

Author accepted manuscript of:

M-C. Newbould, “Encore MacNally?: A Dramatic *Tristram Shandy* in Manuscript and in Print”, *The Shandean* 33 (2022): 173-197.

p-ISSN: 0956-3083

Research for this article was funded by the National Science Centre, Poland, as part of the Opus project number 2020/37/B/HS2/02093

Encore MacNally?: A Dramatic Tristram Shandy in Manuscript and in Print

Abstract: Leonard MacNally's two-act dramatic adaptation of Tristram Shandy, first performed at Covent Garden in 1783, has attracted considerable critical attention in studies of Sterneana. However, those discussions are largely based on the printed version of the text, bolstered by reviews found in contemporary newspapers, leading to many conclusions about the content, performance contexts, and adaptive qualities of MacNally's work. Consulting the manuscript version of this short play provides us with a much clearer view of the Tristram Shandy that was actually performed on stage compared with the printed version consumed by readers. Comparing these two versions reveals the play's excised scenes and its numerous internal changes — hitherto only glimpsed through newspaper reviews. This comparison substantiates conclusions about the nature of MacNally's investment in Sterne, supported by some comment on his Sentimental Excursions to Windsor and Other Places (1781). It also informs our knowledge of the multi-authored, collaborative theatrical culture of his day; the stage as arena for political satire; the differences between performance and reading play-texts; and the audience's appetite for different forms of comedy.

It may seem surprising that anything else remains to be said about a short theatrical adaptation of Sterne's work from 1783 that has attracted perhaps disproportionate critical attention. Leonard MacNally's *Tristram Shandy: A Sentimental, Shandean Bagatelle* is a two-act afterpiece that served a specific function in an evening's theatrical entertainment: performed alongside other afterpieces, dances, and songs, it followed five-act mainpieces as diverse as *Twelfth Night* and *The Revenge*, Edward Young's tragedy of 1721.¹ MacNally's drama is necessarily compact in length, scope, and its handling of Sterne's text. It has nonetheless drawn several critics to discuss its merits and limitations alike, perhaps because it is one of very few

dramatic adaptations of *Tristram Shandy* in what is otherwise a comparatively broad array of Sterneana, in an age which regularly brought popular works of fiction to the stage.

For John A. Hay, writing in 1973, MacNally's play is 'interesting for its chronological re-arrangements', and how it reorganises the jigsaw pieces of Sterne's novel so that they cohere with a more conventional and conclusive storyline. It demonstrates 'the real problems of chronology which confront the reader of Tristram's curious narrative', and which therefore make a dramatic adaptation dependent upon certain expectations of temporal sequencing (or at least cohesion) peculiarly difficult.² More recently Warren Oakley has delved into the piece's performance history, shedding light on the political implications of the portrayal of Uncle Toby, as one of literature's most famous war veterans, in the context of the patriotic fervour awakened by Britain's 'loss of the colonies' in America around this time.³ I have also previously noted the patriotic overtones of the afterpiece, and how it demonstrates the selection and recontextualisation characteristic of Sternean adaptation, and which seem particularly necessary for a dramatic afterpiece: Tristram Shandy's narratorial self-reflexivity and typographic play (for example) are all but impossible to show on stage.⁴ Moreover, they would be irrelevant to the plot-and-character driven focus of such a dramatic piece; an afterpiece on this scale requires a tight range of scenes, characters, and plot-lines in order to hang together.

Discussions of MacNally's *Tristram Shandy* often, perhaps inevitably, perceive that its true value is only really derived from how it piggybacks on Sterne's work. As such, sometimes commentaries on this playlet can be rather disparaging — as, indeed, the opening sentence of this essay itself suggests. Melvyn New summarises this approach in his conclusions on the 'failure' of the piece: 'In part, this is because MacNally and his age were more interested in sentiment than satire; in part, because drama (at least in MacNally's hands) did not allow for an ironic, multilayered voice, the key element of Sterne's achievement; and in part, because MacNally, unlike Sterne, is a writer of small talent'.⁵ Whilst the idea of drama as a simple literary form should bear some scrutiny, in terms of MacNally's self-styled 'bagatelle' its simplicity is its defining quality. And although few critics, except perhaps those who themselves inhabit 'the lunatic fringe of Sterneana'⁶ (a phrase used by J.C.T. Oates which is itself worth reconsidering in this context) would deny Sterne's genius, the assumption that those who creatively repurpose his work only possess 'small talent' has recently undergone necessary critical revision.⁷

MacNally himself deserves fresh attention for the multifaceted creative flair he demonstrated in the latter decades of the eighteenth century. For now, his dramatic piece in particular deserves renewed interest for two main reasons. Firstly, we can add new angles to the already established

idea that this adaptation — arguably, like any — tells us a lot about how Sterne's near-contemporaries thought about so complex a work as *Tristram Shandy* in creative ways, including how they might repurpose some of its material in new forms and contexts. It can therefore serve a critical function. Many of Sterne's readers, after all, exercised the link between creativity and criticism as an 'art', which (according to Sterne's favoured source, Ephraim Chambers) involves 'judging of works of genius, their excellencies and defects'.⁸ If reception history is allowed to provide some form of gauge for how a given work was read and understood, what drew the notice of Sterne's contemporaries in their creative endeavours may well inform later critical appreciation and understanding.

