶ In his lecture notes, Hunter distinguishes his practice from Smellie's in not so much technical, as class-specific ways: "It is not the mere safe delivery of the woman will recommend an accoucheur, but a sagacious well-conducted behaviour of tenderness, assiduity and delicacy."³⁷

Wilson associates this notion of a genteel (and lucrative) practice, largely composed of normal deliveries, with Hunter's famous non-interventionism—a position with which Mrs. Shandy would heartily agree. In his lecture notes, Hunter explicitly distinguishes his methods of diagnosing pregnancy from Smel-

³⁵ *The Compleat Midwife's Practice Enlarged*, p. 250.

³⁶ Wilson, "William Hunter and the Varieties of Man-Midwifery," in Bynum and Porter, eds., *William Hunter*, pp. 343–69; this passage on p. 362. "Onset calls" occur when a practitioner's attendance has been booked to commence as soon as the onset of labor; "advance calls" might mean the practitioner's residence in the patient's house even before the onset of labor.

³⁷ Wilson comments, "Here we have the man-midwife who wants to get into the delivery room, and to deliver normal births amongst wealthy patients—a far cry indeed from the emergency practice of a previous generation." Wilson, "William Hunter and the Varieties of Man-Midwifery," in Bynum and Porter, eds., *William Hunter*, p. 362.

lie's in such a way that the appropriate *techne* and the social position of the patient become inseparable:

Smellie advises introducing a finger in ano which will more likely ascertain the pressure, but the indelicacy of this operation has exploded its practice in private. Such practice is improper when you are called to satisfy a lady. Here you should for your own reputation's sake endeavour to use some ambiguous answer, and by prescribing some inoffensive medicine . . . to amuse her a month longer.³⁸

With a few London exceptions, such as Dr. Manningham,³⁹ whom Mrs. Shandy wishes to attend her delivery, the previous generations of male midwives had been known for their interventionist policies, usually dictated by the rigors of difficult births. The presence of Slop at Tristram's birth, therefore, rather than the fashionable Manningham, signals both the acknowledgement of an unnatural labor pending, and the possibility of dangerous and desperate surgical intervention. The genteel custom of booking an *accoucheur* in advance is undercut by Slop's provincial status and his close association with using the forceps.

Read with Sterne's novel in mind, many of the eighteenth-century treatises on midwifery recapitulate debates from the seventeenth century—on the status of men-midwives, on developments in forceps, on the licensing of women—and in that very repetition they begin to assume a remarkably Shandyesque character, especially since they resolutely adopt a new “scientific” style peculiarly susceptible to parody. Writing with all the self-consciousness of authors establishing new terrain, writers of obstetric manuals risk Sterneian, if not Swiftian, condemnation of their treatises as mere projectors' schemes. Smellie, for instance, reports that he was moved by his lack of success in using the forceps according to traditional methods to “consider the whole in a mechanical view, and to reduce the extraction of the child to the rules of moving bodies in different directions.”⁴⁰ One of Smellie's critics, William Douglas, physician to the Prince of Wales, was Shandyishly critical of the use of obstetrical instruments, berating his colleagues for “lugging about with them a Bag of *Lumber*, a more proper Badge of the *Farrier* than the *Accoucheur*,” bemoaning the low status of male practitioners' association with interventionist instruments, while continuing to advocate their use in emergency cases.⁴¹ The class-specific resonances of this contradictory pronouncement should by now be clear.

³⁸ Quoted in Wilson, “William Hunter and the Varieties of Man-Midwifery,” in Bynum and Porter, eds., *William Hunter*, p. 362.

³⁹ For Sir Richard Manningham's (1690–1759) prestige as an early eighteenth-century version of the fashionable *accoucheur*, a rare species until the 1760s, see Wilson, “William Hunter and the Varieties of Man-Midwifery,” in Bynum and Porter, eds., *William Hunter*, p. 362.

⁴⁰ William Smellie, M. D., *A Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery* (London: D. Wilson, 1752), p. 251.

