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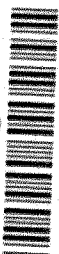
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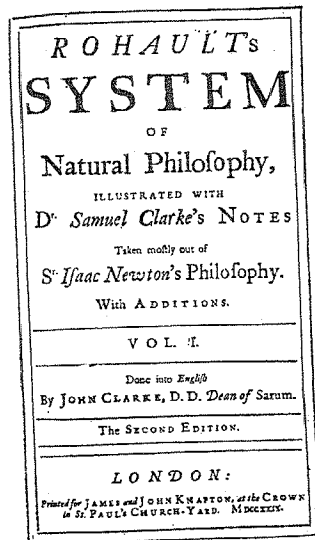
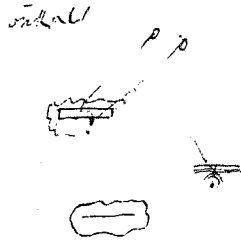
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### *Books Sterne Owned?*

Reading again (in the last *Shandean*) Nicolas Barker's scholarly and entertaining (how well those two words go together) romp through the *probables* and the *might-have-beens* in Sterne's library, I fell to thinking of those elusive others that never even got a mention, the *certain-to-have-been-theres* because he signed his name in them.<sup>1</sup> Where are *they*?

For a man who must have signed it more than twelve thousand times in books destined to go in other libraries,<sup>2</sup> he seems to have been remarkably reluctant to do it to those in his own. Nor did he have a bookplate (though I have known a sharp bookseller who pasted in and tried to pass off the engraving from *A Sentimental Journey* as one); and when in 1976 Geoffrey Day investigated the possible origin of the seven hundred books 'at a purchase dog cheap' Sterne says he bought in 1761,<sup>3</sup> he was able to name in passing only two (neither from the dog-cheap lot) which might have been Sterne's: one a scrapbook of Irish material in Cambridge University Library ascribed on the basis of a six-word note said to be in his hand,<sup>4</sup> the other (oddly) the last volume only in a set of four of Rousseau's *Emile, ou de l'Education* published at Amsterdam in 1762 and bearing on its flyleaf the signature 'L. Sterne'.<sup>5</sup> But neither volume is listed among the 2505 lots in Todd & Sotheran's York sale-catalogue of 1768 which claimed to include Sterne's 'Entire Library'.

Then there are one or two intangible ghosts. Dr Ferrier in 1812 in the second edition of his *Illustrations of Sterne* dropped a footnote on p. 53 saying he had handled Richard Heber's copy of Beroalde's *Moyen de Parvenir* (he does not date it) bearing on a blank leaf 'L. Sterne, a Paris, 8 livres'. But where is the book now? Much more tantalising is Percy Fitzgerald who on pp. 9-10 of the second edition of the *Life* in 1896 tells of seeing Sterne's own soiled and scribbled-upon schoolbook, *Synopsis Communium Locorum ex Poetis Latinis Collecta*, full of juvenile sketches of owls, cocks and hens, soldiers, female faces, and a long-nosed portrait with written above it 'This is Lorence'; yet then, having briefly under-described it, Fitzgerald rushes on in his scampering manner without dropping a hint as to where he had seen the book or who owned it; and nobody had the wit to quiz him before he scampered off for ever at the



*J. Storr*

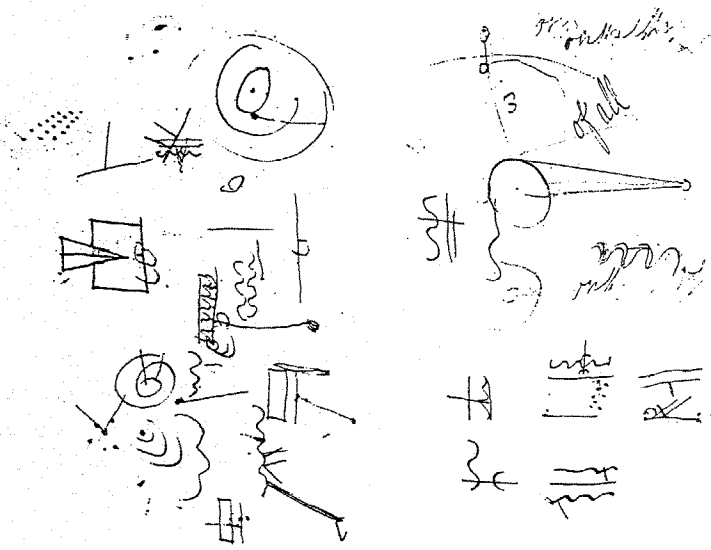


FIG. 65 ROHAULT . . . Title in red and black. Height of original 173 mm

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age of 95 in 1925; what a feast was here lost for a convocation of modern psychologists!

