

Article

'The Figure of the Old with the Pathetic Tenderness of the New': An Early Reading of Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768)

Daniel Reed 

Department of History, Philosophy and Religion, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford OX3 0BP, UK; d.reed@brookes.ac.uk

Abstract: This essay introduces the Reed *ASJ* as a new primary source for the early reception of Laurence Sterne's second novel, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768) and draws on recent developments in marginalia studies to locate it within its contemporary historical context. This framework informs discussion of the reader's possible identity, their use of annotation, and wide-ranging responses to the novel such as comparative readings with *Tristram Shandy* (1759–1767), assessments of Sterne's religiosity, and the depiction of French society and customs. Also explored are the reader's strong interventions with passages in the novel that were beneath their expectations. And so, the recovery of the Reed *ASJ* suggests fresh possibilities for the reinvestigation of *ASJ*'s inherent paradoxes, its disputed sincerity in the sentimental mode and relationship to genre that fuel the novel's ongoing popularity.

Keywords: Laurence Sterne; *A Sentimental Journey*; marginalia; annotation; reception; novel; eighteenth century; France; national identity

Over recent decades, book history and marginalia studies have developed as distinct strands of intellectual history, and their importance to literary reception is now firmly established (Miglietti 2024, p. 279). They offer approaches to the history of reading that emphasise its complexity and reflexive nature, often encompassing several processes going on simultaneously. Marginalia is so closely connected with the history of reading that it has been claimed to be 'a route into all literate culture' (Spedding and Tankard 2021, p. 1). Some core principles around historical annotation remain contested, such as the distinction (or lack thereof) between "authorship" and marginalia (Jackson 2013). It is argued that readers in the past considered annotation a creative practice in itself and not merely subsidiary to more traditionally substantive forms of expression (Miglietti 2024, pp. 279–80). To recover the historical role of annotation is to recover a significant 'fragmentary' practice, though one that may seem distant from textual cultures of the present (Spedding and Tankard 2021, p. 5). This is especially pertinent when considering the reception of authors who wrote in a distinctively fragmentary style. These findings are mostly drawn from scholarship of the early modern period, but the practice was no less ubiquitous for eighteenth-century works.¹ H. J. Jackson's survey of annotations in Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791) draws on over 350 examples (Jackson 2001, p. 167).

The Reed *ASJ*

In 2024, a previously unknown copy of the first edition of Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768) appeared for sale online and was acquired by the author (hereafter, the 'Reed *ASJ*').² The two volumes have no established provenance, and immediate first impressions are not especially promising. The book is presented in a somewhat amateurish later binding, and the gilt lettering on the spine reads simply 'Sterne' with the volume number. The interior fares little better, with unevenly cut pages, some of which are tatty and discoloured. But despite these imperfections, the Reed *ASJ* is exceptional for two reasons. It is one of the 150 large paper copies issued alongside the first



Citation: Reed, Daniel. 2024. 'The Figure of the Old with the Pathetic Tenderness of the New': An Early Reading of Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768). *Humanities* 13: 166. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h13060166>

Received: 28 October 2024
Revised: 21 November 2024
Accepted: 29 November 2024
Published: 3 December 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

printing of 2500 standard octavos, the great majority of which were presented to subscribers (though the list of names is absent from the Reed ASJ) (New and Day 2002, p. xxxi).³ It also features contemporary marginalia throughout, and—more remarkably—over eighty pages of manuscript commentary bound into the rear of the second volume (Figure 1) giving the book an ungainly, asymmetric appearance on the shelf.

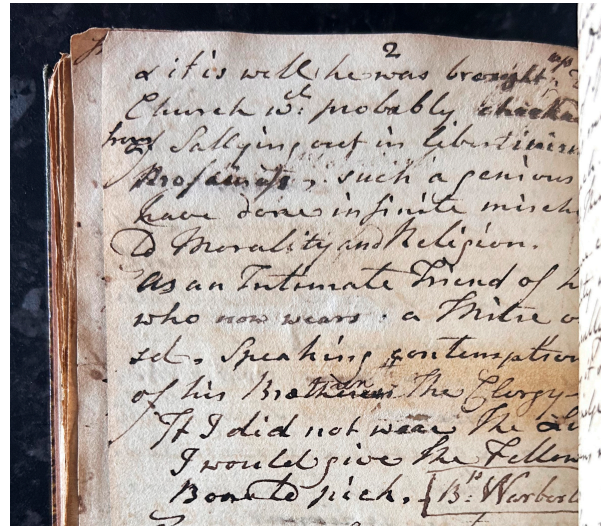


Figure 1. Reed ASJ, MS2. Author's collection.

So, who was the reader? Despite adding over 16,000 words of annotations to the Reed ASJ, they left no certain indications of their identity. The later binding has eradicated potential provenance, and strips are missing from the heads of both title pages, strongly suggesting that marks of ownership have been deliberately excised. It is tempting to imagine they belonged to a significant figure, inducing a later autograph-hunter to butcher the book. But this is merely conjecture, and we must look to slivers of evidence from within the annotations. Against the chapter 'The Sword. Rennes', in which Sterne describes a French nobleman's efforts to preserve his family's dignity, the reader writes of having 'heard' Lord Chatham—or, William Pitt the Elder (1708–1778)—refer to France as the 'master power of Europe' until 'the last war' (II.54, MS53, 107), plausibly the Seven Years' War (1756–1763). The reader also describes the chapter as a 'true narrative as a person assured me he was present' (II.54, MS51-2, 107). This is awkwardly qualified, but it implies an intimacy with French society beyond the metropolis. Regrettably, the available critical apparatus for 'The Sword. Rennes' does not bring us closer to the reader's source, as the Florida editors were unable to establish a factual basis for the chapter, positing that it might have been entirely of Sterne's creation (New and Day 2002, p. 335, fn107.17).

Another clue to the reader's identity is an aside about 'Marishall Villars', who they claim to have known '... at about eighty years [old]' and was then 'as great a baux' as he had been at fifteen, dressing with 'a feather & redheald shoes' (II.159, MS66, 145) (Mansel 2005).⁴ This was Claude Louis Hector de Villars, 1st Duke of Villars (1653–1734), who was Marshal General of France under Louis XIV in his final years (Monahan 2014, p. 192). This association further suggests the reader's proximity to France and the French Court. Elsewhere, martial allusions abound, and the reader provides anecdotes about the Duke of Marlborough and his youngest daughter the Duchess of Montagu, who died in 1722 and 1751, respectively (I.183, MS29, 77). From these available scraps we can tentatively conclude that the reader was male, aged above fifty (if not older), from a military background, with aristocratic connections, and with personal experience of French society. In the absence of a ready alternative, this essay will refer to them simply as 'the reader', acknowledging the multifaceted, reflexive, and creative dimensions of that designation (Miglietti 2024, pp. 279–80). Closer comparison with the subscribers' list may yield a certain name in future,

but for our purposes these are sufficient hints of ‘who’ to nudge further towards ‘when’. None of the above contradicts a reading dating to around the appearance of the first edition of *ASJ* on 27 February 1768, locating it among the earliest sustained commentaries on the novel.

