

Bodies of Type: Tristram Shandy in the Bagnio

This is the accepted manuscript of a journal article. The full reference is below:

Helen Williams, 'Bodies of Type: *Tristram Shandy* in the Bagnio', *Shandean* 34 (2024), 85-106., available at <https://doi.org/10.3828/shandean.2024.6>.

Abstract: This article considers for the first time Tristram Shandy as a text printed in a building that was once a bagnio. Drawing from a body of feminist scholarship on the history of the book since the 1990s, and considering the history of Sterne's printing relationship with Ward's establishment, this article reads the role of the bagnio in the literary imagination at mid-century alongside Tristram Shandy's origin in an ambiguous site of (re)production. Through examining the impact of the gendered metaphors at play in contemporary discourse around printing and copyright upon our reading of literary texts claiming either in their imprints or simply by tradition to have been generated in sites associated with sexual possibility, this article analyses the genderedness that Sterne himself played upon to produce a comic text disruptive of the usual binary structures of human and print reproduction.

The Northern Bagnio

In York in 1691, on Leopard Lane just off Coney Street, was established a Turkish Bath or bagnio. Bagnios, or bath-houses, were the height of fashion in the late seventeenth century, offering Turkish baths, hot and cold water, steam rooms and private temporary lodgings, at a time when public bathing and steam rooms were popular as well as medically recommended. The York initiative was of national significance, being announced in the *London Gazette* of 1691:

Laconicum Boreale, or the Northern Bagnio is lately erected in Coney-street in the City of York, where all Persons who desire the same, may be admitted to Sweat and Bath; and be Cupp'd (if they please) after the German Fashion; and be supplied with all Necessaries, and Conveniences belonging to a Bagnio, paying one a-peace.¹

The establishment's upper-class aspirations are evident in the Latinate name, the meaning of which also suggested the rarity or novelty of such a facility outside of the metropolis. The 'Northern Bagnio' gradually over the years became known as the Old Bagnio. There advertisement suggests a respectable establishment which kept separate days for the sexes, since 'Tuesdays and Fridays in every week are set apart for women, and the remaining days for men'.² Karen Harvey has argued that while bagnios struggled to shrug off a reputation for indecency, being associated with brothels, they remained multipurpose sites of comfort and recuperation.³ But their private facilities lent themselves to assignations, providing space for sexual intimacy and sex work,⁴ and mid-century literary culture perpetuated the image of a licentious space of sexual freedom.

The Northern Bagnio later became the Leopard Inn. Between 1730 and 1735 it was the residence of St Peter's College, before it became in 1735 the printing office of Alexander Staples who produced the *York Courant*.⁵ Probably in late 1738, in preparation for their launch issue of 29 January 1739, publishing duo Caesar Ward and Richard Chandler would take it over, as they branched out into printing.⁶ The structure first conceived of as a space for public bathing had evolved into a space for print, remaining the production site of the *York Courant* until Ann Ward moved her press over the road later in the century, next to the George Inn, which used to be Kidd's Coffee House, but the building continued to be used for various book trade purposes, until a press was re-established there in approximately 1728.⁷ Here the *York Courant* was published until the mid-nineteenth century.⁸ And here, Sterne's earliest works were printed, including the first volumes of *Tristram Shandy*. In 1980, John Hutchinson and D.M. Pallister pondered the possibility for the production of *Tristram Shandy* in the bagnio. In their *Bartholomew City Guide to York*, they write, Laurence Sterne lodged for a time in York, 'but whether the first volumes of *Tristram Shandy* can more properly said to have been published here (1760) under Thomas Hinxman, or at the Printing House (formerly the Bagnio or Turkish Bath) opposite St Martin's in Coney Street, is debatable'.⁹

Tristram Shandy, we now know, thanks to the discovery by the Laurence Sterne Trust of the earliest advertisement for that novel, was self-published, and printed at the bagnio, though it was certainly stocked by Hinxman in York.¹⁰ Sterne chose to work with the Wards in a collaborative manner which meant that his typographic effects were likely co-designed in the printing-office.¹¹ This article considers for the first time the implications for our reading of *Tristram Shandy* as a text printed in an old bagnio. Drawing from a body of feminist scholarship on the history of the book since the 1990s, it explores the gendered terminology of print reproduction and its impact upon our reading of literary texts claiming either in their

imprints or simply by tradition to have been generated in sites associated with sexual possibility. Since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, gendered language around authorship had presented writers as male and texts as female, and problematised reproduction as a threat to the patriline. The terminology around printing couched the page as feminine and the press, ink, and the author, as masculine.¹² Ward's bagnio printing office made that connection between sex and the press all the more apparent in the city's architecture of book production.

Bagnios in Print

Ward advertised her address as being 'at the Bagnio, opp St Martin's Ch, Coney St. Across Coney St, to Kidd's Coffee House, next George Inn', where *Tristram Shandy* was printed.¹³ It was not unusual for bagnios to feature in eighteenth-century imprints, as the following examples demonstrate:

G. Harris, next Door to the Bagnio in St. James's street (London, bookseller, 1708).¹⁴

S. Sheaf, at the Wheat-Sheaf, next the corner of the Royal Bagnio in Newgate-street (London, bookseller, 1716).¹⁵

Mr. Barrow at the Crown next to the Bagnio in Panton-street (London, bookseller, 1728).¹⁶

James Carson, at the Bagnio Slip, on Temple-Barr (Dublin, printer-publisher, 1744).¹⁷

J. Torbuck, bookseller and auctioneer, over-against the Bagnio in Essex-street (Dublin, bookseller-publisher, 1747).¹⁸

H. Miller, in Frontain Court, opposite the Bell Bagnio, St. Martin's Lane (London, printer-publisher, 1759).¹⁹

Ann Ward's imprint is the latest example that I have found to mention a bagnio after 1758, according to a cursory search on the English Short Title Catalogue and Eighteenth-Century Collections Online.²⁰ Ward had little choice: her premises was an old bagnio, whereas other printers and booksellers had the opportunity to choose other landmarks by which to direct customers to their books. Perhaps the reputations of bagnios had become increasingly taboo,

or perhaps bagnios themselves were less popular and therefore fewer buildings were operating as such. Ward herself only intermittently directed her customers to the building by that name.