And neither of the above ghosts makes an appearance in the sale-catalogue. So how stands the list to date? Just one (doubtfully two) books on record, but neither in Todd & Sotheran.

I can do a little better. Writing from a restored and recharged Shandy Hall, where so many of his books once rested, I can name five that he must at least have handled (or six if we include a 2-volume set of which only the second is signed) and of these, three (or four) carry the extra provenance of being listed in the catalogue.

Possibly the earliest of them to have been his (because Christopher Wordsworth's *Scholæ Academicæ; some account of the studies at the English Universities in the eighteenth century*, 1877, says it was a recommended book at Cambridge in Sterne's day) appears in the catalogue thus:

1233: Rohault's System of Natural Philosophy, with Dr Clarke's Notes, 2 vols. 4s 6d 1729.<sup>6</sup>

This was the second edition, and the copy now in the collection here, bound in sound contemporary calf, bears the signature 'L. Sterne' on the top right hand corner of the front fly-leaf of Vol. II (odd again: was it a whim of Sterne's to sign only the final volume in a set?) As will be seen (p. 216), the hand is characteristically his, though written with a sharper quill than usual, but I see no reason to question it; it is the earliest mark of ownership in the book, the only others being the later (probably early 19c) armorial bookplates of 'Sergeantson of Hanlith', which is by way of being supportive evidence since Hanlith is a village near Skipton in Yorkshire, and the owner of Hanlith Hall in 1768, according to Burke's *Landed Gentry*, was William Sergeantson, a 30-year-old member of Gray's-Inn, recently a widower, and a likely enough buyer at the York sale.

What adds to the interest is that, if Sterne was indeed the first owner, and kept the books until Sergeantson bought them in 1768, he was the likely source of a manuscript correction and a number of curious quasi-scientific doodlings in Vol. II: they occur on the front fly-leaf and both end-papers (more fully revealed on the first when I carefully soaked off the Sergeantson bookplate). Further evidence of use in that volume occurs in Chapter 27, *On Light and Colours, and of Transparency, and Opakeness*, where the only slight deviations from the clean state of both volumes can be seen; pages 205-218 bear one or two smoothed-out dog's-ears, a small ink spot, half an inky fingerprint, and a slight hint of wear;

though a more positive sign that a reader has been at work appears on p. 217, thus:

50. And as the Sun is very bright, so it ought to raise the most sensible Heat in us; and so we find by Experience every Day that it does; nay to that Degree, that when its Rays are collected by a ~~concave~~ Glass, they will not only set combustible Bodies on which they fall, on Fire, but will melt Metals, Stones, and Flints.

50 The surprizing Power of the Sun's Heat.

Concave

The correction is made in ink similar to that on the flyleaf and endpapers, and the hand (but with no more than six letters to judge from) could well be Sterne's. As for the doodlings, for what they are worth and in the possibility that they may show early hints of his interest in natural philosophy, if not in semiotics, they are in part reproduced on p. 216. Any Shandean who send a modest sum in sterling for photocopying, postage, &c, to the Laurence Sterne Trust, at Shandy Hall, can gladly have full-sized photocopies on which to write a thesis, provided they undertake not to 'darken their hypothesis with too many tall, opaque words . . .'

If Sterne did read the book, neither he nor Sergeantson, nor indeed anyone, ever read Vol. I all through, for Chapters XVI, *Of hard Bodies put into Liquors* and XXI, *Of the Form of a Hard and of a Liquid Body, or of Hardness and Liquidity*, are unopened at the top edges of one or two pages. But if Sterne read on in Vol. II he would have found material more to his mind, as in the chapter on *Animal Spirits*, which 'the Brain no otherwise conduces, but only like a very fine Sieve, that separates the finest Flower [flour] from the Coarse'. Even more suggestive of things to come are passages in Chapter XXVII on projectiles, whereat the mind is tempted to take a leap forward to 'My uncle Toby understood the nature of a parabola as well as any man in England, — but was not quite such a master of the cycloid; — he talked however about it every day; — the bridge went not forwards. — We'll ask somebody about it, cried my uncle Toby to Trim.' All is explicated in *Rohault*, and the doodlings may even include an attempt to trace the path of a cycloid . . .

