

“The first will serve the bookseller’s purpose”: Sterne’s double title page in *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*

Gabriella Hartvig

When Laurence Sterne, the freshly celebrated author of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, left his home for London in March 1760 to see how his novel was selling, he also took the manuscript of some of his sermons with him. According to Melvyn New, general editor of the Florida edition of *The Works of Laurence Sterne* and editor of *The Sermons*, “he seized the moment of notoriety to persuade Robert Dodsley to publish them, and to pay him the quite substantial sum of £200 for the privilege of doing so” (*Notes to the Sermons*, “Introduction” 1). Sterne’s forty-five sermons were published in seven volumes, the last three posthumously by his daughter Lydia and Sterne’s best friend, John-Hall Stevenson. The first two volumes appeared on 22 May 1760. The book bore the same format, octavo, as *Tristram Shandy*, and contained a portrait of Sterne, by Sir Joshua Reynolds (“Introduction” 1). It was published with a double title page, the first bearing the name of Yorick—“*The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*. Vol. I”—, the second revealing the real name of the author, and enlisting the author’s clerical appointments: “*Sermons* by Laurence Sterne, A. M. Prebendary of York, and Vicar of Sutton on the Forest, and of Stillington near York. Vol. I.” In the eye of the critics, the first title page, *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, undermined the authenticity of the sermons; many found jest lurking in them, accusing the writer of merely putting on the role of a preacher. In an unsigned contribution (by Owen Ruffhead, see *Critical Heritage* 77) of the *Monthly Review* (May 1760) on the first volume of the *Sermons*, we can read the following critical remarks:

However, had his *first* title-page *only* appeared, we might have had the satisfaction to have supposed, that some licentious Layman had presumed to publish these Discourses, under this assumed character, as a ridicule on Religion. But what shall we say to the *second* title-page, in which the *Reverend* and *dignified* Author does not scruple to avow his real name . . . (423)

The title, *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, in the reviewers’ eyes, must have had the appearance of that of a literary work, which usually assumed the name of the protagonist on the title page, also being the fictional author of this new work. It might have given the impression that the book was meant for the novel-reading audience, Yorick being the village parson’s name in *Tristram Shandy* which Sterne borrowed from Shakespeare. Most critics expressed their view that sermons should not be published under the

name of the king's court jester, and that this was a disgrace to the church and the writer was not serious in his intentions. What elicited this critical tone was, as Tim Parnell points out, that there were too many incompatible roles mixed here, "the Reverend Sterne, Parson Yorick and Tristram Shandy" ("The Sermons" 66). The *Monthly Review* well expresses this confusion of different personae in its criticism:

If, as the Reverend Writer premises, the name of *Yorick* is more known than that of *Sterne*, we are sorry for it.—More shame to the *Divine*, who has made the *Jester* so noted—A Fool's cap does but ill become a Reverend head. If the order of society requires that there should be a distinction of characters, *Yorick* and *Sterne*, instead of being one and the same person, should have been, in public at least, as utter strangers as *Moses* and *Mahomet*. (424)

That the sermons, except for two, were not originally meant for publication has been argued by New. Sterne's motivation was, rather spontaneously, to grab his chance: he acted on the spur of the moment and when he "rushed to London in early 1760 to capitalize on his success with *Tristram*, he simply culled the best from sermons he had no known intention of publishing prior to that moment" (*Notes to The Sermons*, "Preface" xv). Kenneth Monkman, however, points out that, before he left for London to celebrate his success with *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne had inserted an advertisement in the *York Courant* of 4 March 1760: "To be printed in Two Volumes, Price 5s. and to be delivered to the Subscribers in May next, The DRAMATIC SERMONS of Mr. YORICK. Published by TRISTRAM SHANDY, Gentleman . . ." (qtd. in Monkman 41). Sterne here does not yet reveal his name or clerical position: he signs the advertisement as Tristram Shandy, which shows that he was consciously manipulating the public by thus marketing his sermons even before he would have shown them to his London publisher. "Dramatic," as is explained by Parnell, here means that the sermons raise the attention of the audience by their very colourful tone, as if the preacher was acting out several roles on a stage ("The Sermons" 65). Donating the name of the protagonist of his novel as the fictional author of his sermons also supports the view that Sterne was here possibly relying on an audience which would read his novel. As W. B. Gerard argues, he wanted to exploit the popularity of *Tristram Shandy* and also to tell the world that he was a member of the English Church (15). Later on, from the London newspaper announcements, "published by Tristram Shandy" disappears and, when the sermons are advertised, Sterne's name takes the author's place. Sterne's plan, New remarks, may also have been "to counterbalance the damage he anticipated the bawdiness of his fiction would cause to his clerical reputation, by demonstrating his seriousness as a cleric" (*Notes to The Sermons* 1). He arrived in London as the celebrated writer of a scandalous novel but, by having his sermons published, he suddenly became Sterne the clergyman who had written an indecent book.