The second reason is allied to the grubbier, often mercenary, usually opportunistic ways in which adaptation also functions, perhaps especially in this period. Yet this reason need not negate the first. MacNally engages with Sterne's text critically speaking, but he also exploits it by reusing it for the purposes of entertainment, moulding its substance to suit the tastes of its intended audience, and according to the role the afterpiece was supposed to play in the theatrical programme. This adaptation, then, tells us about how Sterne was read and repurposed (whether the theatrical audience recognised it as such or not), but also, as we already know, about the contemporary contexts in which his work was seen to have a fresh potential 'use': whether that of political propaganda, as Oakley proposes, or of purely commercial benefit, or of aesthetic aspiration. As such, what was seen to 'work' on stage in adapting Sterne's text matters. However, so far I — like those before me — have talked of 'MacNally's bagatelle' as though it were a single, unified, textual and performative artefact, effectively ignoring the more nuanced case that critics often make in presenting the complexity of eighteenth-century theatrical culture, not least in terms of 'authors' and 'texts'. Typically, the printed version of MacNally's play (and usually the second edition) has provided the sole evidence on which textual and contextual arguments alike are based, alongside contemporary reviews printed in newspapers (which tend to supply the main record of the bagatelle's performance and reception). However, that print-based item is only one component in the creative identity of MacNally's adaptation, and so it provides only a partial clue both as to what happened to Sterne's text when turned to this dramatic purpose, and to the contexts in which it was received. Indeed, it is remarkable that critics scrupulously attentive to the details of theatrical context should base their judgment of this dramatic adaptation of Sterne solely on a printed artefact that is necessarily situated at a remove from other artefacts more immediately connected with what was actually put on stage, as is more accurately represented by the manuscript version of

MacNally's play. There is a 'performance' *Tristram Shandy* and a 'reading' *Tristram Shandy*. On the surface, the one is more overtly comical, the other more sentimental and book-like. We can only perceive the differences when we examine the evidence properly.

The Manuscript and Printed Versions of MacNally's Tristram Shandy, Compared

David Taylor is rare — perhaps, until now, unique — in having consulted the manuscript version of the *Tristram Shandy* first performed at Covent Garden, to no small critical acclaim and popular success, in April 1783.⁹ I did not consult the manuscript in my discussion of the play in my 2013 study of *Sterneana*. Although Oakley makes a significant distinction between 'the text by MacNally' and 'Harris's stage production', generating many important conclusions as a result, he admits that these findings are based on the second edition of the play and he does not mention the manuscript.¹⁰ Any arguments about text, context, and source text would undoubtedly be strengthened by the missing evidence that the manuscript provides, insofar as it can be taken as a more substantial record of what was first performed than the summaries given by contemporary newspaper reviewers.¹¹ The advent of digital editions of manuscript and printed works alike has opened up opportunities for accessing potentially crucial evidence previously inaccessible to those unable to consult such material in person: the entire John Larpent Plays collection, physically held at the Huntington Library, is now available online via the Adam Matthew Digital Eighteenth Century Drama platform (albeit with a subscription).¹²

Taylor's research — presented in an introduction to a digital edition of the second edition of MacNally's afterpiece that forms part of *Laurence Sterne and Sterneana*, hosted by Cambridge Digital Library — allows him to expand on the known fact that the 'original' version contains two whole scenes not present in the printed play-text.¹³ Like others, he suggests that these scenes were later excised in response to critical feedback from the play's contemporary reviewers; the *Morning Chronicle*, for instance, advises that MacNally might have used the 'pruning pen' to cut a too-long piece.¹⁴ As Taylor writes, 'More than one newspaper review [...] complain[ed] of the afterpiece's excessive length. MacNally and Harris evidently listened, for when *Tristram Shandy* began its second run at Covent Garden in September 1783 it appeared in an altered and truncated form. It is this revised version of the play that the [...] volume, published in October 1783, offers the reader'.¹⁵

The manuscript contains many notable differences from the printed version besides these two excised scenes, and as such significantly revises our understanding of this adaptation: both its relation to Sterne, and what it reveals about the theatrical culture of the day. After all, as Oakley

FIGURE

22 Prefatory note, signed by Thomas Harris, to Leonard MacNally, *Tristram Shandy: a Farce in Two Acts*, 1783, manuscript; LA 621, John Larpent Plays, Huntington Library

reminds us, ‘The playscript is the play minus the theatre’.¹⁶ Although authored by MacNally, the manuscript evidences the collaborative nature of any entertainment venture at a time when theatre managers exerted considerable influence over the creative products of ‘authors’, even before the role played by actors, sets, costumes, and indeed audience made ‘a play’ a multi-handed, protean creation. Thomas Harris was no exception in terms of his management of Covent Garden, recently mapped through Oakley’s biography of this rather elusive figure.¹⁷ Indeed, although Harris tends to be forgotten in contemporary accounts of the eighteenth-century theatrical world, and his reputation has borne some damage on various scores, his creative role in the production of new entertainment was widely acknowledged: ‘As every one of the Garden’s playwrights knew, Harris nurtured the talents of his authors, supplied them with ideas for plots and worked with them to craft scripts’, whilst also being closely involved with every stage of production, Oakley writes.¹⁸ We can assume the case was no different for MacNally’s *Tristram Shandy*. Indeed, the manuscript is prefaced by a note signed by Harris to the then Lord Chamberlain, the Earl of Hertford, making the usual plea for indulgence for this piece as it passed before the censor (Fig. 22); the afterpiece’s text is written in the same hand. It is important to retain a wider sense of the significance of figures such as Harris — alongside the piece’s named actors, as well as the anonymous reviewers and the multitude of audience members acting as respondents — when we consider both the substance of ‘MacNally’s’ *Tristram Shandy* and its mutations.¹⁹

Whilst bearing this wider context in mind, for readers of Sterne the main focus must necessarily be how his text has been handled by any adaptation based on his work. What, then, are the differences between the manuscript and the printed versions of the *Tristram Shandy* afterpiece? As Taylor states, the expurgated scenes — ‘the very two scenes [...] recommended for “the pruning pen”’ by the reviewers — involve Slop and Susannah in the kitchen at the end of the first act (a contraction of the battle of the cataplasm in Sterne’s text), and a discussion about geography between uncle Toby and Widow Wadman.²⁰ Taylor goes on to add that the encounter between Trim and Susannah (who, in MacNally’s play, replaces Bridget) at the Dutch drawbridge on the bowling green, which is retained in the printed text, was nevertheless longer in the first performance.²¹ There are numerous changes besides: unsurprisingly, there are

localised alterations to words and phrasing; dialogue is both cut and added, variously in printed and performance versions alike; passages and scenes are reorganised; and, in the manuscript, there are song lyrics (performed to music composed by Michael Arne, minus the score) not present in the print edition.

