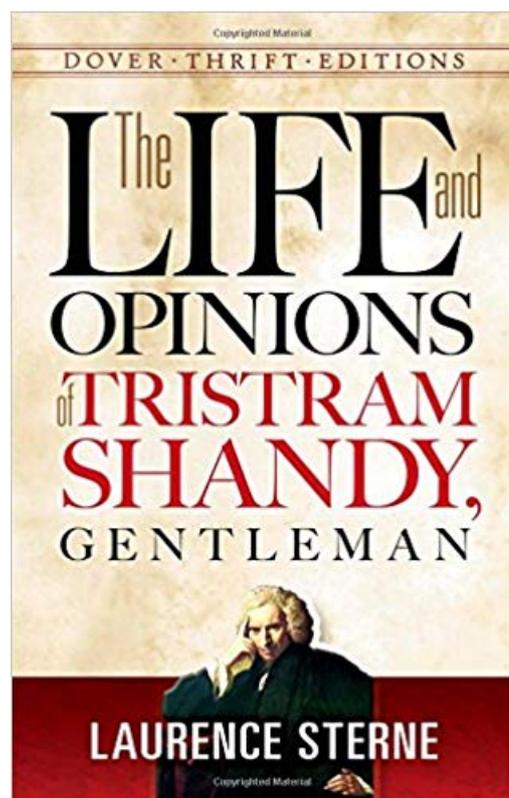


## The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman (Dover Thrift Editions) by Laurence Sterne



**ISBN:** 048645648X

**ISBN13:** 978-0486456485

**Author:** Laurence Sterne

**Book title:** The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman (Dover Thrift Editions)

**Pages:** 528

**Publisher:** Dover Publications; unknown edition (April 19, 2007)

**Language:** English

**Category:** Classics

**Size PDF version:** 1675 kb

**Size ePUB version:** 1129 kb

**Size FB2 version:** 1405 kb

**Other formats:** azw doc mbr lrf

A forerunner of psychological fiction, and considered a landmark work for its innovative use of narrative devices, *Tristram Shandy* was both celebrated and vilified when first published in 1759. While the narrative's endless digressions drew criticism, the novel's bawdy humor made it a cause for celebration in eighteenth-century London. Originally released in nine separate volumes, it is literature's famed "cock and bull" story, reveling in parody and satire. Laurence Sterne's topsy-turvy masterpiece is, in effect, a novel about writing a novel — producing a fictional world that is as strange and wonderful as the process of its creation. Impulsive, addictive, and absurd, it begins at the moment of Tristram Shandy's conception and shifts relentlessly into a hilarious series of disconnected episodes starring the hero's family, friends, and neighbors. The memorable cast of characters wanders in and out of the playful web of Sterne's deliberately visual text treatment, which includes endless dashes and asterisks, one-sentence chapters, unusual graphic renderings, and blank pages that invite the reader to interact with the book. Impossible to categorize — and absorbing and surprising even today — *Tristram Shandy* is a rare celebration of the art of fiction. It remains a beguiling milestone in the history of literature.



## Reviews of the **The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman (Dover Thrift Editions)** by Laurence Sterne

### **Tholmeena**

this three volume original printing of the florida edition of "Tristram Shandy" is considered the definitive text. if the price doesn't appeal and your interest in the book is casual, you can find the text as a penguin paperback.

this is one among the most revolutionary works of fiction ever written. it is still, today, an enormously innovative book. as a story it is mere "cock and bull" -- it says so in the last sentence -- but as writing it is over the top anarchic. if there exists any rule of fiction, or of rhetoric, or of writing, or of reader expectations, or chronology or description, then sterne goes out of his way to violate, disappoint, parody, misuse or flout it. i had to read over a quarter of the book before i realized that the writer was much more intelligent than i was giving him credit for. initially there is the confusing distance of language and historical references and patron dedications and such that makes you wonder, "is that supposed to be funny?", but i stopped sneezing at the book when i realized the author was continually throwing pepper in my face, and laughing while doing so.

there is a precedent for TS in the gargantuan humor of rabelais, and in the rabelaisian method of distorting narrative consistency and scale; toby's military models might easily be the work of a giant. and there's a transparent tribute to cervantes in the character of dr. slop, riding around on a small horse like sancho panza on his mule.

