
 IGNATIUS SANCHO *and* LAURENCE STERNE

LAURENCE STERNE: Reply to Sancho

July 27, 1766

There is a strange coincidence, Sancho, in the little events (as well as in the great ones) of this world: for I had been writing a tender tale of the sorrows of a friendless poor negro-girl, and my eyes had scarce done smarting with it, when your letter of recommendation in behalf of so many of her brethren and sisters, came to me—but why *her brethren?*—or your's, Sancho! any more than mine? It is by the finest tints, and most insensible gradations, that nature descends from the fairest face about St. James's,¹ to the sootiest complexion in Africa: at which tint of these, is it, that the ties of blood are to cease? and how many shades must we descend lower still in the scale, 'ere mercy is to vanish with them?—but 'tis no uncommon thing, my good Sancho, for one half of the world to use the other half of it like brutes, & then endeavor to make 'em so. For my own part, I never look *Westward* (when I am in a pensive mood at least) but I think of the burdens which our brothers and sisters are *there* carrying—& could I ease their shoulders from one ounce of 'em, I declare I would set out this hour upon a pilgrimage to Mecca for their sakes—which by the by, Sancho, exceeds your walk of ten miles, in about the same proportion, that a visit of humanity should one of mere form—however if you meant my Uncle Toby, more—he is your debtor.

If I can weave the tale I have wrote into the work I'm about—'tis at the service of the afflicted—and a much greater matter; for in serious truth, it casts a sad shade upon the world, that so great a part of it, are and have been so long bound in chains of darkness & in chains of misery; and I cannot but both respect & felicitate you, that by so much laudable diligence you have broke the one—& that by falling into the hands of so good and merciful a family, Providence has rescued you from the other.

And so, good hearted Sancho! adieu! & believe me, I will not forget your letter.

Yrs
L. Sterne

LAURENCE STERNE: *From Tristram Shandy**Volume 9, Chapter 6¹*

When *Tom*, an² please your honor, got to the shop, there was nobody in it, but a poor negro girl, with a bunch of white feathers slightly tied to the end of a long

1. London's royal palace, next to a park where people of fashion went to be seen.

1. This is the chapter that Sterne had been writing when Sancho's letter arrived. Corporal Trim is

telling a story about his brother Tom, who has just gone to a sausage shop in Lisbon.

2. If it.

cane, flapping away flies—not killing them.—’Tis a pretty picture! said my uncle *Toby*—she had suffered persecution, *Trim*, and had learnt mercy—³

—She was good, an’ please your honor, from nature as well as from hardships; and there are circumstances in the story of that poor friendless slut that would melt a heart of stone, said *Trim*; and some dismal winter’s evening, when your honor is in the humor, they shall be told you with the rest of *Tom*’s story, for it makes a part of it—

Then do not forget, *Trim*, said my uncle *Toby*.

A Negro has a soul? an’ please your honor, said the Corporal (doubtingly).

I am not much versed, Corporal, quoth my uncle *Toby*, in things of that kind; but I suppose, God would not leave him without one, any more than thee or me—

—It would be putting one sadly over the head of another, quoth the Corporal.

It would so; said my uncle *Toby*. Why then, an’ please your honor, is a black wench to be used worse than a white one?

I can give no reason, said my uncle *Toby*—

—Only, cried the Corporal, shaking his head, because she has no one to stand up for her—

—’Tis that very thing, *Trim*, quoth my uncle *Toby*,—which recommends her to protection—and her brethren with her; ’tis the fortune of war which has put the whip into our hands *now*—where it may be hereafter, heaven knows!—but be it where it will, the brave, *Trim*! will not use it unkindly.

—God forbid, said the Corporal.

Amen, responded my uncle *Toby*, laying his hand upon his heart.

3. Uncle Toby would not harm a fly: “go poor devil, get thee gone, why should I hurt thee?—This world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me” (*Tristram Shandy* 2.12).