Not knowing the reader’s identity, we cannot make use of the ‘how X read Y’ model that predominates in marginalia studies (Grafton et al. 2024, pp. 11–14). This prevents certain lines of investigation, such as making comparisons with the reader’s wider annotating habits, a recognised library, or possible authorial practices (Miglietti 2024, p. 280). That said, we can consider how contemporary readers interacted with Sterne’s works—especially as Sterne actively encouraged those interactions, such as by providing a blank page in *Tristram Shandy* (‘here’s paper ready to your hand’) for readers to sketch an imagined portrait of the widow Wadman (Williams 2021, pp. 144–45). The innovative typographical and rhetorical elements of Sterne’s novels also prompted readers to seek hidden meanings within the texts (Newbould 2008, p. 2). By the early nineteenth century, this process of decryption of Sterne’s ‘borrowings’ led to accusations of plagiarism, notably from John Ferriar in *Illustrations of Sterne* (Gerard and Newbould 2021, p. 4). This work may have encouraged Hampshire clergyman Edmund Ferrers (1749–1825) to cram the margins of his 1770 edition of *ASJ* with annotations, especially relating to Sterne’s literary allusions. Whilst this was an opportunity for Ferrers to flaunt his bibliographical knowledge, Jackson asserts that it also offered ‘a form of legitimation’ for Sterne from contemporary criticism by placing his fiction into a wider literary tradition (Jackson 2005, pp. 90–92). This optimistic reading seemingly anticipates the ‘redemptive impetus’ of recent critical engagement with *ASJ*, suggesting that readers like Ferrer were working out their conclusions in an environment of shifting tastes (Gerard and Newbould 2021, p. 16).

And yet, the views of *ASJ*’s earliest readers—prior to the critical turns against Sterne in the nineteenth century—do not figure strongly in our understanding of the novel, likely because of the small sample size. An important exception is Franssen’s analysis of a pirated 1769 Dublin edition of *ASJ* annotated by John Scott, 1st Earl of Clonmell (1739–98) (Franssen 1990). Given the relative scarcity of early, annotated copies of Sterne’s works, the usefulness of Scott’s marginalia was acknowledged in forming the critical edition of *ASJ* (New and Day 2002, p. 239, fn8.5–6). But unlike the case discussed here, the Clonmell *ASJ* benefits from an established provenance. Irish barrister Andrew Caldwell (1733–1808) added in his own hand that he was ‘indebted to the manuscript part of this book’ (i.e., Scott’s notes), citing Bolingbroke’s maxim (vide Dionysus of Halicarnassus) that history is ‘philosophy teaching by examples’. Both Scott and Caldwell found practical applications to their lives by reading *ASJ*, whilst also recognising the novel’s place in wider literary tradition. Similarly, the reader characterised *ASJ* as at a historic juncture for the genre, describing Sterne’s use of scriptural language as having ‘the figure of the old with the pathetic tenderness of the new’ (II.181, MS70).

How Did They Read Their *ASJ*?

Whilst the reader’s identity remains a mystery, we can compare how they read their *ASJ* with contemporary practices. Whereas Scott only commented on portions of the novel, the reader made reflections throughout the whole book (Franssen 1990, p. 153). Approximately two-thirds of all pages are either annotated directly or remarked upon in the commentary. Sometimes a number of lines, passages, or paragraphs on a single page provoke reflections followed by several pages with nothing—particularly toward the end of each volume. Perhaps an indication of waning attention, or that the reader already expressed their views earlier in the analysis. Taken broadly, their interventions can be grouped into three categories:

1. marginal notes of just a few words providing straightforward definitions or translations from French;
2. brief discursive comments at the foot of a page;
3. deeper analytical commentary bound into the rear of the second volume.

By organising their interventions in this way, the reader avoids cluttering the text of the novel with sprawling marginalia, allowing room to express themselves more fully beyond the confines of the printed page.

This leads us to consider the intentionality and purpose of the annotations, and whether the reader took up their *ASJ* ‘with pen in hand’ (Miglietti 2024, p. 281)? Unlike other contemporary examples (including Scott), there is no introduction or summary to the annotations at the beginning of the book (by either the reader or a later hand), so their purpose remains implicit (Jackson 2001, p. 26). The annotations were evidently made in phases, some first in pencil and then overwritten in ink. There are also subsequent emendations, correcting spellings or inserting the occasional missed letter. This deliberate approach is most apparent in the commentary, which is organised sequentially by page number. Appearances suggest that the upper edge of the text has been cut down by around a centimetre to create physical uniformity and intellectual association between the novel and the reader’s remarks. And cross-references between pages confirm the commentary to be a work of sustained analysis. Following the preface, the reader condemns Sterne’s ‘lunatic invocation’ of accounting for his work before God but adds more favourably that what follows on the ‘variety of character’ is ‘more justly expressed in a subsequent passage in converse with the Count see P86’ (I.32–33, MS11–12, 17). And in other instances, they identify recurring themes by commenting that a passage ‘proves what I before noted’ (or similar), thereby constructing coherent arguments for their interpretation of the novel.⁵

Sterne’s ‘Elastic Genius’

A disarmingly straightforward question is whether or not the reader enjoyed the novel? They clearly admired Sterne, but that admiration was qualified. The reader’s very first marginal comment aims to explain the inherent contradictions in Sterne’s writings from an interpretation of his personality:

I.1, 3] Stern was certainly a most elastic genius, by his sudden trancisions from one extreme to the other, not allways to his advantage, from starts or sally’s most sublime and elevated down to the most gross and beastly unpardonably as if he scard to be to highly admired (Figure 2).