Mid-eighteenth-century literature explores the dubious character of the bagnio at this moment, being a standard element of the rake's progress.²¹ As Miss Wary argues of bagnios in Mary Davys's, *The Accomplish'd Rake* (1727), 'those Places for a small Sum, will find a thousand Ways to avoid Discoveries, and prevent Disturbance. My Papa, when he was in Commission for the Peace, had several of those Things brought before him; and I once heard a Gentleman say, a Bagnio was no more, than a tolerated Bawdy-house'.²² It is no surprise, then, that the bagnio would feature as one of many settings for the assignations recounted in John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1748–49). In this case it is a site for queer sexual encounter. Fanny's friend Emily, dressed as a shepherd, meets a domino at a masquerade and allows him to take her to a bagnio:

He led her to a coach, went into it with her, and brought her into a very handsome apartment, with a bed in it, but whether it were a bagnio or not, she could not tell, having spoke to nobody but himself.²³

Emily 'thought herself so much at his mercy and discretion' that she found herself in 'fear of loosing a maiden-head she had not dreamt of'. But she manages to recover the situation, after which they walk out into the street together and he secures her a chair to carry her home, along with a respectable fee.²⁴ Like Emily's seducer, the rakes of the *History of the Human Heart* (1749), well know what to expect at the bagnio they visit, where they meet 'a Covey of Town Partridges' and 'Miss M—the famous Posture Girl, whose Presence put our Company of Ramblers upon the Crotchet of shewing their new Associate a Scene, of which he had never so much as dreamed before'. What follows is a scene of performative communal female ejaculation. The performance itself, along with the presence of 'the famous Posture Girl' demonstrates how far this was to be interpreted as a public sex which had been widely marketed.²⁵

The rakes of fiction now considered more within the eighteenth-century mainstream also frequented bagnios of this kind. In Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), Mr Mowbray tells of a farmer's daughter ruined by a man who got her drunk, took her to a play, and then to a bagnio, where she is 'ruined' and kept as a mistress for three weeks, 'then left her to the mercy of the people of the Bagnio (never paying for any thing;) who stript her of all her

cloaths, and because she would not take on, threw her into prison; where she died in want and in despair!²⁶ Henry Fielding's *Amelia* (1751) describes well-known sex worker Betty Careless 'in bed with a rake at a bagnio, smoaking tobacco, drinking punch, talking obscenity, and swearing and cursing with all the impudence and impiety of the lowest and most abandoned trull of a soldier'.²⁷

It was not only fiction that perpetuated the sexual possibilities of the bagnio. The bagnio was also a site made notorious by certain news stories. Mary Toft had been removed to a bagnio — Lacey's in London — to permit audiences including eminent physicians to witness her giving birth to rabbits in the winter of 1726. The bagnio's status as a communal space, as Jenifer Buckley has pointed out, 'placed Toft both figuratively and literally in the public sphere',²⁸ in a manner which established the bagnio as a space of sexual spectacle and entertainment. In 1753 a story had circulated about a man calling for a girl in a bagnio only to be presented with his own daughter,²⁹ and when it was politicians or 'men of rank' caught cavorting in bagnios, they were widely condemned by the press. *The London Evening Post* of December 1760 reported that 'the Magistrates have lately vindicated themselves from the Imputation of conniving at Bagnios and other infamous Receptacles of lewd People' simply by revealing a lack of authority to prohibit 'such Publick Nuisances', which are 'a Scandal to this Metropolis, and indeed to the Nation'.³⁰

William Hogarth's *The Bagnio* (1743), also called 'The Death of the Earl', is the fifth in his celebrated series of six paintings, *Marriage à la Mode* (1743–4). The painting responded to and perpetuated the bagnio's association with illicit sexual encounters. The scene at the Turk's Head Bagnio is chaotic, showing the Earl of Squander fatally wounded after a sword fight with his rival, Silvertongue, who escapes through the window behind a dishevelled bed. The Countess kneels amongst the mess of discarded clothing, shoes, and a mask, and the abandoned weapons, pleading for forgiveness. This bagnio scene of sex, scandal and violence was widely disseminated throughout the 1740s and 1750s as a popular print first engraved by Simon François Ravenet in 1745 (Figure 26).

<Insert Figure 26 somewhere near here.>

From novels to art and — finally — to song, the bagnio was culturally coded as sexually dangerous. The Wards were no doubt conscious of the connotations of their place of work. In the 1740s, their song book, *The Merry Companion: or, Universal Songster*, included the ditty Nanny-O, which goes as follows:

SONG XXV. Nanny-O.