This paper intends to demonstrate how the first volumes of Sterne's *Sermons* were marketed and received in early newspaper advertisements, reviews, and even in Sterne's own writings. Furthermore, I would like to show how Yorick's name on the title page of the *Sermons* modified the image of Sterne, not only as the prebendary of York, but also as the celebrated writer of a very bawdy work; how the two types

of Sterne's writing, fiction and homiletics, reflected on each other¹ and how the one helped in the selling of the other in those brief notices in newspapers between 1760 and 1766 (see Brandtzæg et al., "Advertising").

Advertising the *Sermons* in Newspapers

The notices of new publications in magazines and newspapers were part of the marketing policy of publishers. The wording and format of these advertising columns in the, mainly London, newspapers reveal much about the sophisticated manner in which the editors communicated their purpose in marketing newly published books. Besides the reviews, it is here, in these brief notices and advertisements, that we can map out barely noticeable shifts in the early reception of Sterne's fiction and his sermons (see Brandtzæg et al., "Advertising" 28). Digital archives such as *ECCO*, the Burney Collection, and *British Periodicals* are of great help today.

In newspapers, advance notices such as "Speedily will be published" or "This day was published," functioned as "staple headings" and the latter, "this day was published," is "by far the most common advertising heading of the period, echoed in thousands of newspaper advertisements" (Brandtzæg et al., "Advertising" 31). The first installment of *The Sermons of Mr Yorick* was published on 22 May 1760, so the advance notices in the *Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer* and *London Chronicle* on 19-22 April were ahead of publication, the first by a whole month (also see Monkman 42):

Speedily will be published,
In Two Volumes, Price 5 s. sewed,
(With a Portrait of the Editor, engraved from a
Painting by Mr. REYNOLDS)
THE SERMONS OF Mr. YORICK.
Published by the Rev. Mr. STERNE,
Prebendary of York.
Printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pallmall.
(*The London Chronicle*, April 19-22 1760).²

Besides the usual information on price and location of publication, there are two important elements in this brief notice: the first volume contains an illustration, Sterne's portrait by Reynolds, with whom, as Monkman writes, Sterne had had his "final sitting" on 21 April (42). Reynolds raises the value of the book because, by buying the novel, readers can also own "a little bit of" Reynolds, similarly to Sterne's novel *Tristram Shandy*, the second edition of the first two volumes of which was published with a frontispiece by Hogarth: there, as Brandtzæg et al. point out, "readers could

1 On the relationship between Sterne's sermons and his fiction, also see Éva Bús's work, *E diribdarab élet ösvényein. Az életírás mestertrópusai Laurence Sterne műveiben* [On the paths of this fragment of Life. The mastertropes of life writing in the works of Laurence Sterne]. Budapest: Gondolat, 2016.

2 See, *Burney Collection*, Gale Document Numbers: Z2001657872, Z2001671391.

own a little bit of Hogarth” (“Advertising” 34); Monkman also points out that, “The two volumes [of the sermons] came from different printers . . . and, perhaps because of delays over engraving the frontispiece portrait . . . publication took longer than foreseen” (42). This might explain the formulaic headings of the notices: “speedily will be published” (*Public Advertiser*, 29 April),³ “next week will be published” (*Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer* 6-8 May; *London Evening Post* 8-10 May; *London Chronicle*, 8-10 May)⁴ and, finally, “This day is published” (*Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer*, 20-22 May, *Public Advertiser*, 22 May)⁵ show how a promising work is deployed to market.⁶ W. B. Gerard’s depiction of Reynold’s engraving denotes the Janus face of the picture: Sterne is dressed in his clerical robe, his elbow placed on what seems to appear to be leaves of *Tristram Shandy*: “Sterne’s finger, pressed against his temple, possibly gestures to heaven, but also nudges his dress wig slightly askance; his wide, elastic mouth seems to teeter between bemusement and gravity” (15). The irony of the jesting clergyman is clearly foreshadowed by this frontispiece placed before the two title pages: “This image undoubtedly further fostered Sterne’s ambiguous authorial persona, visualizing his play between the holy and the humorous” (15). Furthermore, “portrait of the Editor” means that Sterne appears as the compiler of the published sermons: in an “Advertisement” to Sermon 27 (Sermon XII in the fourth volume), on *The Abuses of Conscience*, “the Editor begs pardon of those who have purchased it in that shape [as *Tristram Shandy*], and in this also, for being made to pay twice actually for the same thing” (*Sermons* 255).