The reader believed in Sterne’s ‘genius’ but also conceded his flaws. His was an ‘elastic’ or even ‘lunatic’ genius (I.1, 3). This perceptive view captures something of Sterne’s erratic nature in his final years, like his behaviour in public (deemed ‘crack-brained’ by fellow travellers) (Day et al. n.d.), and absence of discretion in his epistles to Eliza Draper (Budrin 2021, pp. 196–97). The commentary begins after the book’s ambiguous conclusion with a form of tribute. The reader extracts from Ralph Griffiths’s 1768 review of *ASJ* (though unattributed) on the ‘ludicrous hiatus’ that ends the novel and Sterne’s subsequent demise (Newbould 2008, pp. 4–5).⁶ They follow this with a selection of their own from *Tristram Shandy*: ‘tread lightly on his ashes ye men of genius’ (New and New 1978, p. 544). But beyond this, the reader does not dwell on Sterne’s death—despite serious ill health prompting his European travels and stalking much of his later writing—instead focussing on the qualities and effect of his novel (New 2021, p. 174).

In their praise of *ASJ*, the reader repeatedly deploys words such as ‘delicate’, ‘fine’, and ‘exquisite’ (no fewer than eleven times). They also adopt language that implies Sterne was possessed of unique qualities that distinguished him from other writers, such as ‘incomparable’ and ‘inimitable’ (nine times)—the latter echoing a phrase from Ralph Griffiths’s review.⁷ Sterne’s characters are described as not merely ‘excellent’ but ‘natural’ and ‘just’. The reader is particularly impressed with La Fleur—‘The Sanco Panzza’ of the novel (I.93, MS20, 40)—whose conduct in ‘The Letter. Amiens’ he writes, ‘cannot be enough admird. . . in this scene’ (I.140, MS25, 59). They also reserve special praise for Yorick as author–protagonist, whose encounters often meet their expectations of the sentimental mode. His exchange with the monk is described as ‘exquisitely human & tender’ (I.95, MS20, 41), and his treatment of the *pauvre honteux*, ‘a sweet stroke of refined

sensation' (I.115, 48); at the episode's conclusion, the reader declares it to be 'inimitable truly sentimental' (I.116, 49).

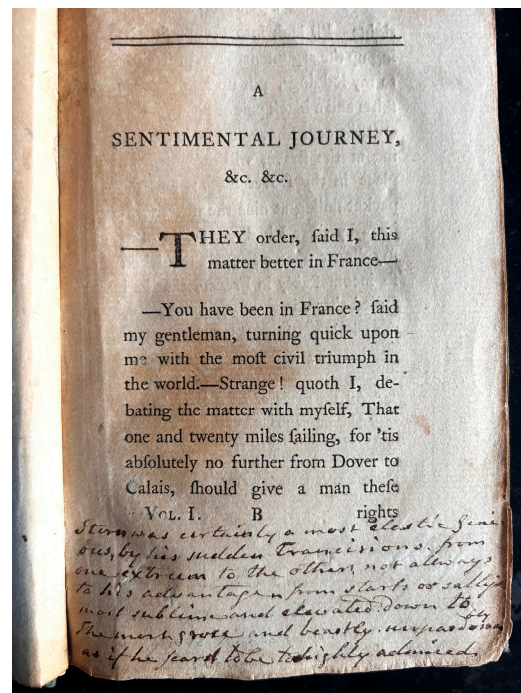


Figure 2. Reed ASJ, I.1. Author's collection.

In his 1765 review of volumes VII and VIII of *Tristram Shandy*, Ralph Griffiths called upon Sterne to give up bawdiness and 'draw natural scenes' (New and Day 2002, p. xv). Whether this call was straightforwardly answered by *ASJ* is debatable, but the novel's pictorial qualities were widely admired. Annotators like Scott praised the way in which Sterne 'sketched' as one of the novel's greatest strengths (Gerard 2006, pp. 12–13). The reader occasionally adopts similar language, especially in appreciation of the 'picture' of certain characters or scenes—Sterne's introduction of Maria earning their greatest applause.⁸

II.179, MS69, 154] as fine elegant & amiable as ever was made a drawing by Raphel the Angel, not Raphel the Painter.⁹

The reader responds more strongly, however, to the novel's musical qualities—perhaps an indication of their own creative interests. Sterne was a capable and knowledgeable player, and the musicality of *Tristram Shandy* has been extensively explored (Cash 1975, pp. 55–56; Freeman 1978; Dubois 2015). The role of music as an expression of religious joy also assumes a central place in "The prodigal son", Sterne's most redolent sermon to the creative period that produced *ASJ*; 'God gave man musick to strike upon the kindly passions' (New 1996, p. 191). In several instances, the reader recognises and responds to Sterne's harmonic metaphors and deploys their own, both positively—'it must be highly tuned to strike such notes' (II.94, MS59, 122)—and negatively, to indicate disharmony: 'the last stroke. . . in this narrative do's the author no honour it is out of tune with the rest a dissonance' (II.108, MS62, 127). But at Sterne's most elevated, they find a freedom of expression paralleled only in nature:

I.89, MS19, 38] The sweet sally of this page is sublime & elevated Stern most undoubtedly had exquisite ideas of harmony & music, & all his reflections or salleys flow like fine voluntaries & fine harmonic flight in music disembarasd from sett rules of composition, like the soaring sky lark.

As Dubois argues, order and harmony can only be extended so far as guiding principles for Sterne's works, which inevitably and overwhelmingly err towards 'dissonance and

non-resolution’ (Dubois 2015, p. 99). For the reader, the finest aspects of Sterne’s prose exist beyond conventional aesthetic tradition—they are as natural and affecting as birdsong.

Comparative Reading

Readers often used marginalia to introduce comparative material to a text, but there are very few references to other authors or works in the Reed *ASJ*. Those that are mentioned—Bacon, Cervantes, Montaigne, William Warburton—do not especially expand our understanding of the novel (New and Day 2002, p. xlix-1).¹⁰ And far from the specificity generally characteristic of marginalia, in one note the reader even concedes that they ‘forgett who it is that says, The Graces should attend all our actions to give them their force. . .’ (II.3, MS45, 87).¹¹ In fact, the reader’s main comparative sources were Sterne’s own works, especially *Tristram Shandy*.¹² Whereas Horace Walpole placed *ASJ* in ‘disagreement’ with *Tristram Shandy*, finding its ‘delicacy’ in contrast to obtuse and bawdy aspects of the earlier work (Gerard and Newbould 2021, p. 1). The reader found that one actually illuminated the other, dedicating fourteen pages of the commentary to ‘striking passages’ from *Tristram Shandy*, comprising extracts without further remarks (Figure 3). This reveals the reader to be an attentive follower of Sterne, drawing extracts from across all nine volumes. They also demonstrate sensitivity to Sterne’s deliberate entanglement of authorial identity, describing the presentation of Parson Yorick in *Tristram Shandy* as ‘Sterne’s own characteristic truly drawn’ (MS75).

