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Lawrence Stern's innovative novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* was written and printed over an eight-year period between 1759 and 1767. This rare set contains the first editions of all nine volumes signed in three locations by the author, later owned by Thomas James Wise (1859-1937), a book collector and forger. How was Tristram Shandy's got a sn about it? The title makes the novel sound like a typical Bildungsroman, a hero's progress chart from childhood to maturity. In reality, however, Sterne undermines this idea in a startlingly postmodern fashion, exposing the challenges of telling your life in a straight line from A to B. Tristram jumps in time and goes on long tangents, only to get to his birth in Volume 3. At times words give way to squiggles, dashes and blank pages, playfully paying attention to the limitations of language and our role in shaping its meaning. What's so special about these first editions? More than any modern version, these first editions show the innovative use of Sterne printing techniques and techniques. He controls and disrupts the process in audacious, innovative ways, making us acutely aware of the book as a material object. Black page: Shortly after the introduction of Parson Yorick, Stern kills him and marks his death with a black mourning page. Later, with a comic leap into the narrative time, Stern resurrects him to baptize Tristram's child. Empty Flyliff: At the end of Volume 1, Tristram says he would rip the page out if he thought we could guess what was on it. The handmade marble sheet in Volume 3 is a motley emblem of Tristram's work - a colorful swirling pattern, subtly different in each copy. Since the first edition consisted of about 4000 copies, it should be very time-consuming. Someone had to fold each sheet to create fields, dip both sides in marble ink and stamp the page number by hand. William Hogarth's illustration of that 4 shows the horrific moment Tristram is baptized with the name his father most hated. There is a ten-page chasm where Tristram says he ripped out a chapter by skipping page 146 to page 156. 18th-century readers expected to see the young pages on the left, but this pattern is broken for the rest of Volume 4. Stern's signatures: The author went to extraordinary lengths to protect himself from piracy by signing all the first and second editions of Volume 5, and the first editions of Volumes 7 and 9. Empty page in Volume 6: To help us feel the power of Uncle Toby's love for Wadman's widow, Stern offers us a blank page and tells us to draw it on your mind - as your mistress can - as unlike your wife as your conscience will allow you. Typographic symbols and squiggly lines: Sterne uses asterisks and dashes to hint at lustful ideas, lapse of time and he paints the winding path of his own history, and in Volume 9 he depicts the physical flourishing of Trim's stick. How was the novel printed? In December 1759, Tristram Shandy's first two volumes were anonymously printed in York at their own expense. The title page hides their provincial origins by not providing a place of publication, and it gives a date like 1760, not 1759 (this was circulated during this period for books published in December to be after date). Stern managed to get the bookseller, Robert Dodsley, to sell the work in London and agree to publish future parts if it was successful. When the book became a sell-out sensation, Dodsley reprinted it in April 1760 and published Volumes 3 and 4 in 1761. Page 2 of Lawrence Stern's innovative novel, *Life and Opinions by Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, was written and printed for eight years between 1759 and 1767. 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