FIGURE

23 The excised ‘battle of the cataplasm’ scene, Act I, Leonard MacNally, *Tristram Shandy: a Farce in Two Acts*, 1783, manuscript; LA 621, John Larpent Plays, Huntington Library

Some of these lyrics were published separately as stand-alone items in contemporary newspapers.²²

In terms of the two major excisions noted by Taylor, it is surprising that the physical comedy of the battle of the cataplasm did not meet with critical favour. The scene at the end of Act I that dramatises Slop and Susannah’s feisty argument over the destruction of noses certainly provides plenty of potential for verbal and physical slapstick appropriate to a comic farce (Fig. 23). The colourful language — ‘you’re an audacious Jezebel!’; the familiar ‘I never was the destruction of any body’s Nose, which is more than you can say’ — is accompanied by stage directions ‘(throws Saucepan at her)’; ‘(returns it)’; ‘(pulls off his wig)’ (MS) which no doubt energised the roles played by Ralph Wewitzer and the well-known actor and singer Mrs (Sarah Maria) Wilson as Slop and Susannah respectively.²³ That this was one of several popular scenes to resurface in book illustrations is also suggestive of its visually comic appeal. And that the notice printed in (for example) the *Public Advertiser* on 9 May 1783 describes the characters as ‘represented to be dressed from the Caricatures of HOGARTH’ suggests rich comic potential for such a scene with such a Dr Slop. But the *Morning Chronicle* voiced the opinion — and apparently with it the audience’s — that this was a scene the play could afford to lose.²⁴

The second excised scene (Figs 24a, 24b) is a compact rendering of Toby’s encounter with Widow Wadman at the sentry-box, where she lays siege to Toby’s virtue with the pretence of having ‘a mote—or sand—or something’ in her eye, drawing him to look into its ‘lambent delicious fire’ (*TS*, 8.24.705–07). The manuscript version of the scene is longer than in the printed text, allowing Toby an opportunity to explain the importance of ‘Geography’ to military campaigns, an extension of Mrs Wadman’s unresolved uncertainty in Sterne’s text over the ‘very place’ of his groin wound (*TS*, 9.20.722–23). The expanded scene in the manuscript version gives greater scope for the political satire that Oakley discerns in the printed version of the play. Toby rhetorically asks the Widow: without so vital a thing as ‘Geography’, which is

‘so necessary to a Soldier’, ‘how else is it to be conceiv’d that Malbro’ should have carried his army from the banks of the Maes to Shelenburgh, where he broke in upon the enemies works [...?].’ (MS).

By drawing greater attention to matters of warfare, and therefore giving freer rein to any potential propagandist intentions, the manuscript dilutes the printed text’s focussed attention on the love-plot — the campaign planned by Walter to take Toby’s mind off the troublesome peace following the Treaty of Utrecht which renders his soldierly services useless. Toby is clearly less easily distracted in the manuscript. Walter seeks to mitigate the ruin not only of his brother’s health, but of his pocket, too, both alike threatened by his obsession: ‘Dear Toby, these military operations are above your Strength, & will in the end quite ruin & make a Beggar of you’ (MS).²⁵ Toby’s reply, present only in the manuscript version — ‘What signifies, it, if they do, so long as it’s for the good of the nation?’ — is a counter-argument not countenanced by the printed text. It invokes what was no doubt a commonplace used to urge patriotic solidarity and a sense of duty made all the more resonant in the ferment of national outcry over ‘the colonies’.²⁶ The manuscript therefore confirms with new evidence Oakley’s observation that the newspaper reviews allow us to assume that the staged version presented a more enhanced ‘satire upon contemporary politics’, and fleshes out speculations based on the printed play-text alone.²⁷ Invoking Marlborough, one of Britain’s most significant military heroes, for instance, especially for a veteran of war campaigns that he had led (and which Toby emulates on the bowling green in Sterne’s text, which specifically invokes Marlborough), adds some pique to the loss of British territories overseas through military defeat.²⁸ Such details enhance the propagandist dimensions of the afterpiece.²⁹

However, topicality and polemical bite only truly serve the expediency of the immediate political moment. Perhaps the diminished presence of political satire in the printed version of the play reflects the waning appeal of that moment’s gradual passage. The shifting relevance of topicality aside, it could be that the reduced emphasis on politics in the printed version answers the critics’ complaints based on aesthetic grounds. The manuscript Toby’s disquisition about geography was perhaps too verbose for the stage, slowing down the energy of the farce — although ‘the very spot’, in replacing Sterne’s ‘very place’, perhaps adds a further sprinkle of bawdy spice if Johnson’s disapproval of the potential innuendo of ‘spot’ is a guide.³⁰ Even when curtailed in the printed text Widow Wadman seems to think that this burst of mansplaining goes on for far too long, especially when it detracts from her carefully managed ‘PLAN’ using her mote-stricken eye: ‘A fig for the geography — We were speaking of love and matrimony’