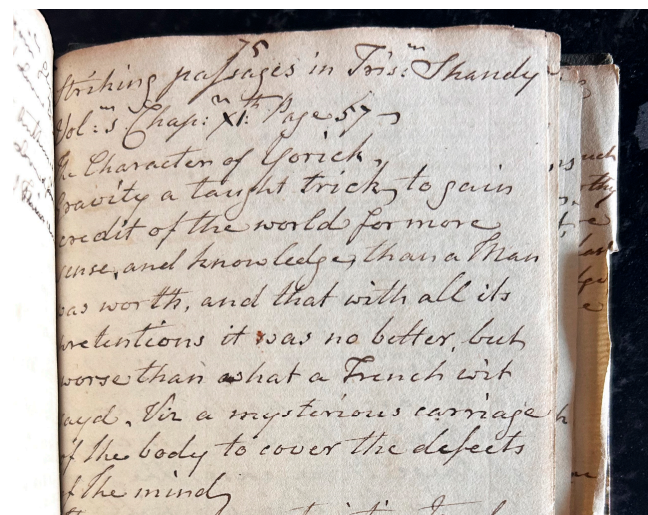


Figure 3. Reed *ASJ*, MS75. Author’s collection.

The other character from *Tristram Shandy* that the reader identifies as embodying the spirit of *ASJ* is Uncle Toby, and the first cross-reading of the two works appears against the appearance of Captain Tobias Shandy:

I.179, 154] his Uncle the Excellent Character in his *Tristram Shandy*: in which he introduced, that supine, most exquisite, inimitable soliloque on his uttering an oath from the over flowings of a most benevolent heart.

The reader selects several extracts relating to Toby’s sensitivity of feeling, including his kindly treatment of the fly, the climax of his encounter with the widow Wadman in the sentry box, and his favourable composition for marriage (MS80-85). These are among the more sentimental passages in *Tristram Shandy* and corroborate the close relationship between the final volumes of that work (published 1766–1767) and the composition of *ASJ* (New and Day 2002, p. xiii).

That said, the reader also detects a continuity of Shandean themes in *ASJ*, identifying the concluding line of ‘The Address. Versailles’—‘I seldom go to the place I set out for’—as

‘not ill applicable to the authors writings’ (II.45, MS49, 103). This prompts a discussion of the transporting possibilities of Sterne’s digressive style:

II.45, MS50, 103] for however interesting & circumstantially he setts off, very seldom that he ends his narrative, but flies off to some subject, quite forrigne & hurt the reader by so unexpected a transition, like an aerial seraphic dream, in which you are instantaneously transported on the wings of love by your sweet guardian minister spirit, to heavens high gate & feel yourself all joy & love, & just arrived with in the echo of the heavenly choir, some uncouth sound awakes you, & pins you down & captive to Earth again.

Despite the risks of a sudden terrestrial thud, the reader is sufficiently inspired by the ‘sublime and elevated’ aspects of Sterne’s narrative style to glance at a Shandean imitation in the summary at the end of the first volume, declaring ‘this digression is rather premature’ and would be ‘better served’ at a later point (MS44).

‘It Is Well He Was Brought Up to Ye Church’

Until recent decades, the role of religion in Sterne’s fiction—or the “theology” of sentimentalism as his critical editors suggest—was underplayed by literary scholars, and it has been a conscious component of the Florida project to provide a corrective; a lead other studies have since followed (New and Day 2002, p. xlvi; Gerard 2010; New 2021, pp. 177–78). The sincerity of Sterne’s religious convictions was first placed under scrutiny amidst a ‘whirlwind of paradox’ unleashed by the author himself with the publication of *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* in 1760 (Gerard 2010, pp. 14–15). Sterne’s decision to intermingle his sermon writing with comic personas from his fiction provoked a range of contrasting contemporary responses. These tensions were apparent to the poet Thomas Gray, who thought Sterne’s sermons ‘most proper’ except that at any moment he seemed ‘ready to throw his periwig in the face of his audience’ (Gerard 2010, p. 15). The strength of public reaction to the later volumes of Sterne’s sermons dissipated somewhat, but the appearance of *ASJ* prompted further examination of the author’s religiosity. Writing soon after the novel’s publication, another unknown reader struggled to reconcile *ASJ* with Sterne’s status as an Anglican clergyman:

That Sterne plainly shews he has no regard for religion which by his profession he is bound to defend, that he’s alltogether free in his notions & immodest & in his ideas, that he disgraces his profession, all this I grant, but the consideration of his being a clergyman apart, I cannot argue that this Journey is so altogether void of any kind of merit, he discovers in it according to my judgment, the utmost benevolence, humanity & charity. . . his sentiments noble & pretty, his knowledge of the human heart extensive, he very prettily apposes the lurking, sordid passions & appetites [that] too often enduce us to commit mean, base actions, shews a through contempt for them, & nobley resolves to act contrary to them.¹³

This is a striking example of the ongoing ‘disjuncture’ in contemporary reception between Sterne’s clerical status and the more lurid aspects of his personal life and fiction, but it was not a viewpoint shared universally (Gerard and Newbould 2021, 5). Our reader believed that far from ‘disgracing’ his profession, it was Sterne’s clerical career that preserved him from straying into greater moral and spiritual dissolution:

I.1, MS1-2, 3] it is well he was brought up to y^e Church which probably checked him of sallying out in libertinism & profaneness, such a genius may have done infinite mischief to morality and religion.

Unlike some contemporaries—especially Tories suspicious of Sterne’s Latitudinarianism—the reader found no contradiction in discovering Christian values throughout a work of admitted ‘benevolence, humanity & charity’, and they couched their highest praise for the novel in explicitly religious terms. They deem Yorick’s encounter with the fille

de chambre at the opening of the second volume to be ‘divinely’ composed and ‘more than human’ (II.5, MS46, 88), whilst the ‘sublime soliloque’ in ‘The Passport. Versaille’ is described as ‘heavenly’ (II.74, MS58, 114).