While some for Pleasure pawn their Health,
 ‘Twixt Lais and the Bagnio,
 I’ll save myself, and without Stealth,
 Kiss and caress my Nanny-O.³¹

They published and disseminated this song as part of a collection of music sold in their York and Scarborough shops and in the bookshop of William Sandby in London’s Temple Bar. Through suggesting the contraction of venereal diseases at the bagnio, and the retention of sexual health through monogamy with an implied virgin, the song made clear the underworld status of the bagnio. Such health concerns had been underlined by Daniel Turner’s writing on venereal disease, *A Discourse Concerning Gleets* (1729), which featured a case study of a bagnio, ‘the Town Mansion-house of Lucifer’, where an hour-long intimacy with a ‘destroying Angel’ produces ‘new Symptoms’.³²

While in the case of the Wards they genuinely did use an old bagnio as a printing house, the appearance of a sexualised site of production in their imprint also played into the printing conventions of contemporary pornography, which used puns and sexual innuendo to disguise the identities of the printers and publishers as well as their actual places of print and publication, as a means of guarding against prosecution for obscene libel. One well known example is the anonymous *A Voyage to Lethe; by Capt. Samuel Cock* (London: Printed for J. Coneybeare in Smock-Alley near Petticoat Lane in Spittlefields, 1741).³³ The publisher of Cock’s *Voyage* claims to be based in a fictional location comprised of genuine places which happen to have sexual connotations that are all the more apparent when accumulated: Smock Alley, Petticoat Lane, Spitalfields. The book was probably printed by John Hughs of Holborn.³⁴ For the Wards, the bagnio-based production of a text inherently concerned with sex and generation might be a neat coincidence which played into the market for erotic and bawdy literature.

Sterne’s own writing engaged with a tradition of printed bawdy, including jest-book tropes, rude songs, and following the Richardsonian/Fieldingesque models of fiction which include sexually suggestive scenes with a claim—less convincing in Sterne than perhaps elsewhere—that the material is purely didactic.³⁵ The title-page of the first edition of *Tristram Shandy* famously omits any information that would connect Sterne with the Wards, and therefore with the bagnio. This was not because of the printing-house’s reputation.

Despite the widespread cultural associations of the bagnio, the Wards had established a respectable press which was a regular printer of tracts and sermons, including William Howdell's *Sermon Preached at the Abbey-Church at Bath* (1744), Thomas Collins's *Sermon, Preach'd in the Chapel of Harrowgate* (1749), and Sterne's own *The Case of Elijah and the Widow of Zerepath Consider'd* (1747) and *The Abuses of Conscience* (1750).³⁶ None of these works included the bagnio in the imprint. The association of Sterne's works with the bagnio was one that remained unprinted but which was likely to have been recognised within the city.

Reading Sex

One of Ward and Chandler's most popular titles had been *The Trial of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin* (1739), a work initially of local interest but which became a national sensation. As would later happen to Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, which was quickly rivalled by hackwriters producing the next serial instalment more quickly than he could,³⁷ Ward's *Trial* was rivalled by illegitimate editions. In the fifth edition, published later that same year, and renamed *The Whole Life and Trial at Large of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin* (1739), Ward railed 'against those Persons who act so openly in Defiance of all Law, Justice, and Equity, as to piratically print what is the Properties of others'.³⁸ Since the rival *The Genuine History of the Life of Richard Turpin* (1739), by John Standen, had appended to it a cut of Turpin, 'as much like Turpin as the Great Mogul', Ward's customers were offered a free print of Dicky Dickenson, the first governor of Scarborough Spa, which they must have had lying around, as a further inducement to buy the original.³⁹ The act of printing both laid one open to having one's copyright stolen while also providing a means of appealing for redress. When Sterne came to publish *A Political Romance* in 1759, he explored the threat of copyright invasion in a letter to Ward appended to the text in distinctly gendered terms.

In the letter to Ward Sterne admits that at first he wanted his printer to 'take Care That the Child be not laid at my Door', but that he had changed his mind: 'I do here desire That the Child be filiated upon me, *Laurence Sterne*, Prebendary of *York*, &c. &c. And I do, accordingly, own it for my own true and lawful Offspring' (*MW*, 117). The reason for his change of heart was his contemporary climate of political antagonism, which meant that 'some one in his Spight (for I am not without my Friends of that Stamp) may run headlong into the other Extream, and swear, That mine had no Father at all:—And therefore, ... I merely do it, as he says, "for fear it should be said to be no Body's Child at all"' (*MW*, 117).

Sterne positions Sterne as father and Ward as, if not mother, then at least midwife. The paternity metaphor, centuries old by the time Sterne was writing, was part ‘of a remarkably long and fairly consistent relationship between writing technology and paternity’.⁴⁰ Sterne joined a long line of authors, including Swift and Pope, adopting this widespread posture of maternal misogyny.⁴¹

Since the early modern period, reproductive machines had engendered reproductive metaphors. The terminology of letterpress was soaked in sex, with each letter’s ‘inseminating power’ implied by its being held in either an upper or lower case, at a time when the scrotum and uterus were also understood to possess upper and lower cases.⁴² As Margreta de Grazia writes, ‘It is not just that textual reproduction shared with sexual reproduction a vocabulary of generating issue, propagating copy, like begetting like. It materialized and mechanized that vocabulary’.⁴³ Joseph Moxon’s *The Mechanick Exercises on the Whole Art of Printing* (1683-84), the first printing manual in English, cemented the sexual status of print production through the peculiarly sexed metaphors that the manual deployed and made popular. Printing terminology, then, as Lisa Maruca has demonstrated, draws upon gendered bodies, bodies of type, with manuals like Moxon’s being populated with the heads, faces, tongues, etc., which represent the mechanical parts and tools of the trade.⁴⁴ An often-cited example of this is the gendered tongue-in-groove terminology of typesetting:

The Female Block is such another Block as the Male Block, only, instead of a Tongue running through the length of it a Groove is made to receive the Tongue of the Male-Block.⁴⁵

Maruca suggests that ‘from the sex of machinery, a unit of language is born.’⁴⁶ The names for the mechanical parts of printing technology seem to be ‘more than an accident of etymology’. As she goes on to explain, ‘The ghostly bodies formed by these parts evidently have a sex, and indeed, are made to have sex’.⁴⁷ Printing processes, then, were often described in accordance with the one-sex model of human reproduction since printing—like sex—involved the bringing together of ‘inverse commensurate parts, either in relief or intaglio, raised or sunken, the reproduced image an inside out-version of the reproduced original’.⁴⁸

The one-sex model of human sexuality, which predominated before and persisted beyond the eighteenth century, proposed that women’s sexual organs were the same as men’s but opposite or inside-out.⁴⁹ Even when a two-sex model of sexual difference gained ground in the eighteenth century, there was some overlap of ideas and terminology.⁵⁰ As Sara de

Sousa has shown, the narrative of *Tristram Shandy* ‘mirrors the ambiguous nature of this debate’.⁵¹ Miriam Wallace suggests that while the Shandy men operate within an ostensibly two-sex system, the boundaries of sexual difference are by no means certain, with bodies being subject to (threats of) change more characteristic of the Renaissance one-sex model.⁵² In Ashleigh Blackwood’s reading of the novel Sterne uses Tristram’s beliefs in preformationism to mock his character’s naivety around reproduction in ways which run parallel to his satirising of Walter’s outdated ideologies.⁵³ I would suggest that with print, as with sex, Sterne was keen to manipulate its rhetoric for comic effect.

For centuries philosophers have borrowed the imagery of impression – and particularly of early forms of mass-production like seals, coins, and type – to describe the mechanics of the mind in ways which discursively allude to sexual reproduction.⁵⁴ The widespread binarised relationship between the male author and printer midwife, as proposed by Milton, was itself based upon a Platonic metaphor for the philosopher giving birth to other’s ideas.⁵⁵ Amelia Dale went on to apply this to *Tristram Shandy*, exploring how Dolly’s fingering of the sealing wax in her pocket models the capacity of female readers to take on ideas engendered in literature.⁵⁶ But unlike the reproduction of wax seals and coins which perpetuated single likenesses, the printing press, through the infinite possibilities of moveable type, presented not only the prospect of producing diverse outputs but also all sorts of opportunities for error. De Grazia writes, ‘It may be quite misleading [...] to assume that fixity was the printing press’s great effect on Western culture’.⁵⁷ Every tiny piece of type on the page represented either a success or a fault, before we even consider the mechanics of page design. Printing was a mode of reproduction which was very far from predictable. Printing was closely aligned with human reproduction, therefore, in being liable to chance.

Sterne’s playing out of the reasons for claiming fatherhood, for the public claiming of the text-child, responds to this long history of aligning print with human reproduction. Of course, Ward as printer would not be expected to publish a private letter without the author’s direction, meaning that the letter takes on a performative capacity within the text. It functions as a substitute for a title-page proclamation of authorship, using a less formal and more creative means of setting a fictional scene of printing shop practice which becomes almost too powerful:

at your Peril, you do not presume to alter or transpose one Word, nor rectify one false Spelling, nor so much as add or diminish one Comma or Tittle, in or to my *Romance*:—For if you do,—In case any of the Descendents of *Curl* should think fit to

invade my Copy-Right, and print it over again in my Teeth, I may not be able, in a Court of Justice, to swear strictly to my own Child, after you had *so large a Share* in the begetting it. (*MW*, 117)

For Sterne, the bagnio typesetters ‘invade’ his copyright through misspelling or by adding and removing punctuation. Printing such a work without his approval would mean that he could not absolutely swear that the product was his own creation. And yet this was also a moment in which writing and print dissemination alone were also associated with sexual promiscuity.⁵⁸ As Wendy Wall describes of the Renaissance author breaking into print, though the point still stands in the eighteenth century, this was a ‘highly confused gendered authorial position, paradoxically becoming vulnerable and impressionable while guarding against the effeminacy entailed in such a transformation’.⁵⁹ Here, Sterne imaginatively builds upon a tradition of print as parenthood to explore how his text might be interfered with by the print-shop workforce in ways which evoke sexual promiscuity.

But while Sterne as author-father imagines the printshop workforce as the untrustworthy female sexual partner, it is not cuckoldom that is his concern here, but rather a horror at the imagined asexuality of the printing-office, which dismisses its authors to take over the literary work, having more than a half-share in its production. Should the text not have an author, it would ‘be said to be no Body’s Child at all’, becoming a non-text arising from an excess of female agency. Sterne reverses what had been the standard gendering of the printing-house as male, in opposition to, for instance, the birthing place.⁶⁰ That the specific printing-office that he teases in this very public letter was known to be a bagnio locally, by the very local community intended also to be the *Political Romance*’s readership, enhances the satiric image he produces of a monstrous reproductive machine, which, by the time he came to print *Tristram Shandy*, would also be—through the death of Caesar Ward in 1759—a female-owned business.

