Sermons on Sermonizing: The Pulpit Rhetoric of Swift and of Sterne

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Jonathan Swift and Laurence Sterne have frequently been compared as eighteenth-century satirists. As sermonists they have received less attention, mainly because the sermon is a traditional genre, perceived as having little room for individual expression, and perhaps because of a literary-critical distaste for theology. Nevertheless, as a form of writing, and especially as a form of oratory, the sermon is susceptible of literary or rhetorical analysis. Swift and Sterne certainly hold a common theological ground in Anglican orthodoxy, but a reading of their sermons in rhetorical terms makes it apparent that each writer has given thought to his method of communication as a sermonist and come to a different conclusion. This essay will examine the rhetorical manifestations of the two sermonists' attitudes toward their audience. Both Swift and Sterne are self-consciously aware of their duties as preachers and the relationship of the sermon form to the performance of those duties, so much so that they address these issues within sermons themselves. However, there is a difference in the nature of each preacher's self-consciousness. Swift's appears involuntary, a product of his conflict with the sermon form. This differs greatly from what I will suggest is at work in Sterne's sermons where he uses self-consciousness as an integral part of his message concerning the communication of moral truth. Swift, in contrast, seems to attempt such communication in spite of self-consciousness. Swift's declaredly rational and Sterne's implicitly social approach to the sermon are indicative of each preacher's view of the rhetorical situation which provides the sermon's context.
My focus on the distinction between the sermon rhetoric of Swift and of Sterne implies a reassessment of recent, more theologically oriented studies which have leveled distinctions between the two authors, suggesting that “[d]espite the wealth of criticism that has concentrated on the fundamental differences between Swift’s mordant satire and Sterne’s amiable humour, there is basically very little difference in attitude or tone.”¹ Such a view has been argued for years by Melvyn New who has attempted to “correct” modern critics “who readily hear tonal differences between the two but are unable (or unwilling) to comprehend the shared intellectual base that makes Sterne the last true heir of Swift.”² The purpose of the present essay is not to argue against Sterne’s inheritance from Swift or the theological reading of these “Augustan” satirists and their sermons. However, to consider theology alone is to examine only part of the matter at hand: the sermon is, after all, a form of oratory, and therefore the way in which it addresses its audience is worthy of equal consideration.³ The effect of the solely theological reading is to collapse important differences between Swift and Sterne. For, in method, if not message, these preacher-satirists have differing views.

Thus, the subject of this essay is rhetorical, and not merely in the ornamental sense of the word. I will seek to answer questions ignored by theological studies: How do Swift and Sterne use the sermon form to communicate Anglican orthodoxy to their congregation? How does each preacher define the rhetorical situation, the relationship between preacher and congregation? Recent scholarship on the Latitudinarians (the Anglican forebears of Swift and Sterne) has had little to say about the sermon as a rhetorical genre.⁴ This is not surprising, for part of the Latitudinarian project was to make the sermon rhetorically unremarkable. Isabel Rivers suggests that the Latitudinarians generally speak with a collective voice which emphasizes reason (although the passions are not neglected), using the language of the plain style advocated by the Royal Society (John Wilkins, the language theorist, was a Latitudinarian bishop) and appealing to the material interests of its mercantile audience.⁵ The collective nature of this voice makes it difficult to perceive individual differences in theology—indeed this is the point.

However, this should not necessarily extend to individual styles. At this level, the essential difference between Swift and
Sterne is the difference between each one's rhetorical paradigm, and the worldview associated with it. These paradigms are traditional: Swift's approach is Platonic, favoring philosophy (with its claims to "truth" and "being") over rhetoric (the realm of "appearance" and "seeming"); Sterne's approach is that of the Sophists—the tradition of Cicero and Quintilian—which posits a relative, contingent truth, identifying eloquence as the source of social harmony. These paradigms correspond roughly with the eighteenth-century division between the head and the heart, although we should keep in mind that both are rhetorical stances: the appeal to the head is still an appeal, and, as we will see, the appeal to the heart is by no means purely emotional. Ultimately the differences between individual preaching styles may suggest questions about the historical difference of their common orthodox ground as the century progresses. For, despite his Augustan (and even Renaissance) proclivities, Sterne, born nearly a half-century after Swift, is a preacher of a different generation. His theology may be grounded in seventeenth-century Latitudinarianism, but he addresses an audience attending church during the decades when saw the publication of not only Pope's rationalist satires, but also the socially embedded novels of Richardson and Fielding.

At this point we should note the nature of each preacher's audience, especially in the case of Sterne. As we receive them, *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* have a multiple audience. First, they represent twenty years of experience in two distinct pulpits: that of the rural parish of Sutton-on-the-Forest, where Sterne was a member of the community, and that of York Minster, where Sterne was a popular substitute preacher. Second, and more important, the sermons make their published appearance after the publication of *Tristram Shandy*, carefully tailored in their selection and printed format to capitalize on the success of that work in London. The present essay has an underlying interest in Sterne's Shandean self-presentation. For this reason it focuses on sermons chosen for publication by Sterne himself (rather than those published posthumously), including two preached in the 1760s after Sterne had gained fame (and wished to maintain it through public performances). Furthermore, my interest in rhetorical turns to these sermons for their pronounced self-awareness of their rhetorical goal and concomitant sensitivity to their audience. What we observe in these sermons is to some degree true
of all of Sterne's sermons; they certainly reflect his preaching practice as he himself wished to represent it.

Such a principle of selection is impossible with Swift, who, unlike Sterne (who expressed affection for particular sermons), expressed only distaste for his sermons and had nothing to do with their (near-posthumous or posthumous) publication. Swift's stance, of course, may be as much of a rhetorical self-presentation as Sterne's. However, it does change the nature of the audience. Although Swift's sermons may have been delivered to audiences as distinct as Sterne's, they were neither delivered at the request of the audience, nor overattended. Certainly they were not selected and published for an urban or urbane audience (and thus there is no implicit address to a reading audience beyond the congregation). Thus I have selected sermons in which Swift comments upon sermonizing, and reflects on his audience. Considering differences in audience, we may see how each preacher approaches the sermon as a rhetorical form. My aim is not to pass judgment on either preacher's performance of his clerical duties, but rather to reinstate a critical distinction between Swift and Sterne, allowing each one to illuminate the other.

