



**Compte rendu de W.B. Gerard and M-C. Newbould
eds., Laurence Sterne's A Sentimental Journey. A
Legacy to the World**

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► **To cite this version:**

Anne Bandry-Scubbi. Compte rendu de W.B. Gerard and M-C. Newbould eds., Laurence Sterne's A Sentimental Journey. A Legacy to the World. 2021, 10.4000/1718.8609 . hal-03517684

HAL Id: hal-03517684

<https://hal.science/hal-03517684>

Submitted on 7 Jan 2022

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XVII-XVIII

Revue de la Société d'études anglo-américaines des
XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles

78 | 2021

**Cartes et cartographies dans le monde anglophone
aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles**

W.B. GERARD and M-C. NEWBOULD eds., *Laurence Sterne's A Sentimental Journey. A Legacy to the World*

Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2021. 275 pp. ISBN 9781684482764

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/1718/8609>

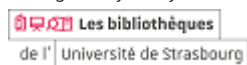
DOI: 10.4000/1718.8609

ISSN: 2117-590X

Publisher

Société d'études anglo-américaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles

Brought to you by Université de Strasbourg



Electronic reference

Anne Bandry-Scubbi, "W.B. GERARD and M-C. NEWBOULD eds., *Laurence Sterne's A Sentimental Journey. A Legacy to the World*", *XVII-XVIII* [Online], 78 | 2021, Online since 31 December 2021, connection on 03 January 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/1718/8609> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/1718.8609>

This text was automatically generated on 3 January 2022.



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- 1 This collection of essays is a welcome addition to criticism on Sterne as it is devoted to his second book, far less frequently the object of publications than *Tristram Shandy* yet often the entry to Sterne's fiction as the 2002 *The Reception of Sterne in Europe* showed. The editors are accomplished Sterneans: Mary-Céline Newbould (*Adaptations of Laurence Sterne's Fiction: Sterneana 1760-1840*, 2013; *Sterne Digital Library*) and William Blake Gerard (*Laurence Sterne and Visual Imagination*, 2006; *Divine Rhetoric: Essays on the Sermons of Laurence Sterne*, ed., 2010) who sadly passed away before the volume was published. Ten essays by scholars from several generations, an introduction and an afterword constitute the volume, along with an Anglo-centric sixteen-page bibliography with remarkably few contributions in languages other than English, three of which appeared in *XVII-XVIII*. After duly noting the enduring "enigmatic" quality of the text, the introduction gives a detailed view of its reception over 250 years. The volume provides traditional views and newer analyses of *A Sentimental Journey*, the latter in tune with current preoccupations such as gender with a focus on masculinity, animal studies, things and borders.
- 2 The first section entitled "Men, Women, and Other Animals" does this the most openly. It begins with Shaun Regan's "Refining Masculinity in Yorick's *Journey*: Courtesy,

Chivalry, Gallantry” which like his earlier perceptive essays on Sterne, provides a subtle reading of the text as “a multi-layered investigation of [...] verbal registers and scenes of manhood” in the light of important studies on masculinity and sentimentalism (Cohen, Mullan, Van Sent). As convincingly if somewhat less ambitiously, Julia Banister in “Yorick’s War : Patriot Politics, Military Men, and Willing Women in *A Sentimental Journey*” analyses “gender politics” by examining in detail how the French military characters are used to show Yorick the ways to interact with women by combining “sentimentality with the violence of desires that, as the sentimentalist Rousseau has it, equip a man for the heterosexual game of ‘attack and defence.’” Glynis Ridley’s “Sterne’s Journey into Animal Affect” takes this confrontation of Sterne’s text to current concerns one step further by opening her essay on the Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness. She sets asses and starlings in diverse contextual readings, from the Bible to twenty-first century work on the linguistic abilities of starlings, and provides a stimulating take on Sterne’s use of non-human animals.