(PT, 20), she declares. The manuscript's Widow — having more of Toby's speech to listen to — voices this frustration more stridently and, it seems, also anticipates the unfavourable response of the reviewers. Upon Toby concluding that none of these feats could have been won 'without the aids of Geography', she replies, 'We were speaking of Matrimony Captn. & here you have led me a Tour thro' the Netherlands into the very heart of the Empire—Well, poor Mr. Wadman! la, he made love!—' (MS). If her innuendo is not to conquer Toby, perhaps her musical talents will: and so she bursts into song — the very 'Sonnet with which [Mr. Wadman] gain'd my heart' — and which voices the subtext whereby Tristram conveys the Widow's intentions towards Toby, concealed by modest reserve: 'I will not touch it, however, quoth Mrs. Wadman to herself' (*TS*, 8.20.773); 'I clasp thee in the Midnight dream' (MS), her dramatic counterpart opines to her uncomprehending lover. The military dimension of the scene detracts from the comedy of this fruitless romance. By cutting such sections and giving greater focus to the amours, the printed play-text brings such comedy to the fore, but — more importantly — it also emphasises the theme of 'the heart of man' that Chalmers's prologue promises the play will explore (the text of which appears in print, but not in the manuscript).

FIGURE

24a The curtailed sentry-box scene, Act II, Leonard MacNally, *Tristram Shandy: a Farce in Two Acts*, 1783, manuscript; LA 621, John Larpent Plays, Huntington Library

FIGURE

24b The curtailed sentry-box scene, Act II, Leonard MacNally, *Tristram Shandy: a Farce in Two Acts*, 1783, manuscript; LA 621, John Larpent Plays, Huntington Library

In terms of more localised changes beyond these major cuts, in the manuscript the second act differs most notably in terms of altered words and phrases, reorganisation, excision and addition. It opens with a discussion about fortifications between Susannah and Trim, compared with the conversation Widow Wadman and Susannah hold about Toby's groin wound in the printed version. Segments of the manuscript scene's dialogue are extracted and dispersed elsewhere in the second act, whilst others are cut entirely. The draw-bridge moment, to which Trim and Susannah's conversation leads, therefore belongs more appropriately at the opening of the second act of the performance rather than later on, as in the printed text's version. Furthermore, it is confused with the narrative of Tristram's birth and misnaming at baptism,

and Slop's interruption of Trim and Susannah's assignation appears as a segmented cameo, rather than being wrapped into Slop's discussion with Mrs Wadman regarding how children are the purpose of marriage, as occurs in the printed text. The doctor's triumphant exclamation in both versions upon his discovery — 'Oho! Madam Lucretia, have we [I MS] caught you!' (PT, 26) — recalls the language used towards 'Madam Minx' in the argument earlier in the manuscript over the cataplasm, which anticipates Slop's later gloating: 'Oho! Mrs. Susannah, Mrs. Mock Modesty — The bridge of the Child's Nose is not the only bridge has been broken' (MS). The manuscript Susannah is more outraged at such 'Malice' than her print incarnation, for whom the discovery of the broken bridge is a source of humour: 'He was shewingit [sic] to me, he! he! he!' — 'it' meaning, of course, the 'Dutch bridge' (PT, 26).

In both cases, this declaration is immediately followed by Trim's announcement that he will marry her, but this is a more protracted affair in the manuscript. Matrimony is a slickly sealed matter in the printed version for Toby and the Widow Wadman, too. In the manuscript, lengthier sections of dialogue concerning her aspirations for a future husband — 'Then give me the Man who is willing & able to protect me at home, & has Spirit to vindicate his King & Country abroad' (MS) — vanish in the printed text, another moment displaying the reduced presence of overt political comment. Toby's reply — 'Right, Madam, for what is War, but getting a number of quiet & harmless people with Swords in their hands to keep the Turbulent & ambitious within bounds [?]' (MS) — is a less romantic response than the more sentimentalised Toby of the printed version musters: 'Widow, will you marry me? [...] Yes, I wish to marry the widow with all my heart' (PT, 27). Whereas in the manuscript Toby and Walter's discussion of this new-found romance provides a parallel for Trim's declaration of interest — 'an amour thus nobly doubled' (*TS*, 3.24.246), perhaps — leading to a final song that seals the festive nuptials according to generic comedic convention, the printed text separates these twinned matrimonials such that the reader is given a perfunctory conclusion with the joining of hands by Walter, which dispenses with the sung epilogue's plea for the audience to 'Protect a young author from censure & harm' (MS), reinforcing the printed version's emphasis on sentimentalised love.

'Pruning' more tiresome passages that seemed less successful on stage (according to the reviewers, at least) was evidently only one purpose of converting the manuscript play into a printed work. Placing Sterne's amiable, admirable veteran figure at one further remove from the muddy theatre of war, thanks in part to the geography lesson's excision, reinforced the printed text's sentimental qualities. What need of a boring discussion about the 'geography' of where Toby got his groin wound — and all the attendant bawdry of Mrs Wadman's

'Netherlands' (MS) — when the manly veteran proves his masculinity by foregrounding virtue, not sexuality, as his predominant characteristic? The print-text Trim's nostalgic demonstrations of duty, now performed in the reader-viewer's memory or imagination alone, similarly gain more pathetic credibility: 'Up to his knees in cold water', '(wheeling to right) [...] (wheeling to left)' (PT, 3), praying all the while. Focussing more on the universal moral benefits of prayer in peacetime and less on the uncomfortable inconveniences of geography and warfare certainly reinforces the moralistic bent of sentimental novels; but perhaps political intentions are not entirely absent either. Privileging peace and prayer seems like a rather effective diversion-tactic from patriotic belligerence.