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Anglican sermons of the early seventeenth-century were highly ornate with a complex structure of divisions "into a succession of rigidly prescribed parts, the first part devoted to unfolding the text, the second to dividing the text, the third to drawing the doctrine, and so on through instruction, refutation, reproof, consolation, and exhortation." The Restoration and eighteenth-century Anglican sermon is notable for its lack of such ornate structures, concentrating on methodical argument, which becomes "one of the chief differences between the latitudinarian tracition of preaching and that of the puritans and their nonconformist anc dissenting heirs." Tillotson is the classic example of the unornamented methodical style. At the outset of his sermons he announces his divisions and carefully numbers them. As he proceeds, he repeats the number and a key phrase upon arrival at the division itself. This is designed to enhance the audience's memory, to spatialize the temporal apprehension of information, creating orally the effect of chapter-headings running across the top of the page. Within the printed text, the
numbering apparatus foregrounds the structure of the sermon. There is nothing self-conscious in this process: Tillotson is merely attaining his end by means of his rigid formal structure.¹⁴

In contrast to Tillotson’s famous style, the case of Swift is telling. One result of the Latitudinarian removal of formal rhetoric from the sermon is that the basic structure which does survive into the eighteenth century remains in the foreground with an increasing self-consciousness (a heightened awareness of what structure remains). Swift is in conflict with the form, simultaneously less comfortable with the given structure of his sermons and more dependent on such a structure. This is apparent in his simplified use of the traditional form. He will introduce the text with a few comments, announce the plan of his sermon, and then proceed, self-consciously counting the divisions as announced. As Landa suggests, beyond this, “there is no ordering of the material that suggests the succession of expository and rhetorical devices dear to clergymen of the preceding century.”¹⁵ Even subdivisions are for the most part excessive for Swift. As they are printed, only the first three of Swift’s sermons (published in 1744) lack rigidly schematic printed characteristics (the others were printed much later). There is, however, a more basic sense of counting down the divisions in Swift’s sermons. Whereas Tillotson was open to further divisions (or digressions with numbered subdivisions) after the sermon began, Swift usually strictly limits himself to his initial announcement of divisions. There is a tension in Swift between reliance on the structure signified by the numbers in his text and distaste for it. What merely appears as textual oddity in the numbering apparatus of Tillotson’s printed sermons becomes monstrous in Swift—mainly through its simplified form.

These monstrosities are not the satirical devices of the Scriblerians, such as the parodic textual apparatus of A Tale of a Tub. In the sermons they appear as involuntary manifestations of Swift’s conflict with the form of the sermon itself. These manifestations of textual self-consciousness complement Swift’s reflections on the genre itself, revealing contradictions as he struggles against the fluidity of boundaries to which self-reference draws attention. It is perhaps disappointing for readers of Swift’s “secular” (or at least non-liturgical) works of self-conscious irony such as A Tale of a Tub to find that, in his sermons, Swift does not open the rhetorical situation to a deliberate confusion of the sacred and
the secular or the preacher and the audience. Instead, in places
where ironic readings are possible, we can see Swift the preacher
struggling against such a doubleness.16 What is important to
Swift is a defined sense of his relationship with his audience.
However, his desire for definition remains patently unfulfilled.

"Upon Sleeping in Church" (a traditional sermon topic) is
wholly concerned with the "great neglect of Preaching now
among us."17 A double reading is possible here: who is neglecting
preaching, preacher or congregation? However, the body of
the sermon makes it clear that no doublessness is intended. Swift sees
the communication situation of the sermon as unidirectional:
"The Doctrine delivered by all Preachers is the same: So we
preach, and so ye believe" (213). The slight alteration of 1 Corin-
thia 15:1 is telling. St. Paul's narrative summary of the gospel
concludes descriptively, "So we preach, and so ye believed," thus
including the audience's belief as a part of the action of the story.
Swift's version imposes an imperative cause and effect scenario:
"Faith and Duty are explained and delivered" (213) to the audi-
ence, and the audience in turn believes. In "A Letter to a Young
Gentleman, Lately enter'd into Holy Orders,"18 Swift reinforces
his view of the preacher's didactic role: "the two principal
Branches of Preaching, are first to tell the People what is their
Duty; and then to convince them that it is so" (70). This vision of
the communication situation resists the doublessness implicit in a
sermon upon sermon giving.

Shortly after the subdivision of the sermon—"These may be
reduced under two Heads" (211)—Swift makes the same gesture
regarding its listeners: "If the Audience were to be ranked under
several Heads, according to their Behaviour, when the Word of
Goc is delivered, how small a Number would appear of those
who receive it as they ought?" (212). However, the potential
crossover between sermon and audience (both ranked or reduced
under Heads) is prevented by the sharp distinction made
between the delivery and the reception of the Word. As Swift
continues to analyze the problem of communication, he again
reflects on the act of preaching:

Opium is not so stupifying to many Persons as an Afternoon Sermon. Perpetual
Custom hath so brought it about, that the Words of whatever Preacher, become
only a Sort of uniform Sound at a Distance, than which nothing is more
effectual to lull the Senses. For, that it is the very Sound of the Sermon which
binds up their Faculties, is manifest from hence, because they all awake so
very regularly as soon as it ceaseth . . . (212)
The solipsistic implications of this statement are large. The very act of communication defeats itself. One is tempted to see the materialistic theory of the effect of language as satiric, a counterpart of The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit or A Tale of a Tub’s teller’s “Experiment very frequent among Modern Authors; which is, to write upon Nothing; When the Subject is utterly exhausted, to let the Pen still move on...” However, such deconstructive deracination is very carefully grounded in the sermon. The Tale’s nothingness is rendered in the sermon as the realm of ridiculers, who

learn a Rote of Buffoons, that serveth all Occasions, and refutes the strongest Arguments for Piety and good Manners. These have a Set of Ridicule calculated for all Sermons and all Preachers, and can be extream witty as often as they please upon the same Fund. (216)

This description of sameness in the ridiculers’ criticism is Swift’s reply to the objection that sermons present “the same an hundred Times over” (213). The reply is developed into a distinction between the finite referentiality of sermons (having their end in explaining and delivering Faith and Duty) and the infinite self-referentiality of ridiculers:

The Scorner of Preaching would do well to consider, that this Talent of Ridicule, they value so much, is a Perfection very easily acquired, and applied to all Things whatsoever... the most celebrated Pieces have been thus treated with greatest Success. It is in any Man’s Power to suppose a Fool’s Cap on the wisest Head, and then laugh at his own Supposition. I think there are not many Things cheaper than supposing and laughing; and if the uniting these two Talents can bring a Thing into Contempt, it is hard to know where it may end. (217)

Swift’s claim to the distinction between the preacher’s grounded reference and the ridiculers’ self-reference is difficult to maintain in a sermon upon sermon giving where he in effect makes his own supposition about the validity of the form he uses. The similarity of the reflexive mode employed (like ridicule, the sermon is self-contained, self-justified) collapses the distinction Swift would have it make.