Sterne’s name cannot be found in earlier advertisements of the first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy*. The novel had been advertised by its title only before the *Sermons* was announced and published. In the *London Chronicle* (19-22 April) and also in the *Whitehall Evening Post* (24-26 April), on the same page,—in the latter, right below the notice on the *Sermons*—we can find another brief notice advertising “Explanatory Remarks” to *Tristram Shandy*, the author wishing his remarks to accompany the novel, although the publisher is different (“printed for E. Cabe, in Ave-Mary-Lane, Ludgate-Street”)⁷:

This Day were publish’d, Price 1 s.
EXPLANATORY REMARKS upon
the LIFE and OPINIONS of TRISTRAM SHANDY.
Wherein the Morals and Politics of this Piece are clearly laid open.
By JEREMIAH KUNASTROKIUS, M. D.
Printed for Edward Cabe, in Ave-Mary Lane, Ludgate-Street.

3 Gale Document Number: Z2001078779.

4 Gale Document Numbers: Z2001657916, Z2000664267, Z2001671622.

5 Gale Document Numbers: Z2001657958, Z2001078968.

6 Siv Brandtzæg elsewhere writes, “My research for the London newspapers has shown that the sentence ‘this day is published’ is very reliable following its first appearance after an advance notice: ‘Next week,’ ‘next Thursday,’ or ‘Tomorrow’ of the advance notices meant exactly that. However, the heading ‘this day was published’ was often deployed to continue promoting a ‘new’ title that could sometimes have been on the market for many months” (“Mercury as Merchant” 274-75).

7 Gale Document Number: CW124594414

N.B. This Explanation is printed in the same Letter and Size of Tristram Shandy, to accommodate those who chuse to bind it with that Work.⁸

Dr. Kunastrokius is a side-character from *Tristram Shandy* in whose figure Sterne parodied Dr. Richard Mead. *The Life and Opinions of Jeremiah Kunastrokius* was an early, anonymous, imitation of Sterne's novel (see Bosch 119-21).

After the publication of the *Sermons*, there would be joint announcements in newspapers. From April 1760 onwards, the publication of the *Sermons* is simultaneously advertised with the second edition of *Tristram Shandy* (but in both cases, the first installment is meant only). On 5 June, the *Public Advertiser* shifts emphasis on the fact that the second edition of *Tristram Shandy* is published together with a frontispiece by Hogarth.⁹ Hogarth was the novelty of this second edition and it of course rendered the work even more saleable, since "booksellers frequently noted frontispieces as selling-points in book advertisements of this period" (Brandtzæg et al., "Advertising" 34); in March, Sterne sent a letter to a friend about Hogarth with the following note: "I would give both my Ears (If I was not to lose my Credit by it) for no more than ten Strokes of Howgarth's [sic!] witty Chissel, to clap at the Front of my next Edition of *Shandy!* - (. . .) the loosest Sketch in Nature, of Trim's reading the Sermon to my Father . . ." (qtd. in Alspaugh 9). "Trim reading the sermon" serves, we know from the novel, to illustrate Hogarth's "line of beauty," the curved "S" line, in Trim's posture. But perhaps Sterne's choice of an illustration related to the sermon in *Tristram Shandy* also foreshadowed his intention of the future marketing of his *Sermons*. The *Sermons* will always be advertised with the added value of the illustration, "a Portrait of the Editor, engraved from a Painting by Mr. Reynolds," in order to enhance the worth of the work for potential buyers.

The advertisement in the *Whitehall Evening Post*, on 24-27 May, was published just two days after publication, so it counted as a fresh notice:

This Day was publish'd Price 5s. sew'd,
In TWO VOLUMES,
With a PORTRAIT of the Editor, engraved from a Painting by
Mr. Reynolds,
THE SERMONS of Mr. YORICK.
Published by the Rev. Mr. Sterne,
Prebendary of York.
Printed for R. and J. Dodsley, in Pall-Mall.
A New Edition of TRISTRAM SHANDY is published this Day.¹⁰

8 Gale Document Numbers: Z 2001677885, Z2001657885. See Parnell, "Explanatory Remarks" 79. Apparently, as L. P. Curtis writes, "Dodsley thought well enough of the pamphlet to purchase a few copies to sell with Sterne's novel" (qtd. in Parnell, "Explanatory Remarks" 79). Curtis, Parnell recalls, even discovered a copy of *Explanatory Remarks* which was "sewn together with an uncut copy of the third edition of the second volume of *Tristram Shandy*" (qtd. in Parnell, "Explanatory Remarks" 79).

9 Gale Document Number: Z2001079078.

10 Gale Document Number: Z2001657973.

Although “this day was published” as we have seen, was a frequent formula, and in fact the book may have been available for months—here it truly means what it says: it appeared just two days after the actual publication of *The Sermons*; however, the second edition of the first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy* had already been published by 2 April, with Hogarth’s engravings, and also with a dedication to Mr. William Pitt (see Ross 10): despite the claim that the work was “published this Day,” it had been out for almost two months.