The enhanced interpolations from Sterne's text in the printed version do not always have a sentimental bent: Susannah's mention of her mistress, who 'nightly reads over her marriage-settlement' tucked up in bed, and weeps — 'a strong sign that she's thinking of a second [husband]' (PT, 4) — recalls the more boisterous innuendo of the staged version. The printed text's expanded 'alphabet of love' energises a relay between Trim and Susannah, and suggests a more elaborate form of verbal foreplay that serves as prelude to the encounter behind the Dutch draw-bridge than the manuscript version allows. Nevertheless, the main difference is that one version (print) is more sentimental, the other (manuscript) is more politically daring, and more open to slapstick comedy and innuendo. After all, the manuscript is labelled merely '*Tristram Shandy: a Farce in Two Acts*' rather than the more extended title of the print version, stressing as it does the 'sentimental' side of the 'Shandean' mode. The printed text generally enhances the play's readability, albeit at a time when play-texts provided popular reading matter without needing to masquerade as anything other than a play, but where embellishing some phrases and refining others, expanding stage directions with further details of setting, place, and props allowed a reader to imagine the scene for him or herself even more easily.

Although the drama's sentimental moments are enhanced by the roles ascribed to characters that might resemble those found in a sentimental novel, a closer correlate lies with the volume of excerpts designed for the 'heart of sensibility' which were particularly popular around this time, initiated by the first edition of George Kearsley's *Beauties of Sterne*, published only the previous year (in 1782). The numerous moralising sententiae MacNally adds in the printed play-text might well have been plucked from any number of these volumes — phrases such as Walter's 'Love, Trim—mark Susannah—Love is a passion derived from heaven', for instance, or Trim's account of his master and Walter's characters as benevolent sentimentalists: '—good hearts! when the unfortunate claim assistance, they fling down their money with that spirited

jerk of an honest welcome with which generous souls only are able to fling down money' (PT, 2). Indeed, Oakley points out that 'Nine out of the ten extracts' in Act I had also appeared in Kearsley's 1782 *Beauties*. The play resembles an anthology 'by carefully selecting and piecing together these Shandean fragments'; and yet, 'Unlike the anthologist, MacNally distilled and dramatically reconceived Sterne's sprawling novel'.³¹

However, the printed play-text is not the same as the 'dramatic' performance text. The one suits the purposes of farcical light relief, the other those of reading affecting and improving sentiments expressed in a fictive narrative, here in a play-text. Many of these sentimentalised excerpts and phrases are highly contracted in the manuscript version or do not appear at all. This certainly calls for some qualification of Oakley's claim that, 'In order to fill Covent Garden, MacNally approved the strategy of *The Beauties* that had distilled *Tristram Shandy* and extracted publicly acclaimed and commercially successful episodes from a miscellaneous text'.³² Indeed, for all that Harris apparently tried to introduce a more genteel theatre-going experience at Covent Garden, countless accounts of eighteenth-century theatrical culture stress its liveliness and ribaldry, and often riotous behaviour, which disrupts the picture of a composed and settled audience consuming moralising statements as eagerly as they seemed to do those of the literary anthology. For all the popularity of sentimental stage comedy, furthermore, it is unlikely that audiences would look to a farcical afterpiece for condensed sententiae. Even if MacNally exerted sufficient influence over what was staged such as to evidence 'his cautious anticipation of the reactions of an audience including traditionalistic admirers of Sterne who had been nurtured upon such selective *Beauties*'³³ — a volume which, after all, was only a year into its popular circulation — to assume that the play-going audience was necessarily familiar with Sterne's text in whatever form is to assume a lot. And, more pertinently, it is limiting to suggest that these homogenised readers would wish to see a staged version of the *Beauties* instead of a comical *Tristram Shandy*, even if they were familiar with the anthology; there were admirers of both Sterne's bawdy humour and his supple wit still, for all the supposed 'sanitization and reformation of Sterne which gained momentum through the 1780s through the success of *The Beauties*'.³⁴

Oakley's important account of how Wilson — renowned for transgressive and ribald roles — played Sterne's beloved amiable humourist, Uncle Toby, in fact supports the argument that the staged *Tristram Shandy* lived up to its expected farcical credentials more than those of an appetite for reading sentimental texts. It must also be recalled that it was the reviewers who declared that the cataplasm scene was unsuccessful (because too farcical?), and that the geography discussion should also be cut (because too political? or too tedious?). Is this

necessarily an unshakeably reliable, or wholly representative, test of what audiences did and did not enjoy? Maybe the kitchen scene *did* work on stage, but did not suit the pretensions of the reviewer — or of the aspiring writer of sentimental fiction who printed the play-text; and maybe the geography scene *did not* work, and MacNally agreed — testing the evidence against the newly revised version of the play performed from September 1783 onwards — and so he discarded it in the printed play, which is more closely allied to that revival performance. This play's identity as an afterpiece, owning a typically less serious role in a theatrical programme often leavened with farce, comedy, and musical interludes, suggests that this was not the place for excessive moralising. The printed play-text, perhaps more immediately in MacNally's creative control, offered a different opportunity altogether for writing in the 'sentimental, Shandean' vein at a time when what 'Shandean' comprised was undergoing some mutation. Either way, different types of evidence are in contention here, just as there was a diverse make-up of readers and of play-goers who might, or might not, want to see a particular kind of Sterne on stage (or who may not even know who he was, or how connected to this afterpiece farce). The point is, we cannot make finalising conclusions when the evidence-types vary so notably — or when not all are taken into account.

Mixed Feelings: MacNally's Sentimental Excursions

If anything, the near-simultaneous appearance of different types of *Tristram Shandy* in ostensibly the same dramatic context, by ostensibly the same creator, reinforces the idea that, far from British culture experiencing a sudden shift from satire to sentiment — or at least there being such a switch in anyone's perception of Sterne's work as either one thing or the other — both the ribald and the pathetic jostled along side by side. Indeed, MacNally's other notable Sternean adaptation, *Sentimental Excursions to Windsor and Other Places* (1781), sustains a knowing balance between bawdry, satire, and sentiment, as well as displaying the negotiation between acknowledged adaptation of a famous work and creative independence. *Sentimental Excursions* exemplifies the conflicting yet complementary dynamics observed so far in comparing the performance and printed versions of his later dramatic adaptation. Its publication date, for one, comes at something of a pivotal point in the evolution of Sterneana, poised as it is between the imitations produced in Sterne's own lifetime and the expansion of the posthumous reputation of the Sterne forged by (for example) his daughter Lydia's edition of the correspondence, and by the *Beauties*, the collected works of 1780 and 1781, visual works connected to his work, and many sentimentalised and satirical adaptations alike.