Nevertheless, Swift insists upon the distinction between preacher and audience (here the ridiculers), maintaining a closed, unidirectional model of communication. If there is a problem with preaching, it lies in the audience. For, as Swift tells his audience: “Nor, lastly, are Preachers justly blamed for neglecting human Oratory to move the Passions, which is not the Business of a Christian Orator, whose Office it is only to work upon Faith and Reason” (214). He maintains a distinct commit-
ment to the rhetoric of the head over that of the heart, without acknowledging this to be a rhetorical stance. This same distinction, again without acknowledgement, informs “A Letter to a Young Gentleman” where rhetoric is seen as “without either Properity or Meaning” (67). It interferes with the exchange of meaning:

I have listened with my utmost Attention for half an Hour to an Orator of this [rhetorical] Species, without being able to understand, much less to carry away one single Sentence out of a whole Sermon. (67-68)

What lies behind Swift’s resistance to rhetoric is his insistence upon boundaries: between head and heart, preacher and congregation. To allow rhetorical considerations to enter into a sermon would be to allow the crossover of audience and preacher, to allow what for Swift are the hierarchized units of the preaching situation to be interchangeable and hence, equal. This, Swift is unwilling to acknowledge.

A brief look at Swift’s comments on his audience in “A Letter to a Young Gentleman” and the sermon “On the Trinity” reveals telling contradictions as Swift attempts to define his relation to his audience. In “A Letter,” Swift echoes the period’s praise of the plain style, speaking out against “hard words” or “Terms of Art” (65, 66) which, like rhetoric, stand in the way of meaning. This is cast in terms which initially appear to be sympathetic with his audience, for his aim is to enhance communication:

But I am apt to put myself in the Place of the Vulgar, and think many Words difficult or obscure, which the Preacher will not allow to be so, because those Words are obvious to Schollars. (65)

However, this identification is accompanied by an anecdote about Lord Falkland which reinforces distinction:

when he doubted whether a Word were perfectly intelligible or no, he used to consult one of his Lady’s Chambermaids, (not the Waiting-woman, because it was possible she might be conversant in Romances,) and by her Judgment was guided, whether to receive or reject it. (55)

The author’s conscious effort to identify with his audience in effect makes that identification impossible. It is noteworthy that distinction is made not only between author and audience, but also within the audience itself (between Chambermaid and Waiting-woman). In considering sermons, “where the meanest Hearer is supposed to be concerned” (65), such distinctions
collapse into equations: "very often a Lady's Chambermaid may be allowed to equal half the Congregation, both as to Quality and Understanding" (66).

As an outside statement of sermon policy, not intended for the congregation's ears, the brusque treatment of the congregation found in "A Letter" is understandable. However, within the sermon "On the Trinity," the same contradiction surfaces as Swift attempts to identify with his audience by means of pointing out his intellectual separation from them. At the outset, Swift establishes a distinction between the complex theological notion behind the Trinity (which he is shortly to label "a Term of Art" [160]) and the audience:

THIS Day being set apart to acknowledge our Belief in the Eternal TRINITY, I thought it might be proper to employ my present Discourse entirely upon that Subject: and, I hope, to handle it in such a Manner, that the most Ignorant among you may return home better informed of your Duty in this great Point, than probably you are at present. (159)

The rest of the sermon is spent dismissing complexity. For example:

This Creed is now read at certain times in our Churches, which, although it is useful for Edification to those who understand it: yet, since it containeth some nice and philosophical Points which few People can comprehend, the Bulk of Mankind is obliged to believe no more than the Scripture-Doctrine, as I have delivered it. (160)

This method, emphasizing the distinction between preacher, "I" who understand the issue, and audience, "you," "the Bulk of Mankind," reinforces the unidirectional sense of the sermon. The preacher delivers, the audience receives.21

When Swift makes his move toward becoming one with his audience, this rigid structure impedes him. The language of distinction employed—"meanest," "Humiliation," "ignorant"—defeats the supposedly unifying intent:

Does this Mystery of the Trinity, for Instance, and the Descent of the Holy Ghost, Bring the least Profit or Power to the Preachers? No; it is as great a Mystery to themselves as it is to the meanest of their Hearers; and may be rather a Cause of Humiliation, by putting their Understanding in that Point upon a Level with the most ignorant of their Flock. (163)

The didactic structure of Swift's conception of the sermon and its rhetorical situation has its parallel in the formal structure of the sermon itself which relentlessly carries the preacher to his conclusion.

Swift is clearly uncomfortable with the genre of the sermon, perhaps because of his sense of alienation from his congregation.
Generically speaking, his most successful sermons, those first published, are the least subject to the tyranny of a structure that is simplified and reified in the text. In these three sermons (which include "On the Trinity"), the format is open-ended: introductory commentary upon the text, followed by a demonstration, followed in turn by "a few Inferences and Observations" ("On the Trinity," [166]; see also "Mutual Subjection," [145]) which are numbered, but not limited by a previous announcement. Here, if anywhere, Swift seems to be representative of the eighteenth century's less rigid approach to the sermon. Nevertheless, as we have seen in "On the Trinity" and "Upon Sleeping in Church," the sermons' formal structure is not the only rigid force at work. Swift is unwilling to engage in dialogue with either his audience or the discourse itself. He is anxious to ground the generic self-reference of "Upon Sleeping in Church" in a unidirectional rhetorical situation. Swift's dealings with genre are negative as he concludes "On the Trinity": "thus I have done with my Subject, which probably I should not have chosen, if I had not been invited to it by the Occasion of this Season . . ." (168). He wishes to ground his discourse, to explain the situation in terms of—and with denotative reference to—outside, liturgical circumstances. He is willing only to tell and deliver in a closed rhetorical situation. He will not make room for his audience.

These characteristics of Swift's preaching foreground the difficulty of the situation. Swift's approach is to deny his audience's participation in the discourse, that is, to deny a conception of the audience as thinking beings (perhaps in need of persuasion) rather than passive receptors. This is a contradictory position, for his didactic absolutist stance denies not only rhetoric, but also dialectic (which is the philosophical ideal of the non-rhetorical Platonic position to which he subscribes). The outright denial of rhetoric creates contradictions left unresolved by either an acceptance of ambiguity or a definitive proof of one side over the other. Swift is at his weakest in failing to acknowledge that the denial of rhetoric is itself a rhetorical stance. As we move to consider Sterne, we will see that it is exactly the acknowledgement of rhetorical considerations which distinguishes The Sermons of Mr. Yorick.