But there can be no doubts about when he came by another volume in the collection here, because Sterne himself has dated it. It makes an modest appearance in the catalogue under the long list of *Sermons*, thus:

1073 Bp. Fleetwood on Relative Duties, 2s 1716

This is the second edition of a volume containing a number of practical discourses and sermons by William Fleetwood, then Bishop of

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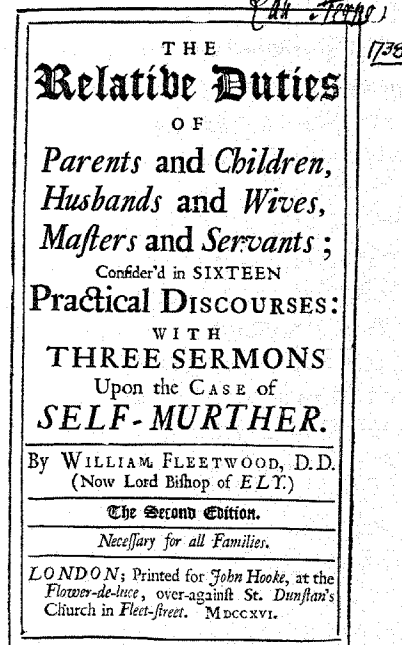


FIG. 66 FLEETWOOD (Portrait) . . . Height of original engraved surface  
158 mm  
FLEETWOOD (Title) . . . Height of original title-page 170 mm

Ely, upon subjects which we must hope had begun to exercise Sterne's mind in the year of his admission to the priesthood when it seems he was given the book, for on its flyleaf is an earlier signature of 'R: Sterne', presumably that of either his uncle Richard of Elvington or his cousin Richard of Woodhouse. There is possibly a hint here of family history; the book, with its admonitory title, may have been given by cousin Richard with a few exhortatory words to one who had been 'a great rake' at college but who now, being 'japanned', promised better things. Or more simply, perhaps the book was in uncle Richard's house in North Street, York, the contents of which he bequeathed on his death in 1732 to his daughter Anne,<sup>7</sup> and on her death in 1738 it came to Laurence. Its full title is set out above; it will be seen that he signed and dated it 'Lau<sup>nce</sup> Sterne 1738'. It is an octavo bound in somewhat shabby but sound contemporary blind-panelled sheep.

The next volume that was unquestionably Sterne's reveals him in an unexpected light; he bought it of his own choosing and paid good money for it: fifteen shillings in the 1740s was more than an average curate's weekly stipend, and to lay it out on a Greek New Testament seems the act of a man more serious and less pressed for money than Sterne is sometimes held to have been in his youthful days; moreover, it may well have cost him more than the fifteen shillings, since there is a likelihood that he paid a visit to London to buy it, with possibly other volumes too, now lost. The story of its buying is somewhat complicated, and begins with a brief entry, not in Todd & Sotheran's *Catalogue* but in Vol. I of the much more impressive one of the late Earl of Oxford's magnificent library, written in Latin by Samuel Johnson for Thomas Osborne, the London bookseller who had bought the library for £13,000 and hoped to sell it for a profit. The entry, on page 22 of *Catalogus Bibliothecae Harleianae*, 1743, reads:

345 [Novum Testamentum] Graec. fol., deaur. Cant. ap. Tho. Buck 1632<sup>8</sup>

When proposals for Vols. I and II of this catalogue had been published in 1742, prefaced by Johnson's account (in English this time) of its contents, Osborne had had the impudence, as many felt, to say he would charge ten shillings for it. To charge for a sale catalogue (albeit a substantial one) was an imposition many bibliophiles would not stomach, and Osborne was forced to concede that the price would be deducted from any purchase made. The sale, after several weeks of public viewing, began on 7 April 1743 'with the lowest price fixed in each Book'. The books indeed were sumptuous, but the 'lowest prices' seemed high to many, sales were disappointing, and Osborne closed the doors on 1 July determined to do better next time.