And elsewhere, *ASJ* stirred up religious feelings for the reader prompting their own spiritual reflections. Against the ‘sweet soliloque’ that concludes ‘The Sword. Rennes’ are meditations on the nature of sin that incorporate both Scripture, ‘he breathed into him the breath of Life’ (Gen. 7.2), and the couplet ‘make me a clean heart O God, and renew a right spirit with in me’ from Psalm 51 in the Book of Common Prayer (II.58–9, 108). These reflections are among the longest annotations against the text, sprawling across two pages, implying a spontaneous response to the novel. Sterne’s apostrophe to sensibility also inspires impassioned reflections that echo Yorick’s exclamation at the conclusion of ‘The Sword. Rennes’:

II.182, MS70, 155] This rapturous apostrophe to sensibility is divine & which like y^e eagle he skims the air & mounts to Heaven, to the fountain of sensation, O Stern how do I envy thee thy feelings.¹⁴

Contrastingly, Keymer interprets this passage as a pointed illustration of Sterne’s ‘failure of feeling’, citing annotations in the Clonmell *ASJ* on the mechanical, self-serving nature of Yorick’s sentimental sympathy (Keymer 2009, pp. 90–91). New argues, however, that any ‘failure’ of Yorick’s can only be placed in the context of human frailty, godly expectations, and hopes of eternal salvation (New 2021, p. 177). Accordingly, the reader not only finds Yorick’s (and Sterne’s) feelings sincere, but responds to them with an outpouring of religious sensation (New and Day 2002, p. xxxiii). So, for some readers, *ASJ* (or parts of it) possessed the redemptive possibilities Sterne hoped for (New 2021, p. 175).

‘Blot Them Out for Ever!’

Among the most distinctive features of the Reed *ASJ* are the reader’s responses to the few passages in the novel that fell beneath their expectations, either stylistically or as a reflection of the ‘gross and beastly’ inclinations of Sterne’s character (as they deemed them). Among the former category, are passages the reader believed strayed away from Sterne’s careful handling of sensibility:

I.123, MS23, 53] The story of the dead ass does no honour to the Author it is forced & unnatural, tho it serves a little to contrass the effects recurrences had on his sensations.¹⁵

And more strongly:

II.91, MS58, 121] The temptation this chapter is one of the unexpected, ill suiting flights and disgracing of the Author yet has interesting passages.

But of parts that betrayed the worst of Sterne’s ‘imperfections’, the reader takes Ralph Griffiths’s invocation to the recording angel to ‘blot them out for ever!’ quite literally.¹⁶ The reader has struck through entire paragraphs of text—this required some effort—from the affected pages; it appears the reader first attempted to paste them together to render them inaccessible. But this not proving satisfactory, because of the imprecision of obliterating entire pages rather than specific lines or paragraphs, they opened them again, leaving ragged edges and staining from adhesive (Figure 4). The first occurrence of this treatment affects the chapter ‘The Rose. Paris’, which the reader subsequently returned to and annotated but is scathing about its content:

I.198, MS41, 83] a very grose narrative & ought to be expunged, very beastly, & could have no other motive of being foisted there but to shew that even amongst the most polishd society, there are grose defects, like a spot in The Sun.

In a second instance, the reader’s intervention is stronger still. The chapter ‘The Passport. Versailles’ has been treated similarly, but after reopening the pages, the reader boldly struck out paragraphs three to five leaving them all but unreadable:

II.79, MS58, 116] This whole chapter is grose beyond excuse or scarcely pardon[able] such a nettle should be pluckd up which aut not to be planted in such a garden of most fragrant, paradisaical flowers.

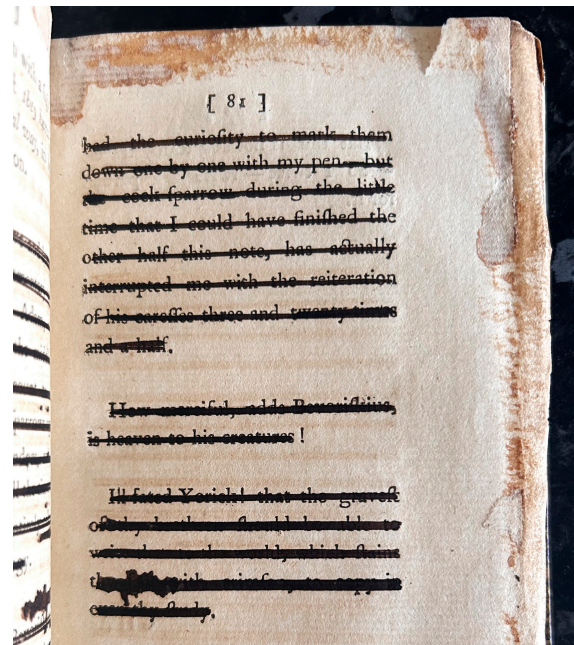


Figure 4. Reed *ASJ*, II.81. Author's collection.

With the analogy of weeds in Eden, the reader exhibits particular sensitivity (especially to passages with overt biblical allusions) to the 'ambiguous delicacy' that characterises Sterne's works and was often crudely mishandled by his imitators (New and Day 2002, pp. 346–47, fn116.7–11; Newbould 2008, p. 9). Newbould argues that these imitations were frequently failures because they 'privilege one particular reading' (usually the most salacious), unlike Sterne's usual mode of presenting several coded possibilities to pursue (Newbould 2008, p. 14). Sterne wrote wryly that those who thought *ASJ* was not a 'chaste' novel must have 'warm imaginations indeed!', but for even the admiring reader, there are instances where a double entendre or compromising scene is pressed too far (New and de Voogd 2009, p. 634).

'Societies as Different as Wasps & Bees'

The great majority of marginal comments against the text in the Reed *ASJ* are translations of French words and phrases—in reality, translations of Sterne's idiosyncratic use of French, 'a language he listened to more than read and used more than he mastered' (New and Day 2002, p. xxxv; Cash 1975, p. 207). The systematic way in which these are translated, even rudimentary examples (e.g., 'politeness' for 'politesse'), gives the impression of an exercise—a student aiming for a better grasp on the language (New and Day 2002, p. xlvii).¹⁷ These include entries that are now familiar loan words from French, some of which were introduced or popularised by Sterne with *ASJ* (Jackson 2001, pp. 22–23):¹⁸

- I.123, 53, 'bouquet'] nosegay;
- I.144, 60, 'faux pas'] false step;
- I.144, 60, 'etiquette'] the propriety;
- I.148, 62, 'la voila!'] here it is;
- II.23, 94, 'sombre'] gloomy.