The difficulty of Sterne's rhetoric is that it plays upon the traditional opposition of philosophy and rhetoric while holding neither position. Sterne is attempting to work a "deep" rhetoric
(which will be seen to be dialogic) while avoiding both absolutist (Platonic-Swiftian) and ornamentalist (e.g., that of Swift's ridiculers) positions. Thus, much of the discussion to follow must employ the term "rhetoric" in two senses which are necessarily subject to collapse. The primary systemic rhetoric of Sterne's entire project is found in his recognition that truth is embedded in a social context. This social context requires a secondary ornamental rhetoric (of classical tropes and figures) which is simultaneously questioned in its opposition to philosophy. Thus we will show Sterne rhetorically denying rhetoric to the higher end of persuading (through rhetoric) his audience to lead a more virtuous life.

Sterne's comment on his charity sermon delivered in 1761, "The parable of the rich man and Lazarus considered" (Sermon 23), is worth quoting as a general statement on his preaching. He promises to give

not a half hour (not a poor half hour), for I never could preach so long without fatiguing both myself and my flock to death—but I will give you a short sermon, and [flap] you in my turn:—preaching (you must know) is a theologic flap upon the heart, as the dunning for a promise is a political flap upon the memory:—both the one and the other is useless where men have not enough to be honest. This makes for my hypothesis of wit and judgment.24

The preacher's sensitivity to the restlessness of his congregation, as well as his awareness of the kind of emotional appeal he is making place him in the arena of both the practical orator and the theoretical rhetorician.

The latter position Swift rejects, for it involves an acknowledging of an interaction between orator and audience which violates his rigid boundaries between head and heart.24 Sterne's approach is one based on just such an intermingling—one which acknowledges the complexities of the rhetorical situation. The sermon promised in the letter just quoted offers a dramatic example of Sterne's use of self-consciousness about rhetoric to persuade his audience. First, in explicating the text of Luke 16:31—'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one should rise from the dead'—Sterne makes explicit its rhetorical context, allegorizing "novelty" in the figure of Lazarus who is depicted as a shocking rhetorical ploy for attention:

—Rise from the dead! To what purpose? What could such a messenger propose or urge, which had not been proposed and urged already? the novelty or surprize of such a visit might awaken the attention of a curious unthinking people, who spent their time in nothing else, but to hear and tell some new
thing but ere he wonder was well over; some new wonder would start up in its room, and then the man might return to the dead from whence he came, and not a soul make one enquiry about him. (214)

A doubling process begins in the following paragraph when Sterne becomes a member of the audience to the dead man who is envisioned as a preacher sent by God "to call home our conscience and make us better Christians, better citizens, better men, and better servants to GOD than what we are" (214-15). Next, Sterne's sermon begins to describe the dead man's sermon in its detailed proceeding until,

he would enter into this enquiry.—

He might add.—

But what?— with all the eloquence of an inspired tongue. What could he add or say to us, which has not been said before? the experiment has been tried a thousand times upon the hopes and fears, the reasons and passions of men, by all the powers of nature . . . [so] that there is not a greater paradox in the world, than that so good a religion should be no better recommended by its professors. (216)

Here the rhetoric of the dead man's sermon breaks down as Sterne's sermon addresses the futility of sermonizing: "The fact is, mankind are not always in a humour to be convinced" (216).

The message of this sermon is similar to Swift's "Upon Sleeping in Church." The technique is radically different. Whereas Swift attempted to force his point by overdefining the rhetorical situation and denying rhetoric altogether. Sterne's sermon becomes a study of the rhetorical situation, an apparent lesson in persuasion: "In a word, a man's mind must be like your proposition before it can be relished; and 'tis the resemblance between them, which brings over his judgment, and makes him an evidence on your side" (222). Is this baring the device? Or is this a device in itself? What originally appears as advice to the orator regarding his audience now reverses its reference. In the next paragraph it is no longer the orator's concern that his audience is not of his mind. It has become the audience's concern:

'Tis therefore not to the cruel,—'tis to the merciful:—-to those who rejoice with those that rejoice, and weep with them that weep,—that we make this appeal:—'tis to the generous, the kind, the humane, that I am now to tell the sad story... (222-23)

The images of like-mindedness (rejoicing and weeping together) obscure the rhetorical flip that has occurred by means of revealing the rhetorical technique at work. The failure of the orator to understand his audience has become the audience's failure to
share the orator's grasp of the truth. It is no surprise that on these shifting grounds, Sterne turns to a questioning of rhetoric: "—What can I say more?—it is a subject on which I cannot inform your judgment,—and in such an audience, I would not presume to practise upon your passions ..." (223). However, this is a rhetorical questioning of rhetoric. It functions not only by occupatio (the rhetorical denial of rhetoric), but by reference to the rhetoric of the other preacher in this text, the dead man whose sermon was interrupted by Sterne's sermon because his audience was doomed to failure. This juxtaposition of orators and audiences, the doubling of rhetoric upon itself returns Sterne's audience to the original text with a new awareness that novelty of vehicle creates only the appearance of communication. Sterne has used a rhetoric sufficiently aware of itself to create the necessary likemindedness which straightforward (ornamental) rhetoric fails to create.

Sterne's rhetorical technique in this sermon is complex. It is certainly free from the limitations which Swift imposed upon himself. In The Eighteenth-Century Pulpit, James Downey remarks that.

With Sterne the sermon comes closer to passing over entirely into the field of literature than with any other preacher of the eighteenth century. He dispenses with practically all homiletic appurtenances; there is nothing to indicate an outline—no major headings, subdivisions, or Roman numerals; no repetitions, recapitulations, and nothing which even faintly resembles a peroration. Only the presence of a Biblical text distinguishes one of Sterne's sermons from a vigorous moral essay.