In later announcements, we find that the two works swap places: now *Tristram Shandy*, the earlier published work, is announced first, maybe because the first edition having been sold out, this second edition came out “with a print rise perhaps ten times larger than the first edition” (Ross 10). Sterne’s fiction is still advertised without its author’s name whereas the *Sermons*, although being the sermons of Mr. Yorick, are always noted together with Sterne’s name and his clerical appointments. On 12-14 June, the *London Chronicle* similarly announces that this second edition is out and adds that *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* can also be bought:

This Day was Published,
With a Frontispiece by Mr. HOGARTH,
In Two Volumes, Price sewed 4 s,
a new edition of,
THE LIFE and OPINIONS of
TRISTRAM SHANDY, Gent.
Where may be had,
The SERMONS of Mr. YORICK.
Published by the Rev. Mr. STERNE,
Prebendary of York.¹¹

When a new edition is published, a different format of the advertisement may be used, and here again the two works swap places in the announcement. On 26 June the *Public Advertiser*¹² and on 5-8 July the *Whitehall Evening Post* emphasize that a new edition of the *Sermons* “in a few days will be publish’d.”¹³ On 8 July, the *London Chronicle*, while advertising the *Sermons*, still adds that, simultaneously, a new edition of *Tristram Shandy* had just come out:

In a few Days will be published,
In Two Volumes, Price 5 s. sewed,
(With a Portrait of the Editor, engraved from a
Painting by Mr. REYNOLDS)
A NEW EDITION of
THE SERMONS of Mr. YORICK.

¹¹ Gale Document Number: Z2001671997.

¹² Gale Document Number: Z2001079243.

¹³ Gale Document Numbers: Z2001658091.

Published by the Reverend Mr. STERNE,
 Prebendary of York.
 Printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pallmall.
 N.B. A New Edition of TRISTRAM SHANDY
 is published this Day.¹⁴

The formula of *Tristram Shandy* being “published this day” was repeated by the *London Chronicle* in the following, 10-12 July issue.¹⁵ The most relevant announcement appears in the 19-22 July issue of the *London Chronicle*, where *The Sermons* and the new edition of *Tristram Shandy* are advertised alike as “this day was published” and “published this day.”¹⁶ Almost exactly two months following the first, the second edition of the *Sermons* was published on 21 July, “and six more before Sterne’s death in March 1768” (New, *Notes to The Sermons* 3): on that day, the *Public Advertiser* also opens with “*This Day is published*”:

This Day is published,
 In TWO VOLUMES,
 Price Sewed FIVE SHILLINGS,
 (With a Portrait of the EDITOR,
 Engraved from a Painting by Mr. REYNOLDS)
 A NEW EDITION, of
 THE SERMONS of Mr. YORICK.
 Publish’d by the Rev. Mr. STERNE,
 Prebendary of YORK.
 Printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pall-Mall.
 Where may be had,
 The Life and Opinions of TRISTRAM SHANDY, Gent. in two Volumes, Price
 sew’d 4 s.¹⁷

“Where may be had” is an indication of the same publisher but this does not necessarily mean that it is by the same author, so it seems that Sterne’s publishers still tried to avoid explicitly attaching Sterne’s name to *Tristram Shandy*. Obviously, the work already enjoyed great reputation and there was a demand for the new edition.

Until 21 October, when the third edition of the first two volumes of the *Sermons* is published (Monkman 55), we can find repeated announcements on the second installment of *Tristram Shandy* (which would come out the following January), the third and fourth volumes: the *Sermons* are jointly mentioned together with the advertising of the second edition of the first installment of *Tristram Shandy*. Emphasis, understandably, now falls on *Tristram Shandy*:

¹⁴ Gale Document Number: Z2001672281.

¹⁵ Gale Document Number: Z2001672316.

¹⁶ Gale Document Number: Z2001672409.

¹⁷ Gale Document Number: Z2001079435.

The Publick is desired to take Notice
 THAT the THIRD and FOURTH
 VOLUMES of TRISTRAM SHANDY, by
 the Author of the two first Volumes, will be pub-
 lished about Christmas next.
 Printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pallmall.
 Where may be had,
 1. A new Edition of the two first Volumes.
 2. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, published by the
 Rev. Mr. Sterne, Prebendary of York.
 (*London Chronicle* 14-16 October, 1760)¹⁸

The unusual opening of the notice and its length, Brandtzæg et al. argue, might be formulated in this manner because the publisher wanted to call attention to a spurious third volume, emphasizing that this is the genuine sequel to the first two volumes (“Advertising” 37). “By the author of the two first volumes,” without revealing the author’s name, means that this is the true continuation of *Tristram Shandy*. That the *Sermons of Mr. Yorick* is also available in the shop of the Dodsley brothers, published by the “Reverend Mr. Sterne,” still maintains the notion that Sterne appears as the editor of Yorick’s sermons only.