Given that evidence suggests the reader had personal experience of France and was attuned to fairly sophisticated literary and philosophical ideas, the prospect of them using the novel as a refresher for their language skills seems unlikely. It is one of the few aspects

of the Reed *ASJ* that suggests a broader purpose to the annotations than just a private meditation on the text. Perhaps, a reader with competent French attempted to make the novel more accessible to someone else in their household or circle—but without further evidence it is impossible to say.

Similarly, throughout the Reed *ASJ* the reader demonstrates considerable knowledge of French society and customs but rarely cites secondary authorities. The inference being that they are drawn from first-hand experience—the scope of which remains unknown—but must have been of long-standing, as they claim to have known Marshal Villars in the 1730s. The reader also recognises David Hume (1711–1776), identifying him precisely as ‘Secretary to the Embassy of Ld. Hertford’ (I.92, 40). So, implied proximity inflects our interpretation of the reader’s takes on Anglo-French encounters at the time of *ASJ*’s publication. The novel appeared in a cultural milieu of prevailing Francophobia following the Seven Years War, a further permutation of ambient anti-Catholicism and popular fears of the ‘evil empire’ of popery (Haydon 1994, p. 28; Claydon 2007, p. 28; Banister 2021, p. 43). But, there was a growing appetite to better understand Catholic societies, and travel offered opportunities—both edifying and otherwise—for a person to ‘live differently’ and ‘renew’ themselves (especially apt for Sterne), even during times of war (New 2021, p. 180). The transformative potential of travel was informed by a belief that the world beyond Protestant Europe was ‘fundamentally alien’, and that England and France were ‘societies as different as wasps & bees’ (I.187, MS38) (Haydon 1998).

I.160, 68] a sentimental traveller who goes to see every thing can never be out of his way especially. . . in a strange place where modes, manners & every thing is not only new but so very different, as that of Paris & London one a place of total gaiety & dissipation the other of industry & business.

Binary contrasts between England and France typify the reader’s remarks, often evoking Voltaire’s *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (1733):

I.187, MS31, 79] I lay it down as a fix’d point that the monarchical & religious government in every state, are equally compeld to unite & support each other, the arbitrary & dispotic with the Romish—the Protestant & rational with a free state.

The decay of trade and widespread poverty in Catholic societies was seen as a product of absolutist government supported by a corrupted faith (Claydon 2007, p. 33). Sterne’s narrative reminds the reader of the crowds of ‘miserable beggars attendin at every inn’ (I.110, 47), a commonplace point of contention for English travellers especially (New and Day 2002, pp. 283–84, fn47.5–6; Claydon 2007, p. 32).

More developed still, the chapter ‘The Dwarf’ inspires a ‘digression’ (as the reader terms it) of over 1500 words on the differences in the nurturing of children in England and France and its consequences for national identity. This—they assert—is a key that ‘may in general shew, & account for the characters in Yoricks work’ (I.187, MS40, 79). The reader contends that the number of dwarfs in Paris was an effect of French infants being withdrawn from their mothers to the care of country nurses, by which ‘the powers of nature are infebled’ (I.187, MS30, 79). This developmental dislocation condemns French children ‘to a second hand oblivion’, in which they are confined to ‘cemeneries’ and ‘convents’ under the supervision of Jesuits (I.187, MS33–4, 79). This creates a lifelong distance between parents and their children, with the result that ‘every French parent considers his offspring as beings whose lives & powers are entirely at the monarchs pleasure’ (I.187, MS33, 79). And so, the source of French sociability is total submission to the king which renders the people perpetually:

I.187, MS36–7, 79] free of anxieties & every thing else that either gladdens or saddens an English mans heart, no family dear relatives friend or fortune, no concience for he clears that by confession as easily as wiping his Sword blade nor even politics liberty, property or no excise, have a shadow over his thoughts, so that it is no wonder having nothing to hope fear or be anxious about. . . we find them the very contrass of Quakers one never exercising their powers to simple &

be chearfull the other never to be grave sad or even thoughtfull, allways lively chearfull ready easy & both mechanically & really good natured & obliged: the only requisites to make themselves agreeable to society.

On the other hand, English children receive every benefit of the 'guardian parental eye' (I.187, MS37, 79). Through loving care, prudent education and choice of trade, and tight bonds of familial obligation, an Englishman has every opportunity of 'acquireing, his own, not his monarchs, freedom of, conscience & protection invisibly of laws, divinely framd & his countrys love' (I.137, MS39, 79). This national distinction in formation shows 'what difference. . . does education, make in mankind & shews why Frenchmen are Frenchmen pliant as a willow tree & English & Englishmen firm as an oaken [plank]' (I.187, MS40, 79).

This reference to pliancy is indicative of the gendered tropes prevalent in contemporary Francophobia (Banister 2021, p. 43). Against the 'Remise Door. Calais', the reader writes that 'the French government has been long & is feminine', adding that 'all shops kept is by the women, as well as government by the King's mistress'. With the influential Madame de Pompadour (1721–1764) clearly in mind, the reader states that this courtly model is reflected across all France; 'all societies the same.' A national effeminacy makes French women 'free easy, & very conversable', with such freedom that they 'speak like an Englishman' (I.46, MS13, 22). The inversion of gendered expectations has profound implications for interactions between the sexes in France. The reader laments the 'groce & frequent' phenomenon in England of prostitutes openly soliciting for sex, whereas there are no such 'indecorums in the streets of Paris' (I.198, MS42, 83). This is occasioned by the perpetual 'willingness' of French women whose freedoms are afforded by the lack of familial connection in their upbringings and with the complicity of the Catholic Church:

II.94, MS60, 122] To an Englishman all French women are half w[hores] allways free & ready. . . as there is no such things as cuckolds, whores or bastards. . . a little confession to a fryer purges the mind of a short absence from home and madam or madamoisell is as much a vestal as nine months before.

The reader pinpoints the 'rouge which every woman in France addopts for beauty' as the outward display of a society in which a superficial civility, even in sexual matters, is valued over true good nature; 'flattery for merrit it is base metal, but yet it pass's current' (II.157, MS65-6). Sterne himself feared the debauching influence of French society on his teenage daughter Lydia whilst she lived there with her mother, gently admonishing her, 'I will have no rouge put on in England' (Cash 1986, p. 306). These national distinctions culminate in the closing scene of *ASJ* with the encounter between Yorick and the fille de chambre, in which he is 'too modest, sentimental' to pursue the situation to an erotic climax. As the reader bawdily puts it, 'she was officious with [her] ink bottle, but his penn was not in cue' (II.192, MS71-2). Yorick—or rather, Sterne (the reader refers to him by name)—was simply too English to accept her invitation.