Sterne appears deliberately to disregard the conventions of sermon construction. This statement exaggerates, perhaps (especially with regard to Sterne's "deliberate" intentions), but, as a description of Sterne's sermons, it is not untrue. However, I believe that Sterne makes his mark in the oscillation between the absolute freedom from convention which Downey describes and convention itself. Obviously, the generic self-reference of the sermon would be impossible in a state of total freedom from genre. It is a peculiar freedom from the doubleness of a genre which incorporates self-reference that allows Sterne to expand self-reference beyond the strictly generic appurtenances of Tillotson and the wider (but still restricted to genre) self-reference of Swift. In Sterne's sermons, reference to the genre is displaced onto referentiality itself. In other words, in Sterne's sermons we have neither the self-referentiality of a textual apparatus, nor
commentary on a general notion of the sermon, but rather an ongoing engagement with discourse at large. This engagement can be seen in Sterne’s frequent meditations on questions of reading which, in contrast with Swift, include his audience’s perspective within the sermon. This develops in part from the sermon form itself which generates discourse by means of interpreting a text. As we have already suggested with “The parable of the rich man and Lazarus considered,” this is just the beginning for Sterne. Whereas Swift used the sermon form to deliver the interpretation of his text in a monologic fashion, Sterne’s delivery (of what is ultimately an orthodox interpretation) is dialogic. He sees the temptation of simplistic reading—a collapse into unquestioned assumptions—but he insists on problematizing such interpretations, revealing the double, interactive nature of the reading process. This is accomplished through his manipulation of the rhetorical situation of the sermon.

In Sterne’s sermons, the typical announcement of divisions is softened into a short—and polite—paragraph:

In the remaining part of the discourse I shall follow the same plan; and therefore shall beg leave to enlarge first upon the story itself, with such reflections as will rise from it; and conclude, as our SAVIOUR has done, with the same exhortation to kindness and humanity which so naturally falls from it. (Sermon 3, 25)38

Unlike Swift, who would have numbered his outline and stuck to the plan, Sterne, after enlarging upon the story, alters his course:

I have now done with the parable, which was the first part proposed to be considered in this discourse; and should proceed to the second, which so naturally falls from it, of exhorting you, as our SAVIOUR did . . . to go and do so likewise: but I have been so copious in my reflections upon the story itself, that I find I have insensibly incorporated into them almost all that I should have said here in recommending so amiable an example; by which means I have unawares anticipated the task I proposed. I shall therefore detain you no longer than with a single remark. (29)

In Tillotson or Swift, a rigid structure would have prevented such a Shandean accident from occurring. Sterne expresses awareness of the strangeness of his proceeding by casting it as accidental. It happened “insensibly,” he has “unawares anticipated the task.” He knows what was “proposed,” but he is not only writing or speaking; he is simultaneously reading, becoming aware of what is happening in the text of his sermon. Reading in one form or another is never distant in Sterne’s sermons. This instance offers the image of the text—or its author/speaker—reading itself. This double sense of a mind simultaneously gener-
ating and interpreting a text is only partially inherent in the sermon genre (this is especially true of the charity sermon). Certainly, a sermon is intended to interpret its text (here, the selected passage from scripture). Also, it is clear that the traditional sermon is highly aware of its own proceeding, using the announcement of divisions as a technique of invention. However, the interpretation of the text and the generation of the sermonic discourse are separate concerns to Tillotson and Swift. What is remarkable in Sterne’s sermons is the collapse into the sermon’s interpretation of its own proceeding.²⁹

Just such a process is at work in “The House of Feasting and the House of Mourning Described” as the opening pages unsettle the metaphoric status of its text.³⁰ This is done by foregrounding types of reading. But before this procedure can be explored, we must experience the immediate reading of the text Sterne offers his congregation. The text is Ecclesiastes 7:2-3:

*It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting.*—

THAT I deny—but let us hear the wise man’s reasoning upon it—for that is the end of al. men, and the living will lay it to his heart: sorrow is better than laughter—for a crack’d-brain’d order of Carthusian monks, I grant, but not for men of the world. (Sermon 2, 12)

Despite his contrary reading of the text, Sterne keeps its travel metaphor. He is, however, unwilling to let it pass unnoticed in the opening pages. The “uneasy journey of life” (12) metaphor is one so common that it does not register as a metaphor. For Sterne this is unacceptable (perhaps symbolic of his audience’s disinterest in his sermon). He must, therefore, defamiliarize. After running the journey metaphor through its familiar changes,³¹ he pulls up and bares the device: “I will not contend at present against this rhetorick; I would choose rather for a moment to go on with the allegory, and say we are travellers” (13). Sterne draws out the metaphor for another paragraph, and then again reminds us we are reading: “But let us not lose sight of the argument in pursuit of the simile” (13).

This attention to reading is necessarily accompanied by attention to the rhetorical situation. It is noteworthy that, in questioning the text, Sterne addresses its author with a mocking phrase: “do you think my good preacher, that he who is infinitely happy, can envy us our enjoyments?” (12). This rhetorical question is a distancing technique, aligning Sterne with his “wise” audience against the “preacher.” However, in the given rhetorical situation, Sterne is the preacher. This reflexive moment introduces an
aporia, allowing Sterne to be both preacher and audience for the duration of the sermon. And it would appear that, as a member of the audience, the journey metaphor has rather secular associations for Sterne. In these opening pages, references to “crack’d-brain’d,” “Carthusian monks,” “the dry and dismal deserts of a Sierra Morea,” and “a nonsensical piece of saint errantry” (12-13) allude to Don Quixote, a journey of rather different import.32 Don Quixote is not just a location of “ridicule,” as Traugott suggests: it is an irresistible text when issues of reading are concerned. Don Quixote’s steadfast literal reading of romances forces him into an equally steadfast allegorical (or “enchanted”) reading of reality. In Cervantes’ text, reading is always present, as Quixote and Sancho argue over the interpretation of events.

Secular reading aside, with the metaphor twice labelled as a metaphor, reading is at issue. Following these reminders, Sterne turns to the moral substance of his sermon. He nevertheless maintains the metaphor throughout the sermon, “look[ing] into” (14) each house. Sterne offers his audience sensual and emotional portraits of the two houses. Although both are emotionally convincing—sentimental—allegories, the warnings offered early on hover over the descriptions. In a sense, the moving rhetoric employed in describing the house of mourning has been undermined. However, there is a counter-rhetoric at work, for, in the last analysis, Sterne contradicts his first reading of the text and returns to an orthodox position: “we might then safely rest our cause . . . whether Solomon has not made a just determination here, in favour of the house of mourning . . .” (20). By alerting his audience to its lazy reading habits—strenuously reading against holy scripture, questioning the role of preacher, alluding beyond the range of the rhetorical situation, pointing to the congregation’s thoughtless acceptance of metaphors—Sterne preoccupies the reader with reading, distracting or dividing his or her attention. Meanwhile, he re-grounds his text’s message in a new discursive context: the aporia of the preacher becomes the identification of the present preacher (Sterne) and the scriptural preacher (Solomon). By doubling his role (preacher/non-preacher), Sterne has restored communication to the rhetorical situation of the sermon (something Swift was attempting to do in “Upon Sleeping in Church”). This highly rhetorical pattern of division and return (here, the shift from aporia to identity, from
multiple interpretations to orthodoxy) is achieved through a reworking of the self-reflexivity Sterne found in the sermon tradition.