From 21 October onwards we can find repeated announcements of the third edition of the *Sermons*:

This Day were published,
 With a PORTRAIT of the EDITOR, engraved from a Painting by
 Mr. REYNOLDS
 in TWO VOLUMES, Price sew’d 5 s.
A NEW EDITION of
 THE SERMONS of Mr. YORICK.
 Published by the Rev. Mr. STERNE,
 Prebendary of York.
 Printed for R. and J. Dodsley, in Pall-Mall.
 Where may be had,
 A New Edition of TRISTRAM SHANDY: The Third and Fourth
 Volumes of which will be published about Christmas next.
 (*Whitehall Evening Post or London Intelligencer* 18-21 October, 1760)¹⁹

After 18 December, those two volumes of *Tristram Shandy* are advertised again, and the *Sermons* appear among the books which “may be had,” too, in the Dodsley brothers’ shop.²⁰ This proves that, depending on new publication, Sterne’s works swap

18 Gale Document Number: Z2001673352. Also see Brandtzæg et al., “Advertising” 36.

19 Gale Document Number: Z2001658407.

20 Gale Document Number: Z2001658580.

places in the notices. How frequent and formulaic such advertisements were can be supported by similar announcements.

In the 23 December 1760 issue of *The London Chronicle* we can see that the second installment of *Tristram Shandy*, volumes 3 and 4, is advertised together with a new edition of the first two volumes but also with the *Sermons*:

Next Month will be published,
Price Four Shillings sewed,
With a Frontispiece by Mr. HOGARTH,
THE THIRD and FOURTH Volumes of
the LIFE and OPINIONS of
TRISTRAM SHANDY, Gentleman.
Printed for R. and J. Dodsley in Pallmall.
Where may be had,
1. A new Edition of the two first Volumes.
2. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, published by the
Rev. Mr. Sterne, Prebendary of York.²¹

It is a characteristic feature of multi-volume serial editions that an impatient reading public is awaiting the next installment. “Next month will be published” provides them with advance notice: the third and fourth volumes were published by the Dodsleys in January the following year. There is an even earlier advance notice in the *London Evening Post* in September, anticipating the next installment by Christmas (Brandtzæg et al., “Advertising” 36). Again, the frequent announcements of the upcoming volumes of *Tristram Shandy* may also have served as notices against the circulating spurious continuations of *Tristram Shandy* (37). In this notice we can also find reference to a second illustration of Hogarth depicting Tristram’s christening, in the fourth volume.

In the *Burney Collection*, we cannot find notices of publication between 1761 and 1765 of *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*. The reason for this might be that the next installment, volumes 3 and 4, was published after a longer period of time, in January 1766. The number of advertisements started to grow again towards the end of 1765. On 5-7 December, the *London Chronicle* announces that

Some Time this Month, will be published,
(Volumes III. and VI. Price 6s. bound, or 5s. sewed.)
THE SERMONS of Mr. YORICK.
Published by the Rev. Mr. STERNE.
Printed for T. Becket and P. A. De Hondt, near
Surry-street, in the Strand.
By whom Subscribers Books will be delivered.²²

²¹ Gale Document Number: Z2001674170.

²² Gale Document Number: Z2001683220.

The *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, together with other newspapers, announces the approaching publication of the second installment throughout January 1766:

This day is published,
 (Volumes III. and VI. Price 5s. sewed, or 6s. bound)
 THE SERMONS of Mr. YORICK, published
 by the Rev. Mr. STERN.
 Printed for T. Becket and P. A. De Hondt, near
 Surry-street, in the Strand.
 The Nobility and Gentlemen, who have honoured
 Mr. Stern with their subscriptions to the above ser-
 mons, are requested to send for their books as above.
 Complete sets in 4 vols. may be had either sewed or
 bound; \also Tristram Shandy, in 8 vols.²³

The second installment would be published on 18th January 1766 (New, *Notes to The Sermons* 4). The notice on immediate publication in the *St. James's Chronicle* for 9-11 January is headed, "Saturday next, the 18th Instant . . .". The announcements stress the fact that publication is preceded by subscription for the work. Sterne, as New writes, probably started gathering subscribers a year before publication (4). In the meantime, he also changed publishers: the new publisher is Becket and Dehondt of London. New also quotes Sterne's letter in which he explains the delicate relationship between the two types of works:

Have you seen my 7& 8 graceless Children [volumes VII and VIII of *Tristram Shandy*, published 23 January 1765]—but I am doing penance for them, in begetting a couple of more ecclesiastick ones—which are to stand penance (again) in their turns . . . These you must know are to keep up a kind of balance, in my shandaic character, & are push'd into the world for that reason by my friends with as splendid & numerous a List of Nobility &c . . . (qtd. by New, *Notes to the Sermons* 4).