The Starling

Having established fundamental differences between the freedoms afforded in English and French society, the reader treats Sterne's introduction of the starling as a challenge to the 'philosophic reasons & axioms' on the nature of imprisonment presented in preceding chapters. Critical analysis of the starling tends to foreground notions of captivity in the most literal sense, be it the transatlantic slave trade, domestic debtors, or prisoners of the Inquisition (New and Day 2002, pp. 327–30; Keymer 2009, p. 91; Powell 2022). Also acknowledged is the influence of the 'liberating qualities' of Yorick's imaginative sympathy on later European writers against political oppression (New and Day 2006, p. vii; Asfour 2004, pp. 27–28). The reader's interpretation, however, focusses solely on intractable social divides between nations. The starling—'poor liberty bird' raised in England—sinks in esteem and value because the 'unknown language' of liberty it speaks wearies its French owners (II.33, MS48, 98). The starling demonstrates the limits of philosophical inquiry

when Yorick's liberty is nearly threatened (for travelling without a passport), 'a simple bird told the real truth':

II.29, MS47, 97] The picture of the captive is exquisite and as a just mirror shews Stern to what danger he was really exposed, awaking him out of his reveries. . . Liberty a language unknown at Parris or in France is a fine inference.

This is a salient reminder of the historical context of *ASJ* and the alternative possibilities in the contemporary imagination for themes of 'captivity'. Travelling during a time of war, in a "hostile", absolutist nation brought into sharp relief Protestant concerns about free will and the fate of the immortal soul (New 2021, p. 177). On the whole, however, the reader's interpretation of the novel does not equate recognising and distinguishing difference—even of fundamental politico-religious principles—with contempt:

II.68, MS56-7, 111] From the nature of the clime religion and laws & customs; whichever they may appear absurd out of it. . . we have no more reason to despise or differ in opinion or be displeas'd with a forrigner for not acting & thinking as we do than for their religion or language, full as their complection being black, the effect of a scorching sun.

Having studied *ASJ* closely and attentively, the reader arrives at a similar destination to Sterne's critical editors over two centuries later: that his brand of sensibility essentially amounts to 'tolerance toward the different lives and actions of others' (New and Day 2002, p. liii).

Conclusions

On 17 June 1767, Sterne wrote of his hopes that 'some annotator or explainer of my works' would remark on *ASJ* and select for comment his 'friendship' with Eliza Draper, the absent presence that inspired the initial composition of the novel, and—as Sterne obsessively imagined her—his future wife (New and Day 2002; Budrin 2021, p.196).¹⁹ Of course, most of *ASJ*'s first readers would not have known Eliza's true identity—a fact only made public with the publication of their correspondence in 1773, some five years after Sterne's death (Budrin n.d.). From the earliest days of his literary celebrity, Sterne was acutely aware of the reception of his works, and the anticipated responses of his readers were part of the conscious self-fashioning prevalent in both his fiction and epistolary writings. There is now a long and rich tradition of annotating Sterne, particularly in a scholarly context, but the recovery of the Reed *ASJ* invites us to reengage with those first readers and better appreciate and contrast their views with the amassed wisdom of the intervening centuries. The principles of marginalia studies offer contextual possibilities to situate these interpretations in their historical context and better ground any reinvestigation of *ASJ*'s inherent paradoxes, its disputed sincerity in the sentimental mode, and relationship to genre that fuel the novel's ongoing popularity (Gerard and Newbould 2021, pp. 2–4).

This essay has sought to draw out initial findings from a rich and complex source that is new to scholarship, and one that will undoubtedly reward further investigation. Particularly, if the identity of the reader can eventually be pinpointed (or even narrowed down) through scrutiny of the *ASJ* subscribers' list, this could open further avenues relating to the purpose and subsequent history of the annotations—issues on which this essay has been deliberately cautious until more evidence emerges. What is clear, however, is that the Reed *ASJ* foregrounds a distinctly English reading of the novel, one that resonated deeply with contemporary experiences of European travel and social conditions on each side of the Channel in the aftermath of the Seven Years War. Against this historical backdrop, the reader did not find it contentious that Sterne was capable of genuine sentiment as well as irony, of profound religious feeling, or even of being 'philosophic' (II.24, MS47, 95). This is another important step in addressing the longstanding charges of 'indifference and insincerity' against Sterne and demonstrates that with *ASJ* he did convince at least some readers that his feelings were 'from the heart, and that heart is not the worst of molds' (New and de Voogd 2009, pp. 621–22).

Funding: This research was supported by a Strategic Research Fund grant from Oxford Brookes University.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analysed during this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Acknowledgments: I am grateful for the advice of Peter Budrin, William Gibson, M-C Newbould, and Peter de Voogd when writing this essay.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- ¹ A recent work that draws deeply from marginalia studies is Renske A. Hoff, *Involving Readers, Practices of Reading, Use, and Interaction in Early Modern Dutch Bibles (1522–1546)* (Leiden 2024).
- ² Given the close association between the annotations in the Reed *ASJ* and the first edition of the novel, in-text references give volume and page number from *ASJ* (1768), followed by the page of the commentary (where relevant), and equivalent in the Florida Edition, i.e., I.101, MS21, 43. In quotations, some abbreviations and contractions have been expanded and capital letters adjusted.
- ³ Large paper copies of *ASJ* measure approx. 105 × 175 cm when bound.
- ⁴ Red heels were introduced to the French court by Louis XIV in the 1670s. They had militaristic overtones and were restricted to nobles who were genealogically qualified to wear them.
- ⁵ Examples at: I.70, MS16, 30; I.81, MS18, 35; I.169, MS28, 72.
- ⁶ *The Monthly Review*, xxxviii (March, April 1768), 174–85, 309–19. My thanks to M-C Newbould for this identification.
- ⁷ Griffiths wrote of death putting ‘a final period to the ramblings and writings of the inimitable LAURENCE STERNE.’
- ⁸ Examples at: I.11, MS7, 8; I.59, MS15, 27; I.139, MS24, 59; II.39, MS49, 101.
- ⁹ This may also allude to Sterne’s reference to Raphael earlier in the novel.
- ¹⁰ The editors identify point out that far fewer authors make an appearance in *ASJ* than were ‘invited to the Shandean feast.’
- ¹¹ I have been unable to locate this reference with certainty. The sentiment bears similarity to, ‘let thy Grace attend me in all my actions, and let it keep my from stumbling and staggering’ in John Arndt, *The Garden of Paradise: or, Holy Prayers and Exercises* (London, 1716), 30.
- ¹² II.68, MS 57, 111, reader cites ‘Yorick’—presumably the sermons—but has not infilled blank spaces for page and line.
- ¹³ East Riding Archives. DDBL/13/78, letter discussing Sterne’s ‘Sentimental Journey’, c1770.
- ¹⁴ There are parallels in Nicholas Rowe’s *The Royal Convert* (London, 1768): ‘Love is in them a flame that mounts to heaven/ And seeks its source divine, and kindred stars’.
- ¹⁵ Byron famously complained that Sterne ‘preferred whining over a dead ass to relieving a living mother’.
- ¹⁶ Griffiths was himself paraphrasing volume VIII of *Tristram Shandy*.
- ¹⁷ Sterne’s critical editors also took care to provide notes to every French word/phrase in the novel.
- ¹⁸ The editors indicate that Sterne’s use of ‘etiquette’ is the first illustration of word recorded by the *OED*.
- ¹⁹ The reader remarks on Sterne’s ‘sweet salute to Eliza’ (II.43, MS49, 102), but this is most likely a reference to the character as named, rather than Eliza Draper the person.