Vols. III and IV of the *Catalogus*, containing a further selection of Lord Oxford's books, were advertised later in the year, again at ten shillings the two, but this time with the concession that anyone returning them within three months could have the money back. Again there was a much advertised public viewing, and the Second Sale began on 14 February, 1744, preceeded by a long newspaper puff by Johnson which ended with a humble admission on Osborne's behalf that 'Care has been taken, not to give any Offence, by exorbitant Valuation . . . the Fluctuation of Trade changes the Value of every Commodity, and as the present Time is more favourable to those that form Libraries, than to those who disperse them, the Proprietor of this Collection is contented to recede from the Expectations which he had at first form'd, and to comply with the Demands of the Publick.' It may well have been

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Osborne's use of him as a hack copywriter that roused Johnson's ire and led to the heavy rebuke recorded by Boswell, 'Sir, he was impertinent to me, and I beat him.'

It is now time to bring Sterne into the story, for on 1 March, with the sale still on, he bought the Greek New Testament which appears among a dozen or so such items in Todd & Sotheran's catalogue, thus:

2154 Idem, Gr. 4s      *Cantab. apud Buck 1632<sup>9</sup>*

Proof that Sterne indeed bought it, and when he did, will be seen on p. 222, and the reason why he named the year as 1743 is that he was using the Julian or 'Old Style' calendar, in which New Year's day was 25 March; many people, especially in the north, still used it.<sup>10</sup> He could not have bought the book on '1 Mar 1743' as stated, since the First Sale did not begin till 7 April of that year. Whether he had bought, or somehow seen, Vol. I of the *Catalogus* in 1743 we cannot know; my own guess is that he attended the Second Sale himself, when prices were lower and some of the unsold stock of 1743 had been reduced; he there spotted the New Testament, the first Greek edition printed in Cambridge, it reminded him of his college days and nostalgically he bought it.<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly at first sight, the volume, which has been rebound in the 19th century and is now in a private collection, has on the endpapers a long manuscript gloss in Latin on the Greek text of *Romans XIII:1*, but the small neat script and shape of the letters are totally unlike any of Sterne's known hands, and a reference to D'Alembert's *Destruction des Jésuites, en France, Seconde partie*, not published till 1767, puts the composition to that year at the earliest and into Sterne's final months, when surely he was too occupied with *A Sentimental Journey* and the *Journal to Eliza* to think of such hierological dabbings.

I have seen two other volumes that Sterne must have at least handled. One I was offered by a dealer forty or more years ago (so I speak from mere memory): it was an oblong octavo sketchbook containing a number of dullish drawings of Italian peasant life by a minor artist named Marotti (or Maroli?) which I felt Sterne must have bought out of kindness during his tour of Italy in 1765-6; he had signed his name (genuinely) on the flyleaf in similar pale ink to that used by the artist; I rejected it because the price asked was ridiculously high even for those pre-inflation days and the quality of the drawings I thought trivial. I happen to know the sketchbook was much later offered to, and rejected by, a worthy fellow collector. Doubtless it still exists somewhere. The other volume was at least momentarily Sterne's, in Paris in 1764 when

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*L. Thomas*

*Brought out of  
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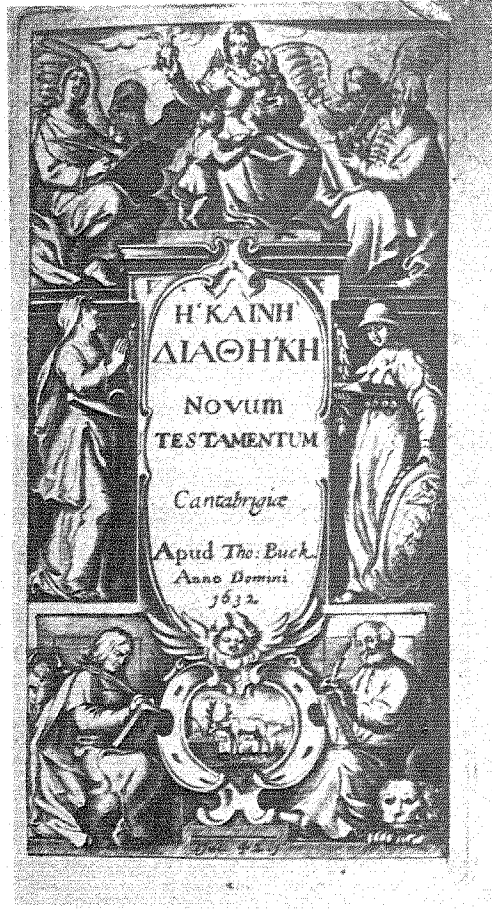


FIG. 67

GREEK N T . . . Height of original engraved surface 147 mm

Call. Post. A. chosen.  
Bought at the sale of Mr. ...  
Lutetia Parisiorum  
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*De done*  
*L. Sterne.*  
*1764.*  
*Lutetia Parisiorum.*



CATULLUS,  
TIBULLUS  
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PROPERTIUS,

Pristino nitore restituti, & ad optima  
Exemplaria emendati.  
ACCEDUNT  
Fragmenta CORNELIO GALLO inscripta.