Sentimental Excursions combines numerous metatextual features that foreground Sternean humour but also expand upon it. In a chapter that appears part-way through the text, ‘A Shandean Conversation’, the narrator and the travelling companion he has met en route — another Maria — come to an impasse in their own conversation, so end up filling it with Sterne’s voice in the form of *Tristram Shandy*’s text. One of its many unfulfilled promises includes the chapter Tristram says he will write on button-holes, alongside that on chamber maids, pishes, chapters, and much else besides (*TS*, 4.14.345). Maria sets the challenge: MacNally’s narrator must write his own version of this missing chapter, and she gives him the blank page on which Tristram had invited his readers to draw Widow Wadman’s portrait for the purpose.³⁵ In the next chapter, the narrator muses ‘what could Sterne possibly have said upon a button-hole?’, and fills its space with meandering and digressive reflections imagining what Sterne might, in fact, have written had he got round to it (had he ever intended to).³⁶

FIGURE

25 Leonard MacNally, *Sentimental Excursions to Windsor and Other Places*, 1781, p. 168.
Copyright © Cambridge University Library. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution
CC-BY-NC 3.0

The digression is, of course, Shandean, as is the typographical play that bawdily points towards how a button-hole might be depicted on the page, and more importantly what it might represent (Fig. 25). Contemplating how this author’s effort might compare with that of his model completes the knowingly allusive Sternean effect. These qualities are evident throughout this text, which often glances towards both the ‘Shandean’ and the ‘sentimental’ aspects of Sterne’s work and its reception. Digression itself is a topic of metafictional conversation. An ‘Introduction’ appears part-way through the volume, too, in which the author directly addresses the matter of his imitation of Sterne, and imitation in general. He parodies passages from *A Sentimental Journey* — beyond the ostensible journey narrative form — such as when the narrator encounters an old sailor asking for alms, and reincarnates Yorick’s internal debate about his own stinginess upon meeting the Franciscan monk at Calais and in his dealings with a mystery incognita.

Sentimental Excursions telescopes its use of Sterne to make his work more, or less, the focal point of parody, but it also juxtaposes him with a vast array of other literary reference-points or sources that diminish or enlarge his presence, partly by using that well-known satirical device,

an array of pseudo-scholarly footnotes, apparently penned by luminaries as varied as Swift, Montaigne, and Anonymous. MacNally also uses the transformative processes involved in adaptation to focalise his interest in, and reuse of, Sterne in relation to a host of contemporary issues and concerns less relevant or even alien to Sterne's day and works: adaptation allows those earlier works to come into contact with futurity. MacNally promotes political commentary in *Sentimental Excursions*, evidencing an interest in contemporary (especially Anglo-Irish) politics, as we have already witnessed in his stage adaptation. He uses the fictional mode, and character-types partly based on Sterne's, to reflect upon contemporary debates surrounding abolition, using the vehicle of Sternean sentiment fully mobilised in the 1780s to deplore the slave trade, as other contemporaries had already done (Ewan Clark's *Miscellaneous Poems* of 1779 versify Sterne and Ignatius Sancho's correspondence) and were later to do (Isaac Brandon's *Fragments, in the Manner of Sterne* of 1797, for instance).

Sentimental Excursions is clearly a satire on the eroticised capabilities of the sentimental journey mode found in Sterne but also in general, making much of the suggestive innuendo belonging to touching encounters, to provide one wry view on this increasingly prolific and popular form of literary productivity. The publication contexts of MacNally's work reinforce the mixed approach towards sources on the one hand, sensibility, on the other, in balancing admiring imitation and comical reinterpretation: *Sentimental Excursions* first appeared in fragments in the *Public Ledger*, as its Advertisement indicates (Fig. 26). Magazines and newspapers provided a context in which numerous other sentimental fragments — often displaying mixed feelings towards sensibility — circulated abundantly. For instance, as Paul Goring has shown, 'A Sentimental Journey, by a Lady', which draws on both of Sterne's novels by incorporating sentimentalised and comically 'Shandean' elements alike, was published in instalments over several years during the 1770s, reaching an enormously wide audience via the extremely popular organ in which it appeared, *The Lady's Magazine*.³⁷

The pre-life of *Sentimental Excursions* in magazine format indicates the versatility not only of the modes, but also of the production, circulation and reception of Sterneana in this period. Such works do not simply appear in a vacuum, but feed off and feed into a wide array of interests belonging to their multifaceted creators: MacNally pursued an eclectic career as a barrister, political informer, writer, and, of course, playwright.