⁴¹ William Douglas, M. D., *A Letter to Dr. Smelle [sic]. Shewing The Impropriety of his New-invented Wooden Forceps; as also The Absurdity of his Method Of Teaching and Practising Midwifry* (London: J. Roberts, 1748), p. 7. Smellie was undercharging for his lectures, according to Douglas, pp. 15–16, p. 18.

This high-scientific discourse on obstetrics reveals Dr. Slop as in many ways a transitional figure, hovering awkwardly on the threshold between the traditional male emergency practitioner, and the fashionable male *accoucheur*, his ungainly shape and clumsy technique rendering him a distinct embarrassment in the new world of doctors specifically “called to satisfy a lady.” Mrs. Shandy’s preference for the reputable midwife may thus be read as a sign of her gentility as well as her old-fashioned reliance upon female “experience.” We notice that it is not, as Uncle Toby opines, that Mrs. Shandy “does not care to let a man come so near her ****” which Tristram quickly translates into “Backside” (2:6),⁴² but that she will allow only a certain kind of man to do so: not a provincial bungler, but a fashionable, urbane, and titled man, Sir Richard Manningham, who knows how to soothe and “satisfy” a lady. Toby’s hypothesis tells us more about his own bashfulness at the prospect of encountering a female-sexed body, than it tells us about Mrs. Shandy’s supposed “MODESTY.” And that modesty, we find, is nothing if not a phenomenon constructed through class, a gauge of gentility rather than an essential element of a classless female sexuality.

Towards History and Politics, the Forceps and the Warming Pan

Walter Shandy’s fears that his son’s cerebellum will be crushed by a head-first delivery through the pelvis are perfectly understandable in terms of the graphically illustrated literature on the subject. Yet these fears display more than mere familiarity with obstetric discourse; Walter is peculiarly embroiled within that discourse, even obsessed by it. His peculiar fascination with the horrific aspects of childbirth produces what turns out to be an excessive anxiety in Tristram’s case. From the many available gruesome accounts of cases of “laborious” and “preternatural” parturition, the production of “monsters” and “moles,” the discovery of partially dissolved bones from the dead fetuses of previous pregnancies accompanying live births or erupting from abdominal abscesses or being passed at stool, Tristram’s head-first delivery by the forceps in the end seems only mildly difficult of its kind.

In typically Shandean—and, we would argue, casually misogynist—fashion, Walter has managed to convince himself, against considerable evidence (and in the absence of antibiotics), “that wounds in the *epigastrium*, and those in the *matrix*, were not mortal;—so that the belly of the mother might be opened extremely well to give a passage to the child” (2:19).⁴³ Such casual misogyny is insidiously present in the novel as a whole, and as the reverse of conventional homosociality, it helps to bind together the brothers Shandy and their friends, despite obvious differences of temperament; it was Toby, we remember, who inserted the disciplinary lying-in clause in Elizabeth Shandy’s marriage settlement, thus guaranteeing that Tristram will be born at Shandy Hall and not in London, following his mother’s false pregnancy the previous year (1:15).⁴⁴ So

⁴² Ross, p. 81; New 1:115–16.

⁴³ Ross, p. 121; New 1:179.

⁴⁴ Ross, p. 35; New 1:46.

Toby, if anyone, is responsible for the presence of Slop and his forceps, rather than Manningham and his fashionable demeanor.

Walter has only been put off his advocacy of Caesarian delivery by Mrs. Shandy's reaction to it: "seeing her turn as pale as ashes at the very mention of it, as much as the operation flattered his hopes,—he thought it as well to say no more of it" (2:19).⁴⁵ The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century treatises on midwifery, we should note, make it very clear that Protestant physicians agreed that Caesarian operations were only to be undertaken when the child was alive and the mother beyond saving. Failing a Caesarian, and the certain consequence of Mrs. Shandy being reduced to ashes in quite a literal sense, delivery by the feet appeals to Walter's desire to safeguard his child's soul and intellectual parts, but as "This was not to be expected from one of the sisterhood, who are not easily to be put out of their way," Dr. Slop, as "a man of science" (2.19),⁴⁶ becomes Walter's assurance that the tyranny of "natural" childbirth need not prevail:

Of all men in the world, Dr. *Slop* was the fittest for my father's purpose;—for tho' his new-invented forceps was the armour he had proved, and what he maintained, to be the safest instrument of deliverance,—yet, it seems, he had scattered a word or two in his book, in favour of the very thing which ran in my father's fancy;—tho' not with a view to the soul's good in extracting by the feet, as was my father's system,—but for reasons merely obstetrical. (2.19)⁴⁷

Reasons "merely obstetrical" here include concern for the mother's well-being as well as the infant's, and are thus quite different from Walter Shandy's notions of needful intervention. As Smellie puts it, "Doubtless it is our duty to save both mother and child, if possible; but if that is impracticable, to pay our chief regard to the parent."⁴⁸ Significantly, Walter's Lockean and materialist Hobby-Horse, the safeguarding of the infant brain from external pressure at all costs, carries him in a different direction from the dominant (Protestant) medical opinion of his day that the mother's health took precedence over the child's in these cases.

We can specify historically the grounds of Walter's anxiety by citing one of the most remarkable moments in Burton's attack on Smellie, the description of an incident that happened at York in December of 1751—for Sterne, very much a local case. Once one has read this passage, it is difficult not to think of Walter's desire for Dr. Slop's assistance in terms of it, and yet the limits of reading a one-to-one correspondence between Slop and Burton are re-confirmed. The case involves a woman pregnant with her tenth child, which she had carried nine weeks beyond the expected delivery date, with the result that the child was extremely bulky and already dead. Having turned the child and got both feet and the shoulders out, Burton finds that the head will not pass, in spite

⁴⁵ Ross, p. 121; New 1:179.

⁴⁶ Ross, pp. 121–22; New 1:179.

⁴⁷ Ross, p. 122; New 1:180.

⁴⁸ Smellie, *A Treatise*, p. 246.

of his maneuvering the chin about with his fingers and using "no small Force" to pull at the shoulders:

wherefore I exerted my utmost Strength, when I found the Vertebrae of the Neck began to separate from those of the Back; and by continuing the same means, the Head and Body were soon parted: I then introduced my . . . Extractor, and immediately extracted the Head in the Manner I have directed in my *Essay on Midwifery*. The Head was exceeding large, much ossified, and with only a small Opening at the Fontanelle. The Woman recovered as well this Time as ever she did of any of her other nine Children, without the least Inflammation in the Parts betwixt the Child's Head and Bones of the Pelvis, which was very strait, and had always occasioned a tedious and difficult Labour of all her other Children, several of whom died convulsed soon after their Birth, or in a few Days.

A certain Person who was present at the Labour run out of the Chamber frightened at the Consequences, when she found the Head of the Child left in the Womb; having before been present at two Labours, where the Head was left in the same Condition; and although a Man-Midwife was sent for to each Woman, yet neither of 'em could extract the Head thus separated, and both the Women died: But this good Woman's Fears were soon over, when one, who attended the Operation, went and assured her, that the Patient was safely delivered both of the Head and After-Birth.⁴⁹

The possibilities for grotesque narrative contained in this text are numerous, and *Tristram Shandy* does not begin to reproduce them. Walter's anxiety about his child's delivery may well seem both more and less excessive than we had previously thought it: more, in that the novel barely skims the surface of obstetric disaster; less, in that as readers we get a brief glimpse of some historically available alternatives to Sterne's version of Tristram's birth, so much more horrendous than the novel allows us to imagine, and which can now substantiate Walter's nightmarish imaginings. Tristram's narrative of his birth, however circumstantially detailed and preternaturally mindful of historico-material origins, begins to seem itself an act of historical repression, a fictional warding off of unthinkably grotesque historical possibility. We might call this moment of newly historical recognition, made possible by inserting the literary text back into a particular discursive matrix, the typically New-Historicist moment.