References

- Asfour, Lana. 2004. Movements of Sensibility and Sentiment: Sterne in Eighteenth-Century France. In *The Reception of Laurence Sterne in Europe*. Edited by Peter de Voogd and John Neubauer. London: Bloomsbury.
- Banister, Julia. 2021. Yorick’s War, Patriot Politics, Military Men, and Willing Women in *A Sentimental Journey*. In *Laurence Sterne’s A Sentimental Journey, A Legacy to the World*. Edited by W. B. Gerard and M.-C. Newbould. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, pp. 42–57.
- Budrin, Peter. 2021. The Shadow of Eliza, Sterne’s Underplot. In *Laurence Sterne’s A Sentimental Journey, A Legacy to the World*. Edited by W. B. Gerard and M.-C. Newbould. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, pp. 194–212.
- Budrin, Peter. n.d. *Letters from Yorick to Eliza*, Cambridge University Digital Library. Available online: <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/PR-CCD-00005-00185/1> (accessed on 20 October 2024).
- Cash, Arthur H. 1975. *Laurence Sterne, The Early & Middle Years*. London: Routledge.
- Cash, Arthur H. 1986. *Laurence Sterne, The Later Years*. London: Routledge.
- Claydon, Tony. 2007. *Europe and the Making of England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Day, W. G., François Colson, and Amélie Junqua. n.d. Sterne in Italy. Available online: <https://www.laurencesterne-trust.org.uk/sterne/a-sentimental-journey/essay-on-sterne-in-italy-by-w-g-day/> (accessed on 20 October 2024).
- Dubois, Pierre. 2015. *Music in the Georgian Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Franssen, Paul. 1990. Great Lessons of Political Instruction: The Earl of Clonmell Reads Sterne. *The Shandean* 2: 152–201.
- Freeman, William. 1978. *Laurence Sterne and the Origins of the Musical Novel*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Gerard, W. B. 2006. *Laurence Sterne and the Visual Imagination*. Abingdon: Ashgate.
- Gerard, W. B., ed. 2010. *Divine Rhetoric, Essays on the Sermons of Laurence Sterne*. Newark: University of Delaware Press.
- Gerard, W. B., and M.-C. Newbould, eds. 2021. *Laurence Sterne's A Sentimental Journey, A Legacy to the World*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press.
- Grafton, Anthony, Nicolas Popper, and William Sherman. 2024. Introduction. In *Gabriel Harvey and the History of Reading*. Essays by Lisa Jardine and Others. Edited by Anthony Grafton, Nicolas Popper and William Sherman. London: UCL Press, pp. 1–20.
- Haydon, Colin. 1994. *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England, A Political and Social Study*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Haydon, Colin. 1998. 'I love my King and my Country, but a Roman catholic I hate': Anti-Catholicism, xenophobia and national identity in eighteenth-century England. In *Protestantism and National Identity Britain and Ireland, c.1650–c.1850*. Edited by Tony Claydon and Ian McBride. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jackson, H. J. 2001. *Marginalia, Readers Writing in Books*. New Haven: The University of Chicago Press.
- Jackson, H. J. 2005. *Romantic Readers, The Evidence of Marginalia*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Jackson, H. J. 2013. Marginalia and Authorship. In *Oxford Handbook Topics in Literature*. Oxford: Oxford Academic. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Keymer, Thomas. 2009. A Sentimental Journey and the failure of feeling. In *The Cambridge Companion to Laurence Sterne*. Edited by Thomas Keymer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 79–94.
- Mansel, Philip. 2005. *Dressed to Rule, Royal and Court Costume from Louis XIV to Elizabeth II*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Miglietti, Sara. 2024. What is an annotator? Renaissance marginalia as a textual form. In *Gabriel Harvey and the History of Reading*. Essays by Lisa Jardine and Others. Edited by Anthony Grafton, Nicolas Popper and William Sherman. London: UCL Press, pp. 279–306.
- Monahan, W. Gregory. 2014. *Let God Arise, The War & Rebellion of the Camisards*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Newbould, M.-C. 2008. Sex, death and the aposiopesis: Two early attempts to fill the gaps of Laurence Sterne's 'A Sentimental Journey'. *Postgraduate English* 17: 1–27.
- New, Melvyn, ed. 1996. *The Sermons of Laurence Sterne, The Text*. The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- New, Melvyn. 2021. Boswell and Sterne in 1768. In *Laurence Sterne's A Sentimental Journey, A Legacy to the World*. Edited by W. B. Gerard and M.-C. Newbould. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, pp. 171–93.
- New, Melvyn, and Joan New, eds. 1978. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman: Part Two*. The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- New, Melvyn, and Peter de Voogd, eds. 2009. *The Letters, Part 2: 1765–1768*. The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- New, Melvyn, and W. G. Day, eds. 2002. *A Sentimental Through France and Italy and Continuation of the Bramine's Journal*. The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- New, Melvyn, and W. G. Day, eds. 2006. *Laurence Sterne, A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy, and Continuation of the Bramine's Journal*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- Powell, Lucy. 2022. Sterne's Captive and the Prison: Double Vision. *The Shandean* 33: 25–49. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Spedding, Patrick, and Paul Tankard, eds. 2021. *Marginal Notes, Social Reading and the Literal Margins*. London: Springer.
- Williams, Helen. 2021. *Laurence Sterne and the Eighteenth-Century Book*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.