Epilogue

The epigraph to *Sentimental Excursions*, taken from ‘MACKLIN’S MAN OF THE WORLD’, reinforces MacNally’s links with the contemporary theatrical world, and especially with Charles Macklin. It also holds a suitably Shandean resonance:

As a MOTTO is a Word to the Wise, or rather a broad Hint to the whole World of a Person’s Taste and Principles, VIVELABAGATELLE, would be most expressive of your Ladyship’s Characteristic.——³⁸

The dedication to *Sentimental Excursions* is addressed to Macklin too, offered as ‘a grateful return to the warmth of your friendship, a just tribute to the integrity of your heart.—’. Interestingly, and significantly given MacNally’s career and the political content of his novel (and, later, his play), his dedication goes on to add that

The author of Sir CALLAGHANO’ BRALLAGHAN, merits respect from every Irishman.— That character has been of national service, by being a means of removing, in a great measure, illiberal prejudices which had too long promoted enmity between sister-kingdoms, but are now happily diminished.³⁹

FIGURE

26 Advertisement, Leonard MacNally, *Sentimental Excursions to Windsor and Other Places*, 1781. Copyright © Cambridge University Library. Licensed under Creative Commons

Attribution CC-BY-NC 3.0

There is more to unravel in assessing the breadth of MacNally’s literary and other activities in such a context. For now, it suffices to note that MacNally’s Shandean, sentimental novel provides a complex prelude for the appearance of his ostensibly simpler dramatic adaptation of *Tristram Shandy* — but which, as we have seen, exhibits the intricacies of adaptation in equally supple, if distinctive, ways. As Taylor concludes, ‘The final, published version of MacNally’s *Tristram Shandy* thus showcases both the difficulties of adapting Sterne and also the process of change that a play might undergo even after a successful first performance’.⁴⁰ For one thing, there was evidently a shift not only in which scenes were performed and using which phrasing, but by whom; only Wilson was ‘a casting constant within a variety of different line-ups’.⁴¹ In tandem with the earliest newspaper advertisements and handbills for the first performances of *Tristram Shandy*, the manuscript identifies that Widow Wadman is played by the actor and singer Mrs (Margaret) Kennedy;⁴² the second edition of the printed text, however, identifies

Mrs Morton as the actor who took the role. This was probably Mary Morton, née Dayes, who had performed regularly at Covent Garden throughout the 1783–1784 season.⁴³ The printed play-text, after all, is not a reliable record of the first performance, but instead reflects the play’s changing performance history. Mrs Morton is listed by Charles Hogan as playing the widow on 8th September (which the *Morning Chronicle* of 13 September 1783 confirms), a role she retained from this point onwards — until it was temporarily taken over by Miss Platt on 21 October.⁴⁴ The whats, whos, hows, and whens of ‘the’ dramatic adaptation were as shifting as the behinds and feet of the audience variously dispersed across pit, box, and gallery.

The printed dramatic *Tristram Shandy* reflects the shuffling scene of theatrical production and of its connection with print culture, but also of the dissonances between these contexts. As Mark Vareschi suggests when discussing the movement between print and performance texts in theatrical and reading cultures, although one bore a ‘relation’ to the other, they could never be considered ‘identical’; they are, instead, ‘fundamentally different forms’.⁴⁵ The announcement in the *Morning Chronicle* of 25 October 1783 that ‘This day is published’ ‘TRISTRAM SHANDY: a Farcical Bagatelle, as it is now performing a [sic] the Theatre Royal, Covent-Garden, with great applause’, naming MacNally as its author, makes a declaration in real-time — ‘now playing’ — of the text’s very live existence after a fairly busy year of its mutation, through manuscript and performance iterations, from April of that year onwards. As Taylor suggests, it is the later iteration of the play that finds its way into print. And yet eventually, any written version of the play — whether in manuscript or in print — will only ever be a skeleton to the fully fleshed-out performance embodied by actors on stage, where the scope for ‘improvisation and off the cuff comments’,⁴⁶ let alone their untraceable infinite gestures and tones, may in some cases be parenthetically preserved in the reports of some contemporary viewers, but in most are fleeting, transient, and finally unknowable. Comparing the manuscript and printed versions of MacNally’s seemingly simple dramatic adaptation of *Tristram Shandy* offers a record of the first performance and reading histories of one reinterpretation of Sterne, and of the highly variable contexts in which his original creative material was first received and recirculated.

NOTES

Research for this article was funded by the National Science Centre, Poland, as part of Opus project number 2020/37/B/HS2/02093.

- 1 For further details, see M-C. Newbould, *Adaptations of Laurence Sterne's Fiction: Sterneana, 1760–1840* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 134–35.
- 2 John A. Hay, 'Rhetoric and Historiography: Tristram Shandy's First Nine Kalendar Months', in *Studies in the Eighteenth Century: Papers Presented in the Second David Nichol Smith Memorial Seminar, Canberra, 1970*, ed. by R.F. Brissenden (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1973), 73–91 (75–76).
- 3 Warren Oakley, *A Culture of Mimicry: Laurence Sterne, His Readers, and the Art of Bodysnatching*, MHRA Texts and Dissertations (Leeds: Maney, 2010), 59.
- 4 M-C. Newbould, initially in 'Shandying it Away: Sterne's Theatricality', *The Shandean*, 18 (2007), 156–70, which according to Oakley presents a 'misreading of the play' (*Culture of Mimicry*, 27), and, more fully, in *Adaptations*, 129–35.
- 5 Melvyn New, *Scriblerian*, 41.2 (Spring 2009), 173.
- 6 J.C.T. Oates, *Shandyism and Sentiment, 1760–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge Bibliographical Society, 1968), 23.
- 7 See Paul Goring's important discussion in 'Authorial authority and the mapping of an –ana', 'Adaptation and Digitization in the Long Eighteenth Century: Sterneana and Beyond', ed. by M-C. Newbould and Helen Williams, special issue of *1650–1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Enquiries in the Early Modern Era* (forthcoming).
- 8 Chambers, *Cyclopaedia*, 4th edn (1741); entry for 'CRITICISM'.
- 9 'Tristram Shandy. Farce, 2 acts. Leonard MacNally', LA 621, John Larpent Plays, Huntington Library.
- 10 Oakley, *Culture of Mimicry*, 54, 73n9.
- 11 Oakley, *Culture of Mimicry*, 73.
- 12 The Larpent collection has been available online via this platform since 2016. See <https://www.amdigital.co.uk/primary-sources/eighteenth-century-drama>.
- 13 David Francis Taylor, 'Tristram Shandy, a sentimental, Shandean bagatelle, in two acts', *Laurence Sterne and Sterneana*, ed. by M-C. Newbould and Helen Williams, *Cambridge Digital Library (CDL)*, <<https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/PR-OATES-00489/1>>, accessed 1 September 2022.
- 14 *Morning Chronicle*, 28 April 1783.
- 15 Taylor, 'Tristram Shandy', CDL.
- 16 Oakley, *Culture of Mimicry*, 53.