Questions of reading pervade Sterne's sermons, although the persuasive success of attention to reading in "The House of Feasting and the House of Mourning Described" is not always possible. In "The Case of Hezekiah and the Messengers" (Sermon 17) we witness a retreat into the collapse of the rhetorical doubling so successful in "The House of Feasting and the House of Mourning," for a specious doubling can mask a dangerous collapse. Early on in the sermon, Hezekiah's apostrophe to God gives way to Sterne's own:

——And he pray'd, and said, O LORD! I beseech thee remember——O Hezekiah! How couldst thou fear that GOD had forgotten thee? or, How couldst thou doubt of his remembrance of thy integrity, when he called thee to receive it's recompence? (158)

This gesture parallels Sterne's address to "my good Preacher" in "The House of Feasting," instantly creating a "scene of reading." Here the two levels revealed in this use of rhetoric upon rhetoric ultimately lead to a meditation on vanity:

VANITY bids all her sons to be generous and brave,—and her daughters to be chast and courteous.—But why do we want her instructions?——Ask the comedian who is taught a part he feels not——

Is it that the principles of religion want strength, or that the real passion for what is good and worthy will not carry us high enough?——GOD! thou knowest they carry us too high——we want not to be—but to seem — (162)

Acting (and Sterne employs the "world is a stage" trope throughout the sermons) stands in for rhetoric here: both place seeming over being—external appearance over internal reality. This was what Sterne was pointing at in Hezekiah's apostrophe to God. Of course in employing the same rhetorical device (apostrophe), the preacher's finger is pointing at himself as well—there is an actor in the pulpit, a jester on the title page of the text, *The Sermons of Mr. Yo'ick*. This is made most explicit when he points the finger at "the saint":

——with what an inflexible sanctity of deportment, he sustains himself as he advance:—every line in his face writes abstinence:——every stride looks like a check upon his desires: see, I beseech you, how he is cloack'd up with sermons, prayers and sacraments; and so bemuffled with the externals of religion, that he has not a hand to spare for a worldly purpose... Must the garb of religion be extended so wide to the danger of it's rending?—Yes truly, or it will not hide the secret——and, What is that?

——That the saint has no religion at all. (162-63)
Sterne's examples of hypocrisy in this sermon are commonplaces. They could easily be paraphrases of Shakespeare. Indeed, it is the very notion of the commonplace which comes to have significance for Sterne. Like the acceptance of the journey metaphor in "The House of Mourning and the House of Feasting," acceptance of these commonplaces endangers communication. To single out sermons as "externals of religion" (a commonplace phrase in anti-Catholic literature) in a sermon should raise questions about the present enterprise, but amidst a catalogue of commonplaces on hypocrisy, this doubleness is flattened out.

It is no wonder then, that the conclusion of this sermon addresses not only the read commonplaces, but commonplaces of reading itself. The falsity of rhetoric is so pervasive that there are those

who from a general distrust of all that looks disinterested, finding nothing to blame in an action, and perhaps much to admire in it,—immediately fall foul upon it's motives: Does job serve God for nought? (165)

The possibility of genuine disinterestedness (the word itself is a negative) has been undermined by the rhetorical use of appearance. Sterne here demonstrates that the distinction between seeming and being is collapsed by biased interpretation. Indeed, it is the very doubleness of seeming and being which allowed for hypocrisy in the first place. Now hypocritical interpretation makes the identification of hypocrisy impossible—or universal.

Commonplaces mark the location of possibilities for hypocritical interpretation: "It is a bad picture, and done by a terrible master, and yet we are always copying it" (165). Copying is the activity of commonplaces; commonplaces are the location of collapse. Sterne's double rhetoric—apostrophe upon apostrophe—is a warning against the collapse, but perhaps, as the sermon's penultimate paragraph pointedly states, "—it is too late" (166). The collapses of rhetoric in this sermon against sermons account for the concluding movement to exclude the preacher altogether:

It is painful to utter the reproaches which should come in here.——I will trust them with yourselves: in coming from that quarter, they will more naturally produce such fruits as will not set your teeth on edge. . . . (166)

This is a desire for a non-rhetorical dialectic, the "fruits" of which stand in opposition to the orator's copia of copied commonplaces. The final words of this sermon continue the preacher's withdrawal in many senses: "——for they will be the fruits of
love and good will, to the praise of GOD and the happiness of the world, which I wish" (166). Not only does the preacher syntactically estrange himself, dangling his desire at the end of the sentence at the end of the sermon, he also recedes into silence and perhaps reinforces the call for a new rhetorical setting by pointing toward the opening line (as well as the frequent refrain) of Tristram Shandy: "I wish . . . ." This sermon has returned to the necessity for likemindedness which we have seen rhetorically created in "The Rich Man and Lazarus" and "The House of Feasting and the House of Mourning." In this case, however, Sterne makes his case by enacting the failure of rhetoric to convey truth, necessitating a turn toward what is ultimately a higher rhetoric, silence.

It is New’s thesis that the retreat into silence is characteristic of the rhetorical difficulties of the Anglican centrist position which contradictorily defines itself against the bombastic extremes of Catholicism and enthusiastic dissenting sects while laying claim to its own divine inspiration. This is an accurate description of the similarity between the Augustan-Anglican stance of Swift and Sterne. However, my point has been to argue that, no matter how similar a conclusion they reach, Swift’s means to that end are different from Sterne’s. Whereas Swift silences the audience of his sermons, closing off the possibility of questions (So we preach, and so ye believe), Sterne actively encourages an interrogation of the discourse, moving together with his audience toward the ideal of silent agreement. Sterne has as many sermons dedicated to aiding and encouraging the audience’s activity of reading—problematizing interpretation, acknowledging the (unfortunate) need for rhetoric—as sermons which offer simplified attacks on rhetoric. Even the retreat into silence needs to be rhetorically demonstrated. For the most part, Sterne sees that rhetoric is unavoidable, and therefore, his congregation needs to know how to deal with it. The option of silence is an ideal which may only be approximated by means of a rhetorical process which Swift is unwilling to perform.