At the same time, however, that Sterne's text becomes newly legible according to this New-Historicist scheme, another theoretical problematic arises, which a materialist-feminist reading will address. *Tristram Shandy* makes certain novelistic conventions newly material, parodically historicizing the activities of writing and giving birth. When one reads it alongside midwifery treatises, a gap between, rather than a neat coincidence of, Dr. Slop and the historical John Burton, makes itself felt; Slop's character contains too many differing clues to be a simple allusion to anybody. At this moment, it also becomes clear that the text destabilizes the very idea of "historical figures," especially as allusions

⁴⁹ John Burton, M. D., *A Letter to William Smellie, M. D. Containing Critical and Practical Remarks Upon his Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Midwifery* (London: W. Owen, 1753), pp. 128–29.

fully equivalent to novelistic characters. Locked in symbolic combat with the midwife, Slop, as self-proclaimed *accoucheur*, figures with her the whole discourse on obstetric knowledge in Sterne's day.

That discourse was marked by the seemingly inextricable concerns of patents and paternity. Slop is known for his "new-invented forceps." From the late seventeenth-century and the first systematic interventions of male midwives in England, signalled by the writing of treatises and attempts to license female midwives or institute guilds as a means of regulating their activities, men-midwives legitimated their claims to scientific knowledge by constantly "reinventing" the forceps in new and more effective forms. The specifications of these "new-invented forceps" usually remained the most closely guarded secrets of the man-midwife's practice. Smellie, who attributes their introduction into England to the Chamberlens, who kept this instrument "as a nostrum,"⁵⁰ was known for his leather-wrapped, wooden forceps with detachable blades, for which he was often criticized in print. Hardly a treatise was published that did not promise some new development in the forceps or other wondrous instrument, such as Burton's "extractor." Defending his use of the forceps, Smellie found it necessary both to encourage further technological advances and to caution against a tendency on the part of practitioners to hoard their self-patented devices.⁵¹ If reputations could be made by the invention of a "new" or marginally improved instrument, then the self-patented nostrum promised an opportunity for a man to claim at least partial paternity for the new science of obstetrics, while assisting other men in the enjoyment of *their* paternity.

While not wishing to assign paternity or the right to patent the forceps to a single historical figure, we might usefully elaborate on the connection between the Chamberlens, popularly believed to have introduced the forceps into England, and the political context of that introduction. Here Slop's Catholicism, with its Jacobite associations, leads us back to the succession crisis of James II's reign and that obstetrical-political site of controversy, the "warming-pan infant." Chamberlens had been delivering English royal heirs for some generations; Peter Chamberlen, the elder, delivered Charles I, and his nephew, "Dr." Peter Chamberlen, delivered Charles II.⁵² Dr. Peter's son, Hugh Chamberlen, projector extraordinaire, composer of proposals for a land-bank in England and for the licensing and guild-regulation of midwives, was physician to James II's household and attended the queen's pregnancy. His failure, which may well have been strategic on his part, to attend this famous birth on 10 June, 1688, was

⁵⁰ Smellie, *A Treatise*, p. lviii, p. 249.

⁵¹ Smellie, *A Treatise*, pp. 256–57: "... let not this assertion [that the forceps "seldom failed to answer the purpose, better than any other method hitherto found out"] prevent people of ingenuity from employing their talents in improving these or any other methods that may be safe and useful: for daily experience proves, that we are still imperfect and very far from the *Ne plus Ultra* of discovery in arts and sciences: though I hope every gentleman will despise and avoid the character of a selfish secret-monger."

⁵² See David S. Katz, *Sabbath and Sectarianism In Seventeenth-Century England* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), chapter 3, on Dr. Peter Chamberlen.

made use of as a rhetorical counter in the ensuing debates that signalled a potential political crisis.⁵³ Gilbert Burnet was among those who wondered why Hugh, who had attended the pregnancy, was kept away from the delivery.⁵⁴ Was the infant brought up to be James, Prince of Wales, actually the offspring of James II's queen, Mary of Modena, or was he smuggled into the royal bedchamber, as opponents of a Catholic succession claimed, in a warming pan? Was Chamberlen, keeper of the obstetric nostrum, the keeper of other secrets as well, including the secret of James, Prince of Wales's, actual paternity? After 1688, the discourse on obstetric knowledge, and the purveyors of "new-invented forceps" in particular, could easily be read as a code with Jacobite associations.