- 17 Warren Oakley, *Thomas 'Jupiter' Harris: Spinning Dark Intrigue at Covent Garden Theatre, 1767–1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).
- 18 Oakley, *Thomas 'Jupiter' Harris*, 8.
- 19 On Harris's creative control, see Oakley, *Culture of Mimicry*, 69.
- 20 Oakley notes that these two scenes are recommended for excision by the *Morning Chronicle*, but states that 'It is difficult to judge the exact content of both objectionable passages since MacNally appears to have followed the advice and produced a revised text for publication with the removal of the confrontational kitchen scene involving Slop and Susannah' (*Culture of Mimicry*, 58). I also gloss over these two excised scenes, merely noting their absence in the printed version, in *Adaptations*, 133.
- 21 The changes discussed here can be compared against the first printed edition reproduced in *The Shandean*, 30 (2019), 89–111. The page numbers I give when referring to the printed text are taken from the second edition of the play: Leonard MacNally, *Tristram Shandy: A Sentimental, Shandean Bagatelle; In Two Acts* (S. Bladon, 1783), cited in-text parenthetically as 'PT' (Printed Text), for clarity, followed by page number. Pagination in the manuscript is irregular, pages numbered consecutively on the recto side only, beginning again at 1 in the second act. To avoid confusion, therefore, I cite references in-text parenthetically as 'MS', but I do not provide page numbers.
- 22 The epilogue was published as a stand-alone item in, for instance, the *Morning Herald and Daily Advertiser* of 7 May 1783.
- 23 Appropriately enough, Sarah Maria Wilson went on to play Bridget in the first performance of Sophia Lee's lightly Sterne-inspired play, *The Chapter of Accidents*, on 5 August 1780.
- 24 *Morning Chronicle*, 28 April 1783.
- 25 In the printed version: 'Dear Toby, these military operations are above your strength, and will in the end quite ruin and make a beggar of you' (PT, 14).
- 26 Perhaps incidentally, for surely it was indeed commonplace enough, this phrase also recalls 'Unkle Toby and Corporal Trim: For the Good of the Nation', a political print of 1786 previously discussed in *The Shandean* 17 (2006). This adaptation of Bunbury's well-known caricatured depiction of Toby and Trim's fortifications by 'J.B.' substitutes Pitt and the Duke of Richmond in their place.
- 27 Oakley, *Culture of Mimicry*, 66.
- 28 Oakley, *Culture of Mimicry*, 59–60.
- 29 Oakley, *Culture of Mimicry*, 63.

- 30 'I know not the meaning of spot in this place, unless it be a scandalous woman; a disgrace to her sex', says Johnson of Shakespeare's Cleopatra: 'the greatest spot / Of all thy sex', his illustration to the word in its *Dictionary* entry.
- 31 Oakley, *Culture of Mimicry*, 56–57.
- 32 Oakley, *Culture of Mimicry*, 58.
- 33 Oakley, *Culture of Mimicry*, 58.
- 34 Oakley, *Culture of Mimicry*, 72.
- 35 Leonard MacNally, *Sentimental Excursions to Windsor and Other Places* (J. Walker, 1781), 166. *Laurence Sterne and Sterneana*, ed. by Newbould and Williams, CDL, <https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/PR-OATES-00482/1>.
- 36 MacNally, *Sentimental Excursions*, 167.
- 37 Paul Goring, 'The Evolution of "A Sentimental Journey, by a Lady" in *The Lady's Magazine*', *The Shandean*, 31 (2020), 67–100.
- 38 MacNally, *Sentimental Excursions*, title-page.
- 39 MacNally, *Sentimental Excursions*, Dedication 'To Mr. Charles Macklin' [np].
- 40 Taylor, 'Tristram Shandy', CDL.
- 41 Oakley, *Culture of Mimicry*, 67.
- 42 The *Morning Chronicle* review of 28 April 1783 notes that Mrs Kennedy, the original Mrs Wadman, sang the epilogue, but 'was evidently indisposed'. Kennedy took the breeches role of Macheath in several performances of *The Beggar's Opera* during this period; Mrs Morton (who also played the Widow) sometimes played Lucy; see for instance the *Morning Post*, 12 April 1783.
- 43 *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660–1800*, ed. by Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), vol. 10, 328. Mary Morton is recorded as performing throughout eleven seasons at Covent Garden, mostly 'secondary and tertiary parts in comedy'; Lucy Lockit was a speciality. Oakley's note, therefore, that 'In the first Covent Garden run [...] the widow was played by Mrs Kennedy [...] not "Mrs. Morton" as stated in the cast list of the second edition of the play' in *Culture of Mimicry*, 75n87 needs some modification.
- 44 Charles Beecher Hogan, *The London Stage, 1660–1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments & Afterpieces Together with Casts, Box-Receipts and Contemporary Comment* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), 645; 653. This is probably Mrs 'S.J.' Platt (1743–1800), actor and singer, who became known as 'Mrs' rather than 'Miss' in the

1787–88 season; her first name is unknown, but her initials exist on a receipt signed in 1796. See *Biographical Dictionary*, ed. by Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), vol. 12, 30.

45 Mark Vareschi, *Everywhere and Nowhere: Anonymity and Mediation in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 88–89.

46 Oakley, *Culture of Mimicry*, 53.