Printing Tristram Shandy

The collaboration of Sterne and Ann Ward on the first volumes of *Tristram Shandy* took place very quickly after the publication *A Political Romance* — within a matter of months. Sterne’s concerns about the printerly promiscuity of the establishment that he expresses in the above letter to Caesar Ward, therefore, must have been either exaggerated for comic effect, satisfactorily resolved, or both, by the time it came to printing *Tristram Shandy*. Sterne was

able to tell Robert Dodsley that ‘I will have it printed at York, but printed so as to do no dishonour to you, who I know never choose to print a book meanly’.⁶¹ The bagnio setting of the Sterne-Ward collaboration amplifies the sexual connotations present both in the first sheets of *Tristram Shandy* that came off the press. As a narrative, *Tristram Shandy* consistently expresses an anxiety of lineage and dynastic continuity, particularly through its opening with the hero’s conception, which has not gone to plan:

I Wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me; had they duly consider'd how much depended upon what they were then doing;—that not only the production of a rational Being was concern'd in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind;—and, for aught they knew to the contrary, even the fortunes of his whole house might take their turn from the humours and dispositions which were then uppermost:—Had they duly weighed and considered all this, and proceeded accordingly,——I am verily persuaded I should have made a quite different figure in the world, from that in which the reader is likely to see me.— (*TS*, 1.1.1)

Like the letter to Ward, which reveals a concern about a lack of care in the printing office at the point of production, Tristram’s complaint about his parents reveals a similar concern about their lack of care at the critical moment, when his father is asked if he had forgotten to wind up the clock. The catalogue of errors that follows includes a bungled forceps delivery of baby Tristram into the world, a moment which, when read in the light of Sterne’s letter to Ward might also be seen to be a metaphor for the ways in which printed works may themselves become distorted through technology in the high stakes and extreme pressure of the birth. The novelty and surprise of the opening pages of Tristram’s fictional autobiography rests on the fact that Sterne makes comically public an inherently private scene, with the bagnio-printing of the novel the means by which the reader accesses the intimate moment of the hero’s conception.

Just as in the image of the bagnio-print house, in the Shandy world, the printing of words and the generation of bodies are comically combined. This is particularly evident at the visitation dinner, when a hot chestnut finds its way through a gap in Phutatorius’s breeches,

causing an awkward medical emergency. Too embarrassed to call for a surgeon in what he considers to be ‘so foolish an affair’ (*TS*, 4.28.386), Phutatorius asks Gastripheres how best to cool the burn, who recommends that he consults Eugenius, who answers as follows:

That greatly depends, said *Eugenius*, pretending ignorance of the adventure, upon the nature of the part—If it is a tender part, and a part which can conveniently be wrapt up—It is both the one and the other, replied *Phutatorius*, laying his hand as he spoke, with an emphatical nod of his head upon the part in question, and lifting up his right leg at the same time to ease and ventilate it—If that is the case, said *Eugenius*, I would advise you, *Phutatorius*, not to tamper with it by any means; but if you will send to the next printer, and trust your cure to such a simple thing as a soft sheet of paper just come off the press—you need do nothing more than twist it round—The damp paper, quoth *Yorick* (who sat next to his friend *Eugenius*) though I know it has a refreshing coolness in it—yet I presume is no more than the vehicle—and that the oil and lamp-black with which the paper is so strongly impregnated, does the business—Right, said *Eugenius*, and is, of any outward application I would venture to recommend the most anodyne and safe. (*TS*, 4.28.386-7).

At first it seems that what Eugenius recommends is a paper bandage. But this is a specifically printerly nostrum. The freshly printed sheet of paper, cool and damp so that it is better able to flex rather than tear from the weight of the impression, is merely the vehicle, as Yorick points out, for the application of the real tonic: the oil and lamp-black—the ink—which has ‘impregnated’ the paper in a typically sexualised act of printing.

Gastripheres suggests cutting out the printing side of things altogether, and simply applying oil and lamp-black with a rag. Yorick retorts that ‘That would make a very devil of it’ (*TS*, 4.28.387), punning on printer’s devils, the very young boys employed by printing-offices, who were typically black with ink. Yorick’s warning, which is indeed for Phutatorius’s own good, is often dismissed at the level of metaphor, since to ‘make a devil’ of something could be taken to mean to make too much mess (the application of ink to the place in question would be quite messy). But Yorick is a wit, too often making jokes at the expense of his friends, with his ‘unwary pleasantry’ (*TS*, 1.7.31). It is worth remembering that we were early informed in the novel that since

his comments had usually the ill fate to be terminated either in a *bon mot*, or to be enliven'd throughout with some drollery or humour of expression, it gave wings to *Yorick*'s indiscretion. In a word, tho' he never sought, yet, at the same time, as he seldom shun'd occasions of saying what came uppermost, and without much ceremony;----he had but too many temptations in life, of scattering his wit and his humour,—his gibes and his jests about him. (*TS*, 1.6.29)

To make a printer's devil is quite literally to cover a person in ink. As Brian Michael Norton has argued of this scene, 'A hallmark of *Tristram Shandy*'s literary style, and a source of much of its humour, can be found in the friction Sterne generates by playing figurative and literal uses of language off each other'.⁶² *Yorick*'s image transforms Phutatorius into an inked up body of type: he is briefly, grotesquely, imagined as both an ink-stained member of the printing workforce and as a man with an ink-stained member. In both senses, *Yorick* pokes fun at Phutatorius's latest literary endeavour, since 'It was well known that *Yorick* had never a good opinion of the treatise which *Phutatorius* had wrote *de Concubinis retinendis*, as a thing which he feared had done hurt in the world' (*TS*, 4.27.384). *Yorick*'s wordplay casts Phutatorius as a man who writes with his dick.