but a huge amount of the content of the book is in the orthography of font faces and dashes and rows of asterisks, blank pages or marbled pages or entirely black pages, squiggly lines and chapters one sentence long. the work was originally published as eight volumes with separate chapter numbering in each; it has typically been republished with modernized spelling and punctuation, loosely reproduced orthography, with chapters numbered continuously. all this brings into focus that a lot of sterne's innovations are technical, and he was a scrupulous proofreader of every first edition.

the florida edition restores all of that, or claims to, and my only complaint about the volume 3 of notes is that it came in a different binding, a uniform coarse blue cloth rather than leather spine and decorative hard cover. i've accepted it as a happenstance example of life's whimsical anarchy, mr. sterne would understand.

### **Sharpbringer**

Difficult. Rewarding.

Serious. Hilarious.

Wise. Faux-wise.

Scholarly. Mock-scholarly.

Observant. Absurdly, obsessively observant.  
Sharp characterizations. Ridiculous characters.  
Devout. Bawdy.  
Endearing. Frustrating.  
Genius. Barking mad.  
Narratively incoherent. Stream-of-consciousness associative.  
Consistently provincial. Profoundly universal.  
Mired in the 18th century. Harbinger of 20th century literary Modernism.  
Baffling. Brilliant  
Not for every taste. For my taste.

And while I'm at it, let me give a shout-out for the out-of-print Norton critical edition, which provides many helps, essay avenues of understanding, and a clever chapter summary/table of contents. For so many years - since reading Moby Dick in grad school with the help of a Norton critical - this publication line has been my go-to for great texts: useful annotations, contemporary reviews, later scholarly articles, and more.

And also let me give a shout-out to Anton Lesser, who narrated the complete novel for Naxos. I have never, ever experienced an audiobook as masterfully produced and narrated as Naxos' Tristram Shandy. No, it is simply not a book one can listen to and fully comprehend as heard. But one might read while listening, or listen while reading, with - if you have the riight software - the narration sped up closer to one's own reading speed, and experience the full majesty of Lesser's absolute preparation, with Latin, Greek, French, and German - as well as regional English - beautifully and humorously intoned, character voices carefully differentiated, tone and mood captured, etc. Or, as I do, go for a walk and listen as you walk, and afterward slip into a comfy chair, crack the novel open, and continue from where you left off, or backtrack if necessary to sort out the characters. In any event, and particularly for devotees of audio books, do find Anton Lesser's note-perfect reading, a veritable radio serial, perhaps the last book you'd expect anyone to attempt single-handedly, with My Father, My Uncle Toby, Corporal Trim, Parson Yorick, Doctor Slop, Widow Wadman, and all the rest of the supporting characters beautifully, consistently interpreted. Lesser is, in a galaxy of fine narrators, the greatest I've heard: an absolutely peerless voice actor in a most demanding work.

### **Iraraeal**

Great book. Early precursor to modern lit, even post-modern with its wry tone, author intrusion, apparent wandering mind/free-range consciousness. All good fun. Actually haven't finished it yet, and the tone and other aspects may change--one of the delightful uncertainties for me--but I'm having a great time getting there.

### **Budar**

One of very favorite novels. Rather dense prose common to the era. One of the funniest pieces of writing I have ever read. This book is definitely not for everyone. The style of writing and the plot are very different from modern novels. Browse through the first page or two before buying, as that gives you an idea of what you will be reading, and see if it fits your taste.

### **Cenneel**

Can't praise this book enough! It's packed with delicious phrases, 20-dollar words and plenty of humor. Written in the 1700s, it was thought of by many critics, decades later, as roughly, the first novel. A delightful read, but you won't do it in a day!

### **Pumpit**

This is perhaps the oddest book ever written with the author jumping in & out of the story. Lines like "Both of our characters have fallen asleep, which is good because it gives me time to discuss my uncle's fascination with fortifications."

Thomas Jefferson's favorite book. Very quirky, very funny.

## Dusho

This is the third time in 55 years that I've read Tristram Shandy and it gets better every time. This edition was best of all because it has the extensive notes in the back explaining the humor in many cases. Jokes in 1760 sometimes don't go over so well in 2016. The notes are essential and made me appreciate Laurence Sterne all the more.

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