LUTETIAE PARISIORUM,  
Apud Iohannem BARDOU, vii. San-Jacobi.  
M. DCC. LIII.

FIG. 68

he gave it to Wilkes, who recorded the gift, as will be seen here on p. 223. It is now in the collection of the inspiritor of this article.

We catch glimpses of books of his own he gave away; a sermon of 1747 to Philip Harland, still manifest today in York Minster Library; a set of what 'appears' (suitably ghostly) to be first editions of his works inscribed 'John Dealtry ex dono Autoris' noted by Curtis in 1931 and footnoted on p. 61 of *Letters*, 1935. But where now are the volumes Sterne gave to Kitty Fourmantel, to Eliza, to Garrick, Mrs Montagu, *et al*?

I myself tried in 1957 to glimpse another item of which Curtis in *Letters* on p. 85 says: 'In the possession of Mrs. Edwin Gray, of Gray's Court, York is a volume containing Berkeley's *Querist*, London, 1750, and *A Letter from Mr. Cibber to Mr. Pope*, London 1742. Upon the fly-leaf of this volume, which Sterne presented to Marmaduke Fothergill, he wrote: 'L. S. To Mr. Fothergil greeting — with Cibber's 2<sup>d</sup> Letter to Pope. have been doing Penance at the rate of 4 Quarts of Tar Water a Day, for the Pleasure — committed of sitting up till 3 in the Morning. — Dean Swift used to say to the Irish — "Burn everything y<sup>t</sup> comes from England but y<sup>e</sup> coal —"'

I can add a postscript. Upon enquiring at Gray's Court for permission to see this interesting volume, I was told by her son-in-law, the last survivor of the family to live in the house, that during the war a member of the ground staff of an overseas airforce then stationed near York had begged the loan of it, which they had agreed to. After the war a letter asking for its return brought no response. Another, more peremptory, was also ignored, and a third threatening dire action was sent. The volume was then returned, with no word of thanks, no apology — and no fly-leaf.

It seems fair that whoever owns that leaf today should know how it came to fly the Atlantic.

KENNETH MONKMAN  
*Shandy Hall*

## NOTE

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## NOTES

- 1 I am grateful to Nicolas Barker for striking the spark which ignited this article, and for the kind loan of the item reproduced on p. 223; and to the anonymous owners of the item reproduced on p. 222.
- 2 Sterne signed his name in vols. V, VII, and IX of the first edition of *Tristram Shandy*, of which Strahan printed 4,000, 4,000 and 3,500 copies respectively; he also signed the genuine second edition of vol. V, of which 750 were printed; in all, since very few copies escaped the treatment, certainly more than 12,000.
- 3 *The Library*, September 1976, pp. 245-8.
- 4 I have seen this scrapbook and greatly doubt it was Sterne's.
- 5 In the Beinecke Library at Yale University.
- 6 Jacques Rohault (1620-1675), French philosopher and follower of Descartes; his 'Traité de Physique', 1671, is an abridgement and explanation of Cartesian principles; it was first translated into Latin in 1674 and used at Cambridge, but a better translation, with notes recognising the further importance of Newton's 'Principia', was made by Samuel Clarke; this became the Cambridge textbook and was still so in Sterne's day. The present translation into English, with additional notes, was by Samuel's younger brother, John (1682-1757), Dean of Salisbury; it first appeared in 1723.
- 7 J. W. Clay, 'The Sterne Family', pp. 100-101, *Publications of the Yorkshire Archaeological Society*, 81, XXI, 1910.
- 8 [New Testament] Greek, *gilt leaves*, Cambridge, at the office of Thomas Buck 1632
- 9 . . . Cambridge, at the office of Buck 1632
- 10 Both York newspapers did.
- 11 The Second Sale began on 14 February 1744 and was still being advertised on Thursday 1 March as 'to be continu'd every Day 'till the Publick shall be advertis'd of its Conclusion.' (*London Evening-Post*)