Eugenius, perhaps sensing *Yorick*'s mischief, quickly steps in, deflecting from the image while supporting the general point, that applying ink directly to the part would not do. Instead, he emphasises the significance of printing to Phutatorius's recovery:

And besides, added *Eugenius*, it would not answer the intention, which is the extreme neatness and elegance of the prescription, which the Faculty hold to be half in half—for consider, if the type is a very small one, (which it should be) the sanative particles, which come into contact in this form, have the advantage of being spread so infinitely thin, and with such a mathematical equality (fresh paragraphs and large capitals excepted) as no art or management of the spatula can come up to. (*TS*, 4.28.387)

Eugenius's response reveals him to be a connoisseur of typography, requiring 'neatness and elegance' as the product of art and management. Though it was widely regarded as an elegant production, the first edition of *Tristram Shandy* would be useless in such a scenario, it far surpassing the 'half in half' ratio ('with such a mathematical equality') of ink to white space.

What is required is a much more closely printed text, from smaller type. Phutatorius, missing Yorick's joke, can't help but mention his latest print endeavour:

--It falls out very luckily, replied *Phutatorius*, that the second edition of my treatise *de Concubinis retinendis* is at this instant in the press—You may take any leaf of it, said *Eugenius*--no matter which—Provided, quoth *Yorick*, there is no bawdry in it—

They are just now, replied *Phutatorius*, printing off the ninth chapter—which is the last chapter but one in the book—Pray what is the title of that chapter, said *Yorick*, making a respectful bow to *Phutatorius* as he spoke—I think, answered *Phutatorius*, 'tis that *de re concubinariâ*.

For heaven's sake keep out of that chapter, quoth *Yorick*. (*TS*, 4.28.387)

Even the bawdiest texts can be stylishly printed. Yorick's warning suggests that the text would be literally inflammatory. This mock-medicinal reading of typesetting, prescribing pages from the printing press as a cure for a physical ailment, supports what we have long known—Sterne's print literacy and presence in the printing office—though his books at this time were being produced on London presses while he stayed nearby in town. In this imagined remedy at the visitation dinner, the damp paper may have been the feminised receptacle of the masculine printing ink but it here it joins with the ink to become the presser rather than the pressed, reversing the widely held stereotype of female impressionability.⁶³ As Wall demonstrated: 'To be 'pressed', as Renaissance texts suggested, is to 'play the ladies part', to undergo the 'press' of the male body during sexual intercourse'.⁶⁴ 'Textual impressionability', therefore, 'is always already scandalized. The printed page is always a fallen woman because it is, by definition, highly public and common'.⁶⁵ Many of these gendered associations were latent in the very act of printing such a kind of text in such a location.

Conclusion

The lingering slipperiness of the one-sex/two-sex model throughout the eighteenth century — and in its literature — is paralleled by the ambiguity of the bagnio as a social space, which was further accentuated in this case when the building itself was repurposed for print. Printing was an ostensibly different business, but it was ironically prone to the same

associations. Even while Ward and Chandler, and later just the Wards, projected a respectable business image through their various printing ventures, and regardless of what they oriented, the associations with the bagnio (and therefore the double elements of ambiguity through potential associations with brothels and printed pornography) would have been in the minds of York readers, Sterne included. Given Tristram Shandy's advertisement in the *York Courant* as 'York printed', Ward's own readers would certainly have noted the origin of the work.⁶⁶ These valences would have been prominent to some readers with local knowledge, obscure to others, and completely lost on most. Sterne's move to London for the publication of the second edition of the first two volumes and the first edition of the subsequent one side-steps or at least changes the relationship between sites of print production, gendered printing metaphors and associations, and Sternean bawdry as inherently ambiguous.

In both *A Political Romance* and *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne calls us back to the primal scene of typesetting and the potential errors it can introduce to the literary text. Grounding Sterne's first volumes of *Tristram Shandy* in the bagnio reminds us that the typographic effects of the opening volumes of Sterne's most famous works — the celebrated black page, Yorick's epitaph, the blackletter legal documents — were a collaboration between Sterne and his printer, Ann Ward. It encourages us to remember the specific circumstances of textual production undergone by Sterne's works. And the bagnio setting of that collaboration amplifies the innuendos present in both the text and in contemporary printing terminology. In this way, it invites us to explore this rich ground of bawdy metaphors and sexual associations, a process which comes so natural to Sterne and his readers, and of seeing the site of printing as a site of radical possibility for transcending the tired language and prescriptions we have inherited.

The letter appended to *A Political Romance* and the visitation dinner scene in *Tristram Shandy* evoke a printing office which is unpredictable, not subject to the binaries implied in the period's terminology. As Rachel Stenner has warned us, 'texts often figure technological creativity hermaphroditically'.⁶⁷ In particular, the chestnut's cure, in a typically Sternean sexual inversion, upturns any binary representation of gendered print rhetoric. Viewing Sterne's productions through the peep-hole of the bagnio makes us alert to the nuances of the gendered production of books, and the genderedness that Sterne himself played upon to produce a comic text disruptive of the usual binary structure of human and print reproduction. This was a reality which saw Ann Ward as a female printer an outlier in an otherwise male-dominated trade, and a fitting frame considering that in 1924, when the

bagnio was demolished, the structure spent the first part of its life cleaning and caring for human bodies and its last two centuries manipulating and producing bodies of type.

HELEN WILLIAMS

Northumbria University

Notes

1 *The London Gazette*, 15 October 1691. For a photograph of the building, see Paul Chrystal and Simon Crossley, *In & Around York District Through Time* (Stroud: Amberley, 2007).