- 3 The bird reappears in Fraser Easton’s “Yorick’s Speech and the Starling’s Song : The Limits of Elocution in *A Sentimental Journey*” which includes “nonword sounds” in a wider analysis of how Sterne “rethinks and complicates [...] elocutionary models of communication, especially Thomas Sheridan’s.” Showing how “reader-listeners” are forced to acknowledge the impossibility of “a stable understanding” of sounds, gestures and the sexual register of sentimental encounters, Easton cogently argues that Sterne’s text “models its own unstable historical reception.” In “Things of the Spirit : Vibrant Matter in *A Sentimental Journey*” Jennifer Preston Wilson also looks at Sterne’s text through a recent lens, thing theory, and fruitfully focuses on “moments of enchantment with things” notably the désobligeant, the snuffbox, the wig and the pail, paper and the final curtain. A significant number of chapter titles, she notes, cite things rather than places. “(O)economy and Order : Laurence Sterne’s Chaptering” by Alexander Hardie-Forsyth illustrates the difficulty of writing with originality on Sterne by paying such heed to Melvyn New’s recurring words in *the Scriblerian* to “do one’s homework,” i.e. not publish without checking what other critics have written, that his own words hardly stand out. His “imaginative leap,” documented by reproductions from the fair copy of *A Sentimental Journey*’s first volume, is that the arrangement of some chapters originated from Sterne rather than the printer so as to “bear the most profitable return when his books enter[ed] the marketplace.” Chris Ewers has no such qualms in “Spatial Digression and the Borders of Knowledge in *A Sentimental Journey*” when he states that “fittingly, the volume ends with a dash,” which is not the case in the first and second editions nor in the authoritative Florida one used for the volume. The essay however interestingly explores the text as “a journey of sidesteps” and foregrounds “the mapping of affect in which the threshold is privileged.” In a different order from that adopted here (French perspective ?) these four essays come under the second heading, “Words, Structures, Things.”
- 4 The following section is entitled “Historical Contexts, Rewritten Texts.” True to his lifelong stance as the guardian against publications that presents Sterne as a prankster in tune with later experiments in fiction playing with ambivalence and double entendre for the sake of it, Melvyn New, general editor of the Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne (1978-2014), takes to the letter Sterne’s qualification of *A Sentimental Journey* as his “work of redemption.” In “Boswell and Sterne in 1768” he argues that “the dogmatic slumbers of secularism” have prevented scholars writing in the second

half of the twentieth century from perceiving that men such as the two authors could “agonize over theological issues.” By putting *A Sentimental Journey* and *An Account of Corsica*, two “works of genius [...] in proximity with each other” he makes the claim that sensibility was the eighteenth-century’s “far more important” contribution to Christianity than “the rational and empirical knowledge that Enlightenment has come to signify as being essentially hostile to religion.” Likewise, it is not the humour of *Don Quixote* that is pointed out in both works but rather “quixotic heroism,” that “placed [Boswell] and the Corsicans on the right side of history” and of which “*A Sentimental Journey* is a particular act,” for “we will end with our hand stretched across the empty space surrounding us, seeking whatever solace we hope is out there.” Fortunately for the present reader at least, “everything in this world [...] has two handles” (*Tristram Shandy* II.7). The one seized by Peter Budrin in “The Shadow of Eliza: Sterne’s Underplot in *A Sentimental Journey*” is to discuss “the question of Sterne’s sincerity” and to argue from *The Bramine’s Journal* (a.k.a. *Journal to Eliza*) and letters that the *Journey* “contains hidden messages addressed to” his love interest Eliza Draper. Paul Goring’s “Debt, Death, and Literary Inheritance: The Ends of Sterne and *A Sentimental Journey*” closes this section with a flourish, not surprising after his *Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century*. Considering narrative as a currency and examining different facets of debt (including his own mortgage and the economic situation of Britain since the 1680s), he considers *Tristram Shandy* and *Journey* as a whole. Looking in detail at the text through close readings leads to the conclusion that “‘A Case of Delicacy’ may be read [note the modal] as a life-affirming rewriting of Yorick’s death-bed scene” (*Tristram Shandy* I.12), and an “insurance policy, just in case he would not live to accompany Yorick through Italy” (231). This deepens the resonance of both Tristram’s “Mortgager and Mortgagee” joke which culminates with “Alas Poor Yorick” and Walter Shandy’s “everything is big with jest—[...]—if we can but find it out” (V.32).

- 5 In his Afterword, Pat Rogers reflects on the differences between the 1968 celebration of the bicentenary of Sterne’s death which resulted in *The Winged Skull* (1971) and those for the tercentenary of his birth in 2013 (omitting *Hilarion’s Asse* published under the aegis of Société XVII-XVIII) and the present one begun in 2018. These result from the effects of widening the canon, and, most particularly, the “remarkable resources” produced in between: the Florida edition, *the Shandean* and “the authoritative life” by Arthur Cash. Rogers aptly concludes that “the writings that emerged within a period of just fifteen months [the final volume of *Shandy*, *A Sentimental Journey* and Continuation of *Bramine’s Journal*], and so many difficult circumstances, still have the power to excite and engage modern readers.” Indeed the present volume, “bringing *A Sentimental Journey* center stage” should definitely find its place alongside the “remarkable resources” in every good library.

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