One phrase in particular rings throughout the novel, if we take the connection between Shandyesque theories and Jacobite lore seriously. *Aristotle's Master-Piece* argues that, in the act of conception:

nothing is more powerful than the Imagination of the Mother; . . . nay, so powerful is its Operation, that though a Woman be in unlawful Copulation, yet if fear, or any thing else, causes her to fix her Mind upon her Husband, the Child will resemble him, tho he never got it. . . . wherefore it is apparent, that likeness can confirm no Child to be a lawful Father's own.⁵⁵

Thus the text establishes room for critical speculation about Tristram's paternity and his possible illegitimacy, as J. Paul Hunter has shown.⁵⁶ If this is the familiar paternal and proprietorial anxiety with which *Tristram Shandy* plays, that a father may be of no kin to his child, dead-ringer resemblances notwithstanding, a different formulation is also offered by the novel, however quixotically. At the dinner to ascertain whether, after his mischristening, Tristram can be rebaptized, Kysarcus quashes the Shandy brothers' query by rehearsing legal

⁵³ The incident generated much pamphlet literature such as *The Amours Of The French King With the Late Queen of Albion. Being The Fourth and Last Part of the History of Messalina*. By a Woman of Quality (London: John Lyford, 1689). Our thanks to Rachel Weil for this reference; see her essay, "The Politics of Legitimacy: Women and the Warming Pan Scandal," forthcoming in Lois Schworer, ed., *The Revolution of 1688-89: Changing Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press). With at least forty witnesses in the Queen's bedchamber at the birth, many of them Privy Councillors peering in at the foot of the bed, the warming pan story seems fantastic. According to Derek Jarrett, it was closely examined and utterly exploded at a subsequent public inquiry; see his *Britain 1688-1815* (London: Longman, 1965), p. 8.

⁵⁴ J. H. Aveling, *The Chamberlens And the Midwifery Forceps: Memorials of the Family and an Essay on the Invention of the Instrument* (London: J. & A. Churchill, 1982), p. 150. It was on the testimony of a letter written by Hugh to the Princess Sophia that much of the case for the child's legitimacy rested; the letter is transcribed in Aveling, pp. 150-1.

⁵⁵ *Aristotle's Master-Piece: or, the Secrets of Generation Displayed* (London: W. B., 1695), pp. 20-21.

⁵⁶ In "Clocks, Calendars, and Names: The Troubles of Tristram Shandy and the Aesthetics of Uncertainty," J. Paul Hunter fully explores the possibility of Mrs. Shandy's adultery and Tristram's illegitimacy, while recognizing that the text finally "seems to hold a secret but refuses to deliver," p. 276.

precedent, invoking a decree by Pope Leo III, to which the Williamite Toby retorts:

— But my brother's child, cried my uncle *Toby*, has nothing to do with the Pope — 'tis the plain child of a Protestant gentleman, christen'd *Tristram* against the wills and wishes both of its father and mother, and all who are a-kin to it. — (4:29)⁵⁷

To the Shandy brothers' astonishment, Kysarcus replies that "Mrs. *Shandy*, of all people, has the least to do in it," for "it has been adjudged for the negative, — namely, '*That the mother is not of kin to her child*'" (4:29).⁵⁸ As part of an unfolding network of playful Jacobite allusions, this moment might well put us in mind of the warming-pan controversy. The Old Pretender, if anyone, could stand accused of what "the vulgar" find it hard to credit (4:30),⁵⁹ that a child might not share consanguinity with his mother.

Historians of Jacobitism have begun to trace a long-lived discourse, dependent upon just such variously furtive codes and allusions, which erupts in literary texts as well as the documents of political and social history. As Howard Erskine-Hill has shown, one of the crucial tropes in literary Jacobitism was the thematizing of William III's "conquest" of England as a rape of the nation, and the consequent force of Pope's charge that, after the bloodlessness of 1688, England must bear the taint of having yielded to this violator of the national honor. In Erskine-Hill's reading, the line in *The Rape of the Lock*, "The conqu'ring Force of unresisted Steel," assumes a new, and political, significance in the context of Jacobite codes.⁶⁰