2 *The London Gazette*, 15 October 1691.

3 Karen Harvey, *The Imposteress Rabbit Breeder: Mary Toft and Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2020), p. X (check print edition).

4 Robert L S. Cowley, *Marriage a-la-mode: A Re-view of Hogarth's Narrative Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983); Tony Henderson, *Disorderly Women in Eighteenth-Century London: Prostitution and Control in the Metropolis 1730-1830* (London: Routledge, 1999), 32.

5 George Benson, *An Account of the City and County of the City of York* (York: S. R. Publishers, 1968), p. ?; Robert Davies, *A Memoir of the York Press: With Notices of Authors, Printers, and Stationers, in the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Centuries* (Westminster: Nichols, 1868), p. 237, n. 1.

6 *York Courant*, 29 January 1739. C.Y. Ferdinand, 'The Economics of the Eighteenth-Century Provincial Book Trade: The Case of Ward and Chandler', in *Re-Constructing the Book: Literary Texts in Transmission*, ed. by Maureen Bell, Shirley Chew, Simon Eliot, p. 44.

7 Robert Davies, *A Memoir of the York Press: With Notices of Authors, Printers, and Stationers, in the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Centuries* (Westminster: Nichols, 1868), p. 237, n. 1.

8 Davies, *Memoir of the York Press*, p. 261.

9 John Hutchinson and D.M. Pallister, *City Guide to York* (Edinburgh: Bartholomew, 1980).

10 W.G. Day, 'The First Publication of Tristram Shandy', *The Laurence Sterne Trust*, available at <https://www.laurenceternetrust.org.uk/sterne/tristram-shandy/the-first->

[publication-of-tristram-](#)

[shandy/#:~:text=The%20earliest%20advertisement%20for%20the%20publication%20of%20the%20first%20two,for%20Tuesday%202011%20December%201759](#), last accessed 5 July 2024.

11 Helen Williams, *Laurence Sterne and the Eighteenth-Century Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2021).

12 Wall, *Imprint of Gender*, pp. 219-220.

13 See also '46/12 Coney Street York', *Coney Street Heritage Project*, available at <http://coneystreetheritageproject.org.uk/the-buildings-of-coney-street/46-coney-street>, last accessed 26 June 2024.

14 Etienne François Vernage, *The Happy Life: or, The Contented Man, Shewing the Art, How to Live Well* (London: Keble, 1708).

15 Is Pinckney, *Honesty the Best Policy: or, The Renown of Faithful Heroes and the Total Confusion of Knavery Illustrated, and Prov'd by Scripture Parallels* (London: Sheaf, 1716).

16 J. F. D. B., *A critical answer to the letter written by the Reverend Father Peter Francis Courayer, D[ean] of the University of Oxford, and a regular canon of the Abbey of St. Genevieve (Winifred) in Paris* (London: Hoeck, 1728).

17 Boyne Society, *Rules, and Orders, to be Observed and Kept by the Several and Respective Members of the Boyne Society* (Dublin: Carson, 1744).

18 William Gace, *Thirty Four Sermons of Dr. Martin Luther; Discovering Clearly and Evidently to Every Capacity, the Difference betwixt Faith and Works, Law and Gospel, the Christian and Creature Operations, Troubles and Consolations, and the Best Way to Make Christians, Keep them so, and in Case of Relapses to Recover them Again by Christ, the Only Cure of all Soul Maladies* (Dublin: Torbuck, 1747).

19 *The Case of the Unhappy people of Custrin, in the New-Mark, in the Electorate of Brandenburg, since the invasion of the Russians in 1758* (London: Miller, 1759).

20 My use of the ESTC has been restricted to its temporary search facility, hosted on Print and Probability, available at <https://estc.printprobability.org/>, last accessed 8 July 2024.

21 Neil Guthrie, "'A thousand wrecks!': Rakes' Progresses in Some Eighteenth-Century English Novels' (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1990).

22 Mary Davys, *The Accomplish'd Rake: Or, Modern Fine Gentleman. Being an Exact Description of the Conduct and Behaviour of a Person of Distinction* (London, 1727), pp. 96-97.

23 John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, ed. by Richard Terry and Helen Williams (Toronto: Broadview, 2018), pp. 226-227.

24 Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, pp. 226-227.

25 Anon., *The History of the Human Heart: or The Adventures of a Young Gentleman* (London: Freeman, 1749), p. 123.

26 Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 1382.

27 Henry Fielding, *Amelia* (London: Millar, 1751), Vol. 1, book 1, Chapter vi, p. 50.

28 Jenifer Buckley, *Gender, Pregnancy and Power in Eighteenth-Century Literature: The Maternal Imagination*, Palgrave Studies in Literature, Science and Medicine (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2017), p. 52.

29 See, for example, *Derby Mercury*, 11 May 1753.

30 Originally from the *London Evening Post* but cited in the *Ipswich Journal*, 3 January 1761.

31 *The Merry Companion: or, Universal Songster: consisting of a new collection of over 500 celebrated songs, with their tunes fix'd to each song*, 2nd edition (London: printed for Ward and Chandler, and sold in their shops in York and Scarborough. Sold also by W. Sandby, at the Ship without Temple-Bar, London, 1742), p. 23.

32 Daniel Turner, *A Discourse Concerning Gleets* (London: Clarke, 1729), p. 19.

33 On this work, see Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex*, pp. 14-16, Julie Peakman, *The Pleasure's All Mine: A History of Perverse Sex* (London: Reaktion, 2013), p. 31; Helen Williams, 'Extra-Illustration and the Seduction of a "Standard" Text: James Comerford's Erotic Books', in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Eighteenth-Century British Novel and the Arts*, ed. by Jakub Lipski and M-C. Newbould (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2024), pp. 433-59.