The London Chronicle for 27 February-1 March (1766) has a joint announcement for the fiction and the sermons. It is interesting because it still does not name Sterne as the author of *Tristram Shandy* yet it warns the reader not to confuse the work with a spurious ninth volume:

To the PUBLIC.
 WHEREAS there has been lately adver-
 tised the NINTH Volume of the LIFE and
 OPINIONS of TRISTRAM SHANDY, it is
 thought proper to acquaint the Public, that the said
 NINTH Volume is not written by the Author of the

23 Gale Document Number: Z2000353623 (27 January, 1766)

EIGHT Volumes, printed for J. Dodsley, in Pall Mall,
and T. Becket and P. A. De Hondt, in the Strand.

Of whom may be had,

1. The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, in 8
Volumes, Price 1 l. bound.
2. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, published by the
Rev. Mr. Sterne, 3 Volumes. Price 12 c. bound.
Volumes III. and IV. may be had separate.²⁴

One year after the appearance of those disclaimer warnings, *The Public Advertiser* for 29 January (1767) and *The London Chronicle* for 29-31 January²⁵ start to advertise the real ninth volume of *Tristram Shandy*, which is published in January that year, “by the Author of the first eight volumes.”²⁶

These short notices and advertisements in the newspapers prove, among other things, that due to the simultaneous publication history of *Tristram Shandy* and Sterne’s *Sermons* there is an intriguing connection between the two works, not merely as regards their publication but also how they were very likely conceived by the reading public. Parallel with the newspaper advertisements, we can also find literary reviews, critical essays, and even parodies related to the publication of Sterne’s works.

Reviews of *The Sermons*

In June 1760, the *Grand Magazine* (printed for Ralph Griffith, 1758-60) published an account on Sterne under the title “An Original Piece: An Account of the Rev. Mr. ST****, and his Writings. (. . .)”, which, in the form of a dialogue of Sir John, Sir Patrick, the Reverend Mr. Vicarius, and others, discusses the celebrated author’s works. Sir John calls attention to Sterne’s mixed identities and the confusion caused by them:

I will readily, Sir, oblige you with the best information I am able. To begin therefore in proper biographical form, I must acquaint you that *Tristram Shandy*, alias *Yorick*, alias the Rev. Mr. St****, was born—No—I beg pardon—Tristram Shandy is not born yet: *Yorick* is dead, buried, and resuscitated—and the Rev. Mr. St**** is just beginning to live in his fiftieth year of his age or thereabouts. (. . .) In few words, Sir, and without a figure, *Tristram Shandy* is an obscene novel and the reverend author is a *prebend* of the Church of England. And both are at present in the highest estimation. (309, also qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 96)²⁷

24 Gale Document Number: Z2001683692. *The Gazetteer* for 27 February, and onwards, also warns against the spurious ninth volume, see, Gale Document Number Z2000354136.

25 Gale Document Numbers: Z2001115899, Z2001684689.

26 Gale Document Number Z2001684711.

27 Gale Document Number: CB3328927114.

As we have been able to follow from the advertisements earlier, in June 1760, the second edition of the first installment of *Tristram Shandy* and the first two volumes of *The Sermons* were published in May. Yorick the village parson's death (and a black page) concludes the twelfth chapter of the first volume of *Tristram Shandy*; Tristram will be born in the fourth volume only, which was not as yet published. The Reverend Mr. Sterne was forty-six years old at the time of the publication of *The Sermons*. Reading the dialogue, we can obtain an insight into Sir John's opinion on Sterne's *Sermons*:

You may recollect, Sir, that, in their account of *Tristram Shandy*, when the author was unknown, not a word was said of the indecency or obscenity of this novel: but when *Yorick's Sermons* appeared, when Mr. St****'s merit and good fortune were the standing topics, then forsooth these godly Reviewers found out that *Tristram Shandy* was an obscene novel, and that for a *clergyman* openly to avow such a performance, was an outrage against Christianity, and a mockery on religion. (. . .) (310, also qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 97)

At the time of the appearance of *Tristram Shandy*, the speaker here claims, nobody guessed that the author of such a bawdy book would belong to the established Church. But now that it has come to light, it darkens the reputation of Sterne's fiction to the degree that the later work, the *Sermons*, casts an unfavourable light on the novel, which had had an unprecedented success among readers:

But when *Yorick's Sermons* made their appearance under the real name of the reverend author, when he thought proper to claim *Tristram Shandy* as his own, in his preface to his *religious discourses*, then circumstances varied, and the *Reviewers* preserved a consistency of character, in reprehending such indecency, and in appropriating proper epithets to that indelicate novel. (310, also qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 98)

The author's true identity was first revealed publicly only in the "Preface" to *The Sermons* and on the second title page, where Sterne himself explains why he decided to print them with two title pages:

The sermon [in *Tristram Shandy*] which gave rise to the publication of these, having been offer'd to the world as a sermon of *Yorick's*, I hope the most serious reader will find nothing to offend him, in my continuing these two volumes under the same title: lest it should be otherwise, I have added a second title page with the real name of the author:—the first will serve the bookseller's purpose, as *Yorick's* name is possibly of the two the more known;—and the second will ease the minds of those who see a jest, and the danger which lurks under it, where no jest was meant.