Steel swords, steel scissors, steel forceps: Walter Shandy does anything *but* resist the steel forceps of the "man of science," but Mrs. Shandy resists them adamantly. They eventually triumph over her, just as William and the Whigs triumph over the Jacobite cause. For Pope, England is a recumbent nymph, a female body raped and conquered by William and the Whigs. Her resistance may have been insufficient, but she was violated nevertheless. In Sterne's novel, Mrs. Shandy's resistance is similarly overridden by historical circumstances. Walter's embracing of "new-invented" forceps could be aligned with his Whigish trade policy, and his embracing of technological invention, regardless of its practical usefulness:

For that very reason, replied my father, "Because [wind-driven chariots, as opposed to horses] cost nothing, and because they eat nothing," — the scheme is bad; — it is the consumption of our products, as well as the manufactures of them, which gives bread to the hungry, circulates trade, — brings in money, and supports the value

⁵⁷ Ross, p. 262; New 1:389.

⁵⁸ Ross, p. 262; New 1:390.

⁵⁹ Ross, p. 265; New 1:394.

⁶⁰ Howard Erskine-Hill, "Literature and the Jacobite Cause: Was There a Rhetoric of Jacobitism?" in Eveline Cruickshanks, ed., *Ideology and Conspiracy: Aspects of Jacobitism, 1689–1759* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1982), pp. 49–69; this passage appears on p. 53.

of our lands; —and tho', I own, if I was a Prince, I would generously recompense the scientifick head which brought forth such contrivances; —yet I would as peremptorily suppress the use of them. (2:14)⁶¹

Walter's contradictory desires, to embrace new technology for its scientific inventiveness and to promote glorious consumption, nicely sum up the contradictions in a Whiggish position, aiding capitalist state formation while mystifying it. When Walter praises consumption as the necessary counterpart of manufacture, we enter the realm of Marx's "peaceful struggle of competition" and the forgetting of revolutionary struggles and ideals.

Significantly, the retired Turkey merchant's dissertation upon trade exactly parallels his brother's dissertation on fortification (2.14). Toby's own displacement activity, we should observe, his obsession with tracing the history of his wounded groin through reconstructing the fortifications "erected" during William's wars, is a discourse of Whiggish idealism as well as displacement, never more ironically apparent than in his whistling of "Lillabullero." Tracing and re-tracing the scene of his wound, spatially and with technical knowledge, compensates Toby for the pain of remembering. Whistling "Lillabullero," on the other hand, keeps Toby's mind off potentially embarrassing confrontations with the rather-not-known.

The song thus carries a trace of Toby's Williamite idealism; it is a sign of the Whigs as *the* bourgeois revolutionary party. But the song also bears a trace of the history of the English imperial conquest of Ireland. The words "Lilli-Burlero-Bullen-a-la," were, according to Bishop Percy in his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, "the words of distinction used among the Irish Papists at the time of their massacre of the Protestants in 1641."⁶² As Graham Petrie comments, the words "were made the refrain of a nonsense song satirizing the Earl of Tyrconnel on the occasion of his going to Ireland in January 1686–7 as James II's Catholic lieutenant. The song . . . is said to have played a major part in rousing the anti-Catholic feeling which brought about the Revolution of 1688." If we read "Lillabullero" historically, we find Whig idealism undermined by the bloody trace-memory of colonial oppression. "Lillabullero" also constitutes an apotropaic, or warding-off, gesture on Toby's part. As Tristram observes, "You must know it was the usual channel thro' which his passions got vent, when any thing shocked or supriised him; — but especially when any thing, which he deem'd very absurd, was offer'd" (1:21).⁶³ Among Toby's rather-not-knowns, knowledge of the female body and the confrontation with sexual difference this knowledge would provoke, loom large.

Toby's whistling thus figures a double displacement, through which ironic trace-memories emerge, of colonial oppression and the "fact" of sexual differ-

⁶¹ Ross, p. 94; New 1:136–37.

⁶² Quoted in Graham Petrie's notes to his edition of *Tristram Shandy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 622.