34 According to annotations on the British Library copy of *Voyage to Lethe* ([London?]: 1900?), British Library General Reference Collection Cup.1000.aa.10.

35 Charlotte Holden, "'Against the spleen": *Tristram Shandy*, Jest-books and Treatment for Melancholy', *XVII-XVIII* 70 (2013), 153-175; Paul Goring, 'Musical Catches and the Singing Nuns of *Andouillet's*', *Shandean* 26 (2015); Tim Parnell, "'An Impromptu", Thomas Strester and Sterne's Bawdy', *Shandean* 33 (2022), 263-272; Thomas Keymer, *Sterne, the Moderns, and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002).

36 However, of this list, only Howdell's and Sterne's later sermon named Caesar Ward as printer, since the other texts were produced during the short period that Ward had had to

declare bankruptcy before buying back his business. Davies, *Memoir of the York Press*, p. 249.

37 Upon this, see M-C. Newbould, *Adaptations of Laurence Sterne's Fiction: Sterneana, 1760-1840* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013), p. 2.

38 *The Whole Life and Trial at Large of the Notorious Highwayman Richard Turpin*, fifth edition (York: Ward, 1739), Preface, n.p.

39 *Whole Life and Trial*, Preface, n.p.

40 De Grazia, 'Imprints', p. 69.

41 See, for example, Marilyn Francus, 'The Monstrous Mother: Reproductive Anxiety in Swift and Pope', *ELH* 61.4 (1994), 829-851.

42 Margreta de Grazia, 'Imprints: Shakespeare, Gutenberg and Descartes', in *Alternative Shakespeares*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 65-96: p. 88.

43 De Grazia, 'Imprints', pp. 82-83.

44 Lisa Maruca, *The Work of Print: Authorship and the English Text Trades, 1660-1760* (U of Washington Press, 2007), p. 328; Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993), p. 281.

45 Joseph Moxon, *Mechanick Exercises*, p.181; Maruca, *Work of Print*, p. 40.

46 Maruca, *Work of Print*, p. 329.

47 Maruca, *Work of Print*, p. 328.

48 De Grazia, 'Imprints', p. 85; 83.

49 Thomas Laqueur's argument that the two-sex model replaced the ancient one-sex model has not been uncontroversial in histories of sexuality. Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1990), p. 5. Maruca, *Work of Print*, p. 328. See, especially, Katharine Park, 'The Myth of the "One-Sex" Body', *Isis* (2023) 114.1; Michael Stolberg, 'A Woman Down to Her Bones: The Anatomy of Sexual Difference in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries', *Isis* (2003) 94.2; Helen King, *The One-Sex Body on Trial: The Classical and Early Modern Evidence* (London: Routledge, 2016).

50 Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 7.

51 Sara de Sousa, 'darling! because my blood can sing: Contours of Lust and Sensibility in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*', *Via Panoramica: Revista de Estudos Anglo-Americanos*, série 3, 10.1 (2021), pp. 10-24: p. 15.

-
- 52 Miriam L. Wallace, 'Gender Bending and Corporeal Limitations: The Modern Body in *Tristram Shandy*', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 26 (1997), pp. 175-194: p. 180.
- 53 Ashleigh Blackwood, 'Sterne's "Little Gentleman": *Tristram Shandy* and the Male Participant in Childbirth', in *Sterne, Tristram, Yorick: Tercentenary Essays on Laurence Sterne*, ed. by Melvyn New, Peter de Voogd, and Judith Hawley (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2016), pp. 101-119.
- 54 De Grazia, 'Imprints', p. 91.
- 55 Estelle Haan, ed., *Epistolarum Familiarium Liber Unus and Uncollected Letters*, Supplementa Humanistica Lovaniensia XLIV (Leuven: Leuven UP, 2019), p. 156. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 149e-151e; David Smedley, *The Midwife of Platonism: Text and Subtext in Plato's Theaetetus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006).
- 56 Amelia Dale, *The Printed Reader: Gender, Quixotism, and Textual Bodies in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, *Transits: Literature, Thought & Culture, 1650-1850* (Bucknell: Bucknell UP, 2019); 'Dolly's Inch of Red Seal Wax, or, Impressing the Reader in *Tristram Shandy*', in *Sterne, Tristram, Yorick*, pp. 133-151.
- 57 De Grazia, 'Imprints', p. 92.
- 58 Christopher Flint, 'Speaking Objects: The Circulation of Stories in Eighteenth-Century Prose Fiction', *PMLA* 113.1 (1998), 212-226: p. 222.
- 59 Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1993), p. 2.
- 60 De Grazia, p. 88.
- 61 Sterne to Dodsley.
- 62 Brian Michel Norton, *Fiction and the Philosophy of Happiness: Ethical Inquiries in the Age of Enlightenment*, *Transits: Literature, Thought & Culture, 1650-1850* (Bucknell: Bucknell UP, 2012), p. 32.
- 63 On impressionable female readers and *Tristram Shandy*, see Dale, *The Printed Reader*.
- 64 Wall, *Imprint of Gender*, pp. 219-20.
- 65 Wall, *Imprint of Gender*, pp. 219-20.
- 66 Day, 'First Publication'.
- 67 Rachel Stenner, *The Typographic Imaginary in Early Modern English Literature*, *Material Readings in Early Modern Culture* (London: Routledge, 2018).