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Dean  
College of Graduate Studies and Research  
University of Saskatchewan  
107 Administration Place  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5A2  
Canada

## ABSTRACT

This project explores the effect eighteenth century reproductive theory had on Laurence Sterne's use of satire in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759 - 1767). Particular focus will be on the impact of the paternal and maternal imagination on the developing fetus, sexual facts and misconceptions common to eighteenth-century readers, as well as the changes in the gender dynamic of the birthing process (the man-midwife debate). There has been a lack of critical attention specifically on *Tristram Shandy* and its textual debt to medical treatises, midwifery texts, and folkloric medical tracts. Beyond this, I believe that the visual images also published in these works to be of great value in understanding the socio-historic background to sex and reproduction in the eighteenth century. I propose that the reader should look beyond the child-like antics of Walter and instead focus on Elizabeth as patient and Tristram as "experiment" within the historical-medical context of their contemporary culture. By expanding the context of relevant cultural materials that would have been available to Sterne, it is possible to read certain portions of the novel as a timeline of pregnancy through conception, gestation, and ultimately birth. I wish to examine the physical development not only of Tristram the character but also *Tristram* the novel, as the parallels between its creation and birth are obvious to even the most casual reader. Images of the autonomous fetus were quite well disseminated at this time and could be used to understand Tristram as a pseudo-fetal narrator, an author trapped somewhere in between a self-reliant free embryo writing and a grown man imprisoned by the calamities that befell him in-utero.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This project began with work I completed in the Fall of 2008 as a research assistant. Working closely with Professors Raymond Stephanson of the English Department and Roger Pierson of the Obstetrics and Gynecology Department at the University of Saskatchewan, I collected and catalogued images of generation from the eighteenth century to be used in a gallery show. Because of this work, I fell in love with the literary history and art of reproductive medical treatises from this era. Both of these men have been supportive of this project from its very inception, with Dr. Stephanson being the most encouraging and supportive advisor a graduate student could wish for. I would also like to thank Professor Lisa Vargo for serving as a second reader.