

## Reading *Tristram Shandy* with Wesley Stace

Online course: Tuesdays on Zoom, 11/14, 12/12, 1/9, 2/13, 3/12

6:00-7:30 p.m. ET

Zoom link will be sent one week before the class begins.

### Description

Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-1767), one of the great novels of the Eighteenth Century, is a nine-volume pseudo-memoir, and simultaneously, a domestic drama and a wild narrative and linguistic adventure, resolutely of its time yet completely timeless. By turns sentimental and bawdy, the book was a publishing sensation: a scandalous, digressive, and transgressive book written by a canny self-publicist with a brilliant turn of phrase, a satirist, a master of innuendo, and, perhaps most surprisingly, a vicar. *Shandy*, more than any other book, makes you aware of the page itself, the act of printing, with its black pages, its marbled pages, its squiggles and its elaborate punctuation.



Laurence Sterne by Joseph Nollekens

In *Shandy's* immediate aftermath, its more formally experimental (“flashier”) elements were ignored in favour of the sentimental aspects; yet at the start of the 20th Century, the sentimental movement long forgotten, Sterne's various “modernist” techniques were an inspiration for Woolf and Joyce among others. It has long been thought that these techniques were of Sterne's own invention, but deeper study has revealed a foment of experimentalism in the depths of the Eighteenth Century.

Join us over five sessions as we dissect *Tristram Shandy* and explore its creation, its reception, and the reasons behind its shifting reputation since publication. Let's also simply revel in the story (often overshadowed by the literary fireworks), the characters (ditto), and the glittering wit of this Eighteenth Century classic. We might even discuss whether the novel actually ends or not with the ninth volume.

You'll come for the marbled page; you'll stay for the characters.

## Required Reading

*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* by Laurence Sterne

The recommended edition is the Penguin Classics version. Both the older Penguin and newer one have the Christopher Ricks introduction, but the newer one also has copious notes by Melvyn New. Here is the current Penguin:

*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (Penguin Classics)

by Laurence Sterne (Author), Joan New (Editor), Melvyn New (Editor), Christopher Ricks (Introduction)

ISBN: 0141439777

It's also recommended you read Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, at your own pace throughout the course.

## Reading Schedule

Nov 14: The whole book, *Tristram Shandy*

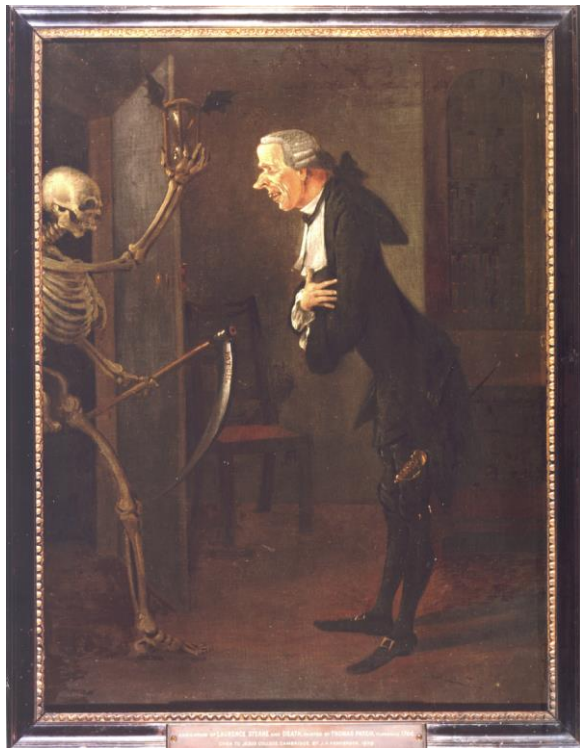
Dec 12: Books 1/2

Jan 9: Books 3/4

Feb 13: Books 5/6

Mar 12: Books 7/8/9

And we shall also refer to Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* throughout the class.



**About the instructor: Wesley Stace** was born in Hastings, East Sussex in 1965. He released many albums under the name John Wesley Harding, before switching back to his birth name for more recent recordings, including 2021's *Late Style*. He has recorded duets with, among others, Bruce Springsteen, Lou Reed, and Rosanne Cash. Stace has published four novels, including the international bestseller *Misfortune*, and recently co-wrote Mark Morris' memoir *Out Loud*. He also created Cabinet of Wonders, a monthly show that plays at New York City's City Winery, and which *The New Yorker* called "one of the finest nights of entertainment this city has to offer." He has taught at Princeton, Swarthmore and Fairleigh-Dickinson, and writes regularly for the Times Literary Supplement and the Wall Street Journal. He lives in Philadelphia and for the Rosenbach has taught a course on *David Copperfield* and a year-long course on all 12 novels of Anthony Powell's *A Dance to the Music of Time*.

Caricature of Laurence Sterne and Death by Thomas Patch