I suppose it is needless to inform the publick, that the reason of printing these sermons, arises altogether from the favourable reception, which the sermon given as a sample of them in TRISTRAM SHANDY, met with from the world. (*Sermons* 1)

The sermon that was given as a sample in *Tristram Shandy* is *The Abuses of Conscience*, which was first preached in York Minster by Sterne in 1750 and subsequently published in York by Caesar Ward (see, New, *Notes to The Sermons*, 58, 284-85). The dialogue in the *Grand Magazine* makes it clear how authorship in the two works is connected: “When *Tristram Shandy* appeared,” says one of the participants, “the author, as you have intimated, was unknown.” Later, he explains, “when *Yorick’s Sermons* made their appearance under the real name of the reverend author, when he thought proper to claim *Tristram Shandy* as his own, in his preface to his *religious discourses*, then circumstances varied . . .” (310). So it is since the publication of the “Preface” in *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* that the reading public had identified Sterne as the author of *Tristram Shandy*, too. And this is the source of its success too, as the unknown “critic” in the above mentioned dialogue describes Sterne’s fame: “Had the author of *Tristram Shandy* remained unknown, the work perhaps would have had few, if any, imitators” (311). That Sterne revealing his identity as the writer of that bawdy work caused its great success is argued as being the reason why there appeared so many imitators in his steps: “But the extraordinary circumstances of its being avowed by a *clergyman*, and . . . being patronized by the *Bishops*, has encouraged every scribler [sic!] to mimic the reverend writer’s manner” (311).

The Critical Review, commenting on the publication of the third volume of *The Sermons* in January 1766, begins its essay by drawing a parallel between *Tristram Shandy* and the sermons; also, after six years, it cannot but still maintain the main objection against the incompatible nature of Sterne’s two roles: “The author of *Tristram Shandy* is discernible in every page . . . But the author sometimes forgets the dignity of his character . . . and condescends, on the most interesting topics of religion, to excite a jocular idea, or display a frivolous turn of wit” (qtd. in *Critical Heritage* 171).

We can find references, Parnell points out, in the sermons to *Tristram Shandy* and, similarly, references to the sermons in *TS*. The sermons and Sterne’s fiction share the common ground of Christian philanthropy (Parnell, “The Sermons”). Sterne himself declares in the “Preface” to his work: “. . . for as the sermons turn chiefly upon philanthropy, and those kindred virtues to it . . . proceeding more from the heart than of the head” (*The Sermons* 2). There is, for example, an early allusion in *Tristram Shandy* to Sterne’s possible plan to publish his collected sermons: Tristram remarks after Trim’s reading of the sermon on *The Abuses of Conscience*, if, “the character of parson *Yorick*, and this sample of his sermons is liked, there are now in the possession of the *Shandy* Family, as many as will make a handsome volume, at the world’s service” (*Tristram Shandy* 2.17.167, also qtd. in Parnell, “The Sermons” 64-65). In *Tristram Shandy* we learn that it was Yorick’s practice to comment on his written sermons, to jot down short remarks on what he thought about each sermon:

—N.B. *The Excellency of this text is, that it will suit any sermon,—and of this sermon, —that it will suit any text.—*

—For this sermon I shall be hanged,—for I have stolen the greatest part of it. Doctor Paidagunes found me out. ☞ Set a thief to catch a thief. (Tristram Shandy 6.11.514, also qtd. in Parnell, “The Sermons” 74)

If Yorick habitually copies from other sermonists, one tends to believe that perhaps *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* is also full of borrowings; that Sterne was fully aware of this, can be seen in the apologetical “Preface” attached to the first two volumes of *The Sermons*: “there are some other passages, where I suspect I may have taken the same liberty . . . but ‘tis only suspicion, for I do not remember it is so, otherwise I should have restored them to their proper owners . . . (*The Sermons* 2). This would explain why Sterne always appears, rather modestly, as the editor, not the author, of *The Sermons*.

In a similar manner, there is an allusion in the later installment of the *Sermons* to Sterne’s fiction. *The Abuses of Conscience* appears in the second volume of *Tristram Shandy* as Yorick the village parson’s sermon; it accidentally falls out of another book, *Stevinus*, and is read out by Corporal Trim in the Shandy household. Sterne, however, truly preached this sermon in York Minster in 1750, ten years before its second publication, and it was published in York in the form of a pamphlet two weeks after it was preached (see, *Tristram Shandy*, “Appendix 7” 2.946). The sermon, when published in the fourth volume of Sterne’s *Sermons* (the third and fourth volumes were published in January 1766), was headed with an advertisement, which explains its dual presence in the novel and among Sterne’s sermons:

As the following Sermon upon Abuses of Conscience, has already appeared in the body of a moral work [ie *Tristram Shandy*], more read than understood, the Editor begs pardon . . . it was thought fit to add it to the collection [ie of the *Sermons*],—where moreover it stands a chance of being read by many grave people with a much safer conscience. (*Sermons* 255)

In its critical essay on the fourth volume of *The Sermons*, *The Critical Review* (February 1766), still questioning whether the author is in earnest, concludes the essay on the *Abuses* sermon with the following words, referring to Sterne’s remark above: “All the editor wishes, is, that this may not, after all, be one of the many abuses of it set forth in this discourse” (106). Because the original pamphlet, together with the rest of the sermons, was written in earnest, and Sterne gave his name, together with his ecclesiastical positions, to *The Sermons*, he inserted the second title page to emphasize that he was by no means in jest about his sermons: the first and the last word in this story of the sermons he wanted to be his, Sterne’s, not Yorick’s—Yorick and *Tristram Shandy*, in this context, might perhaps be taken as a digression in Sterne’s ecclesiastical career.

The first edition of *The Works of Laurence Sterne* (7 vols., 1779) has an introductory part with the author’s short biography with the title “The Life of Mr. Sterne,” which reveals what the author’s true intentions may have been. There, we can find an interesting idea about the possible connections between Sterne’s fiction and his sermons:

. . . the manner in which they were ushered to public notice was by some, severely condemned, that such excellent discourses should stand in need of such introduction; and many were of opinion, that he [Sterne] had wrote *Tristram Shandy* purely to introduce them [the sermons]. (“Life” xii)²⁸

What the editor means by this remark is that *Tristram Shandy* was written with the sole purpose of marketing Sterne’s sermons, that Sterne knew beforehand that he would ride on the success of his fiction to sell his sermons. Monkman argues that, by inserting the *Abuses* sermon “into the text of *Tristram Shandy* as a ‘trailer’ to the public,” he already did it with the purpose to publish his sermons as well (41).

In a review on the “Character of Laurence Sterne,” *The North British Intelligencer* (Edinburgh, 1776—; 4 vols., vol. 4) also expresses its view on the assumed connection between Sterne’s fiction and his sermons, suggesting that readers had decided to buy the sermons only because they were written by the celebrated genius, the writer of *Tristram Shandy*:

Having established the character of an ingenious buffoon, Mr. Sterne ventured to raise his clerical reputation upon a foundation that every one who duly reflected on the essential requisites in a christian pastor, blushed to see any one of that order capable of attempting: But, however that might be, Mr. Sterne did not blush to slip on his black gown over his harlequin’s jacket, and step forth with four volumes of sermons in the name of Yorick, a principal character in his *Tristram Shandy*; Novelty again favoured him; . . . his sermons were highly extolled by those, who perhaps would never have looked into sermons as the compositions of a consistent clergyman, though of equal or superior talents as a divine. In short, for a season people perused Yorick’s *Sermons* by Mr. Sterne beyond all measure, probably for their own sakes, that they might establish some credit for piety as well as discernment; and be thought read to admire even sermons, if penned by a man of acknowledged genius. (35-36)²⁹

That the *Sermons* were sold amid great success can be shown by the figures of newer editions: as Monkman claims, “in Sterne’s lifetime the two volumes of 1760 had run into nine (possibly ten) editions (more even than *Tristram Shandy*) . . .” (33). This abundance of editions is supported by the great number of subscribers; as New points out, more than 600 subscribers are named, which counted as a very impressive list at the time (*Notes to The Sermons* 2).³⁰

28 ECCO Gale Document Number: CW116502920. It is peculiar that this last sentence is missing from earlier editions of Sterne’s life, attached, for example, to John Hall-Stevenson’s continuation of Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* as volumes 3 and 4.

29 ECCO Gale Document Number: CW3306018590.

30 About the subscription lists to the different editions of *The Sermons* and *A Sentimental Journey*, see New’s Introduction (XV-XXXIX) to the ninth volume of *The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne (The Miscellaneous Writings and Sterne’s Subscribers, an Identification List)*. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2014).

Yorick's name certainly served the bookseller's purpose, for the sermons sold even better than *Tristram Shandy*, sales of the volumes in Sterne's lifetime outstripping the "bestselling" *Tristram Shandy* (see Parnell, "The Sermons" 64). Yet many doubted the seriousness of the writer and thought that Sterne had merely "seized the moment of notoriety to persuade" (New, *Notes to The Sermons* xii). Not only his publishers, but many of his readers, too, were of the opinion that his sermons were written in the same manner as his fiction. The large number of joint advertisements on the publication and newer editions of the ensuing volumes of the *Sermons* and *Tristram Shandy* proves how much the two works were intertwined in the eyes of Sterne's reviewers, and also how the contemporary reader was directed by those newspaper notices and reviews to read the one with a knowledge of the other.

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