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NOTES

1 J. T. Parnell, “Swift, Sterne, and the Skeptical Tradition,” Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 23 (1994): 238. Parnell is arguing against modern or postmodern readings of Swift and Sterne by linking these authors to a Renaissance humanist tradition which is conservative and Pauline rather than radical and modern.


Throughout his career, it has been New’s consistent aim to defend Sterne from accusations of “superficial, nominal, Shandean” Christianity. In his major study, Laurence Sterne as Satirist: A Reading of Tristram Shandy (U. of Florida Press, 1969), New argues, by comparison with Swift, that Sterne was an “Augustan” satirist with a moral outlook grounded in orthodox Latitudinarian Anglicanism (which asserts the limits of reason and the necessity of revelation—that there is no morality without religion): for New, Sterne’s sermons and satires both stem from and are consistent with this foundation (see Chapters 1-3). This argument has been extended in great detail in New’s recent edition of Sterne’s sermons (The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne, [U. of Florida Press, 1996] Vol. 4, The Sermons [hereafter cited parenthetically] and Vol 5, The Notes [cited as Notes]).

3 New’s “Relationship Revisited” does briefly address rhetorical considerations, especially the turn toward silence in Anglican-Augustan discourse. Nevertheless, this needs further treatment.

4 Recent writing on the Latitudinarians has been concerned to describe a Restoration tradition which, in reaction to the strife of the civil war, attempted to find an inclusive middle way between Catholic authoritarianism and radical Protestant individualism by means of an appeal to reason and an emphasis on practical morality. This is a revisionary attempt to correct the assumptions of past scholars who have looked back at this seventeenth-century movement through the lens of eighteenth-century rationalism and deism, magnifying the Latitudinarians’ emphasis on reason by denying their insistence on revelation and ignoring their belief in the Fall and its consequences. See W. M. Spellman, The Latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660-1700 (U. of Georgia Press, 1993) and Gerard Reedy, The Bible and Reason: Anglicans and Scripture in Late Seventeenth-Century England (U. of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).


6 That “Sophist” has a sense in malo should remind us that we are subject to Platonic (or Swiftian) assumptions about rhetoric. For a cogent summary of the traditions mentioned here, see Stanley Fish, “Rhetoric,” in Critical Terms for Literary Study, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, 2nd ed. (U. of Chicago Press, 1995), 203-9. To align an eighteenth-century Anglican
7 Louis Landa's 'Introduction' to Swift's sermons suggests approximate dates for the surviving sermons ranging from 1715-1726 (The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, Vol. 9, ed. Herbert Davis and Louis Landa, [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948], 133-37). Lansing Van Der Heyden Hammond's extensive source study, Laurence Sterne's "Sermons of Mr. Yorick" (Yale U. Press, 1948) argues that all but one of Sterne's sermons were written before 1751. Melvyn New suggests it is impossible to pinpoint dates of composition: "the sermons . . . have roots in . . . a sermon-writing career that coincides with the start of Sterne's clerical career in 1737 and ended probably in 1765 with his final acts of revision" ("Introduction" in Notes, 5).

8 Arthur Cash (Laurence Sterne: The Early and Middle Years [London: Routledge, 1975]) portrays Sterne as a popular preacher at his rural parish, known for preaching extemporaneously: contemporary accounts describe a crowded church and a dramatic style (126-128). At York, Sterne's sermons were likely less extemporaneous, and therefore the likely source of the printed sermons, "written for delivery at the minster or before some assembly of ladies and gentlemen who had invited him to preach" (217).

9 Two sermons had appeared individually in York in 1747 and 1750. Regarding the London collection, New notes that Sterne "picked out sermons rather unlike his others, at least in their concentration on the Old rather than the New Testament, sermons illustrating his narrative capacities, a natural gesture, perhaps, since he was riding the coattails of his narrative triumph" ("Preface" in Notes, xv). In addition, Sterne's selection included four charity sermons (numbers 3, 5, 7, 23). Charity sermons are public performances with a highly rhetorical end, namely to solicit donations. Added to this general rhetorical end, we must keep in mind Sterne's own end in creating and maintaining his public Shandean persona which he obviously conceived of as consonant with the performativity of the charity sermon.

10 Before becoming Dean of St. Patrick's, Swift preached to a small country parish such as that of Laracor, described by Swift in a letter of 1710: "I am this minute very busy, being to preach to day before an Audience of at least 15 People, most of them Gentle, and all Simple" (The Correspondence of Jonathan Swift, Ed. Harold Williams. 5 Vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1943-65: 1:163). There is little evidence that, despite the comfort he derived from improving the land, Swift was a member of the community. After becoming Dean, it is possible that Swift may have mainly addressed the lower clergy (something suggested to me by Melvyn New). Nevertheless, Swift maintained his curacy of three small parishes (see David Nokes, Jonathan Swift, A Hypocrite Reversed: A Critical Biography [Oxford U. Press, 1985], 37 and 273-79). As I will argue, there is no doubt that, in either case, there is a great distance between Swift and his audience. Finally, we should note that, for lack of evidence, the sermons I will discuss "cannot be said with any assurance" to have been "composed or preached when Swift was Dean of St. Patrick's" (Landa, "Introduction to the Sermons," 187).

12 Rivers, Reason, Grace, and Sentiment. 52.

13 Scholars agree that Tillotson’s influence was astounding. See, for example, Rivers (41-2), Reedy (142) and New ("Introduction," 47-48).

14 This description is based on Tillotson’s sermons in Volume Two of Sermons on Several Subjects and Occasions (London, 1757). The oral nature of the sermon makes the textual apparatus appear unnatural, especially in the inconsistencies of eighteenth-century printing which foreground the strangeness of the text.

15 "Introduction," 103.

16 The satiric device of an implied middle ground between two extremes is absent from the sermons. If at all, it surfaces as an outright contradiction (see New’s ‘Relationship Revisited’). Brian A. Connery addresses recent critical approaches to the problem of author, persona and intentionality in a Tale of a Tub, suggesting that the Tale argues for a kind of “interpretive community” through the recognition of the need to construct meaning (“The Persona as Pretender and the Reader as Constitutional Subject in Swift’s Tale” in James E. Gill, ed. Cutting Edges: Postmodern Critical Essays on Eighteenth-Century Satire [U. of Tennessee Press, 1995]). This is exactly what the Swift of the sermons will not tolerate.