⁶³ Ross, p. 56; New 1:78.

ence. What Toby would rather not know, the novel, if read historically, ironically insists upon. Irish resistance to a Whig policy of armed repression, which finds adumbrations in Jacobite disaffection and the uprising of 1745, is ironically remembered through "Lillabullero," and Whig idealism is consequently undermined. But we need to read against the novel's geniality, its comic forgetfulness, in order to produce this effect of ironic remembering. Similarly, despite the questioning of gender-identity put in play by Tristram's narratorial style, the effect of Toby's comic refusal to "know" such things as the Widow Wadman offers him, reinscribes a self-evident notion of sexual difference. Through Toby's refusal of such knowledge, the novel refuses its own knowledge of the instability of gender. We have to read against the grain to recover that instability. Both these displaced knowledges converge in the historical embeddedness of "Lillabullero" and the Jacobite discourse of warming-pan infants and "unresisted steel."

In Conclusion: Towards Materialist Feminism

Inserting *Tristram Shandy* back into a discursive matrix renders a simply gender-conscious reading of its obstetric discourse impossibly reductive. The status of obstetric knowledge in the novel is bound up with high political conflicts at the same time that its textual prominence easily yields a reading couched exclusively in terms of sexual politics. We think that a materialist feminist reading will resist a facile gendering and sexualizing of a text's meaning. Surely it is more theoretically and historically sound to ask what the connections between Jacobitism and representations of reproductive sexuality might be, than continually to re-trace Engels's historical defeat of the female sex in the many eighteenth-century texts that would be susceptible to such a reading?

In Sterne, as in Marx, the status of the midwife is both metaphorical and historical: "No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces, for which there is room in it, have been developed." Far from representing the revolutionary *techné* necessary to bring a new historical epoch into being, Sterne's midwife proves historically inadequate to the task at hand: "and new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society."⁶⁴ Tristram is, on the one hand, born too late for her to be of any assistance, since the revolutionary moment of the bourgeoisie has passed into the advent of the capitalist state: "wholly absorbed in the production of wealth and in the peaceful struggle of competition."⁶⁵ And, on the other hand, he is born too soon for the "new higher relations of production" to have matured in the womb of the *new* society. And so he is born a good bourgeois subject, prey to the "anxieties of the male middle-class intellectual," in Sedgwick's phrase, bound to be delivered, and disfigured, by the obstetric regime of the new scientists.

⁶⁴ Karl Marx, "Preface," *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. N. I. Stone (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and International Library Publishing, 1904), p. 12.

⁶⁵ Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York and London: Norton, 1978), p. 595.

If we consider the spatially divided and gendered scene of Tristram's birth, the men debating downstairs while labor is in progress above, there is clearly from our retrospective point of view no revolution in progress here, but rather the familiar separation of social reproduction from political activity, of women's bodily concerns from men's affairs of state. We could read the religious dispute in which the Shandy brothers, Slop, and Trim engage downstairs as a displacement of questions of both social reproduction and the body from political discourse. And this displacement is precisely necessary for the formation of the capitalist state, a process that is further displaced by being figured here as religious and partisan controversy. While women reproduce persons, men debate politics. Sterne satirizes this need for mutual male reassurance at female expense by revealing it to be largely a confidence trick, one of the novel's primary moments of ideological fracture and potential resistance to dominant gender ideology—or at least it might prove to be if the genially homosocial, coyly heterosexual tone of the book did not make such critical reading seem beside the point.

By bringing Sterne and Marx together, we have suggested that the once-revolutionary struggles of the bourgeoisie only appear to disappear, to become the conditions of its own containment within the "peaceful struggle of competition" and the discourses of gender and sexuality. How is this different from a New Historicist position that leaves political resistance untheorized, or sees it as contained within the immanent terms of an historical text's difference from our own moment? In Sterne, the effect of such a reading would be to reinscribe containment sharply, to leave the text's "immanent" resistances undermined by their frivolity, or their triviality as programmatic practice. Such resistances would remain untheorized, at the level of farce. But acknowledging some coincidences between Sterne's preoccupations with materializing writing and the histories of individual subjects, and those of our own theoretical moment, we hope to have opened both his text and our own to the multiple resistances to fixed gender identities and the bourgeois subject's historical forgetfulness made thinkable by such textual processes.

Wayne State University