17 Prose Works, 9:211. (Unless otherwise noted, all further references to Swift are from this volume, cited in text.)

18 This is a preaching manifesto from the point of view of an outsider, a “Lay-Patron,” alternately titled, “A Letter from a Lay-Patron to a Gentleman Designing for Holy Orders” (see Prose Works Vol. 9, pp. xiii and 372). That Swift should adopt a persona and write a separate piece to express the audience’s point of view, rather than directly incorporate it into the rhetorical situation of the sermon, is telling of his rigid approach.


20 In “The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus Considered” (discussed below), Sterne turns the tables on his audience in a very different fashion. For the moment, Swift’s attitude toward his audience in “Upon Sleeping in Church” may be seen clearly by contrast with Sterne’s Sermon 43 which addresses similar issues of church misbehavior. Sterne’s terms of accusation are mild: motives for absence from church on Sunday are merely “to trifle that day away, or apply any portion of it to secular concerns” (405). Swift is more accusable: absence is “upon the Account of Idleness, or Spleen, or Hatred to Religion, or in order to doze away the Intemperance of the Week” (210). Each preacher’s use of the first person plural is similarly indicative. Sterne’s use is inclusive, counting himself among the congregants, “when we are performing this solemn duty in the house of God” (406). Swift’s use of “we” is, with a single exception, authorial, for the purposes of argument, or exclusive, separating “we,” the preacher(s), from the congregation. Indeed, this stance is so strong it might be surmised that
this sermon was addressed by the dean to lower clergymen, were it not for his explicit accusation of "some Part in this Audience" (210, emphasis added), a gesture of separation which Sterne never employs.

21 I should note here that this is an unexceptionable model for eighteenth-century sermons; it is stressed here to contrast Sterne's approach.

22 This is not to suggest that Anglican doctrine was a matter for public debate, but rather to show Swift's almost antagonistic attitude toward his audience. Even the sermons of as strait-laced a preacher as Tillotson convey a greater sense of mutual purpose in seeking religious knowledge.


24 Thus it is no surprise that we have no record of Swift giving a charity sermon for the purpose of encouraging generosity and soliciting donations, although charity (however discouraged) is certainly the subject of several sermons, such as "On the Poor Man's Contentment," "Doing Good," and most famously (for its proposal that parishes have their beggars wear badges) "Causes of the Wretched Condition of Ireland."

25 The suggestion that like-mindedness (honesty) precludes the need for preaching—or any communication—is the import of Sterne's letter about this sermon. We will consider this turn toward silence at the conclusion of this essay.


27 Downey's study is dated in its use of early twentieth-century assumptions about Latitudinarianism (e.g., the sermon as "vigorously moral essay") which have been questioned by the revisionist historians noted above. Although New's comment that "one would be hard pressed to find in Sterne a passage that could not have appeared in Tillotson or Clarke—or, for that matter, in Wkins or William Wollaston, Edward Stillingfleet or John Sharp" ("Preface" in *Notes*, xiv) must be considered, we should note that it refers more to Sterne's theology than his style.

28 See also *Sermon 1* (5) and New's note on Sterne's awareness of "the traditional three-part division of sermons, viz., explication, confirmation, and application" (*Notes*, 63).

29 In one sense, this phenomenon could be the function of Sterne's plagiarism: he is reading others' texts in his own. It is also conducive to drawing attention to the sermonist—another aim of *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*. In examining the reading of the sermon in *Tristram Shandy*, Homer Obed Brown draws attention to the "scene of reading" ("a moment in a text in which other texts are 'read' in a way to suggest possibilities of reading the narrative that contains them") (*Institutions of the English Novel: From Defoe to Scott* [U. of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, 117]. This concept may be broadly applied to any moment in the sermons in which Sterne interrogates his text, on behalf of, or as a model to his audience. From such moments I derive
my paradigm of doubling/collapse, which is also indebted to Jonathan
Lamb's similar use of pleonasm and tautology in Sterne's Fiction and the
Double Principle.

30 Indeed, New suggests that these first pages of an otherwise sober sermon
are intended to unsettle the congregation after forty-five minutes of per-
haps dull church service "Preface," xix). This is a popular sermon ("one of
the best," according to Sterne himself [Letters, 301]). Traugott's reading of
this sermon (100-102) is similar to mine, perhaps seeing as "philosophical
rhetoric" what I term "reading." See also Downey (141-42).

31 Sterne is plagiarizing here (Notes, 69-70).

32 Traugott (100) and New (Notes, 70) use only the Sierra Morena to introduce
the Quixote, but the confluence of the four terms increases the secularity of
the allusion; for there is a greater sense of time spent with the novel. Don
Quixote's niece believes his reading "help some how or other to crack my
Uncle's Brain" (Miguel de Cervantes, Don Quixote, trans. Peter Motteux, rev.
John Ozell [New York: Random House, 1930], 1.1.6, p. 31). Later, Quixote
compares the austerity and benefit to the world of his profession with that
of a Carthusian (2.1.5 [75]). For his adventure in the Sierra Morena, see
1.3.9 (164 ff.). Finally, "saint errantry," although not of Sterne's coining,
was one of his favorite phrases (it appears in two other sermons, and an
eary political piece—see Notes, 70-71). The word is obviously based on
'knight errantry," but only in the post-Quixotic, ironic sense of the term
OED, s.v. "saint-errant" and "knight-errant").

33 This sermon has drawn considerable critical and biographical attention, as it
was a provocative public performance (given in Paris) with considerable
results for Sterne's public image. See New's headnote (Notes, 193-97) for
details and problems with the documentation.

34 Sterne's apostrophe to Hezekiah is borrowed from Joseph Hall (Notes, 197).
It is the doubling echo of Hezekiah's own apostrophe which is Sterne's
innovation.

35 Sterne attests to his conception of preaching as dramatic in a letter praising
a "more than theatrical" French preacher (Letters, 154-55). Sterne initially
advertised the publication of his sermons as The Dramatick Sermons of Mr.
Fileck (New, "Introduction," 2). See also Byron Petrakis, "Jester in the

36 This is supported by the fact that New cites an analogue rather than a
source (Notes, 202).

37 See "A Relationship Revisited," passim. New's strongest evidence is found in
the silent characters of Martin in A Tale of a Tub and Diego in Tristram
Shandy's "Salweckenbergius's Tale." In selecting theological evidence from
Sterne's sermons which directly attack the rhetoric of enthusiasm, New
obscures a significant difference between the styles Swift and Sterne.

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eessay.