

# Serialization as Adaptation in Later Eighteenth-Century Magazines and Newspapers Sternean Sentimental Journeys

Mary-Celine Newbould

Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego w Bydgoszczy, Polska

**Abstract** Eighteenth-century magazines and newspapers were fecund sources for fiction, printing both existing works and new material: serialization thrived, a form of adaptation that took inspiration from already successful works to invoke familiarity while developing in new directions, conditioned by the distinctive nature of these publication venues. Here, two adaptations of Laurence Sterne's fiction, serialized in magazine and newspaper outlets, illuminate Sterne's reception, wider adaptive practices, and the unique contexts of a publication environment characterized by aesthetic imperatives and commercial rivalries.

**Keywords** Adaptation. Serialization. Magazines. Newspapers. Laurence Sterne.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Never-Ending Stories: Serialization in Magazines, Newspapers, and Sterne's Fiction. – 3 "A Sentimental Journey, By a Lady" in the *Lady's Magazine*. – 4 "A Sentimental Excursion" in the *Public Ledger* and the *Morning Herald*. – 5 Conclusion – or to Be Continued?



## Peer review

Submitted 2026-02-01  
Accepted 2026-02-11  
Published 2026-05-11



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**Citation** Newbould, M.-C. (2026). "Serialization as Adaptation in Later Eighteenth-Century Magazines and Newspapers". *English Literature*, 12(1), 87-110.

**DOI** 10.30687/EL/2420-823X/2025/01/005

## 1 Introduction

The blue-green paper covers of Charles Dickens's serialized novels have acquired something of a fetishistic quality, a material embodiment of the paradoxical transience and endurance of so-called ephemeral publications (Gibson, Grener, Goodenough 2022). The cover designs of each magazine issue, incorporating images by renowned illustrators, coupled with the text of now canonized fictional works, possess collectors'-item status, confirming connoisseurship of the material object but also of what it apparently signified in Victorian culture: moralistic self-restraint brought readers to regulate their eagerness for the next instalment of an engrossing story by patiently awaiting its scheduled arrival. Scholars of eighteenth-century literature are nonetheless keen to point out that the nineteenth century did not have the purchase on serialization, and that the enduring association between that period and serial fiction testifies to an imbalanced, perhaps nostalgic perception of what Nicholas Seager calls "constructions of the Victorian outlook, a culture allegedly attuned to deferred gratification – in economics, religion, sex, and light reading" (Seager 2015, 112). Serialization constituted not only the reading experience but the compositional and publication practices of major eighteenth-century prose fictions, including *Clarissa*, *Sir Charles Grandison*, and *Tristram Shandy*. As Thomas Keymer argues, the strategy was as much aesthetic as financial; authors such as Richardson and Sterne used the dissemination of their work in parts to cull reader feedback, partly so as to shape what came next (2000, 38). Serialization is a form of adaptation, each new instalment building on and developing the last, an adaptive process that is rendered more complex when the serialized fiction absorbs and reconfigures work already published elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

Comparable questions to those characterizing book serialization pertain to the vast terrain of fiction found in eighteenth-century periodicals, magazines, and newspapers. Their publication environment was nonetheless distinct: anonymity and pseudonymity, while prevalent on the book market (Orr 2017, 15; Raven 2003, 141), ran particularly rampant in the more fluid context of these press publications.<sup>2</sup> Serialized works in these venues could appear at

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**1** This research was funded in whole or in part by the National Science Centre, Poland, as part of Opus project number UMO-2025/57/B/HS2/01436.

**2** The differences between types of "press publication" should be borne in mind: periodicals carried essays, using a fictional eidolon ("Mr. Spectator"), and dominated the century's earlier decades; magazines, most popular mid-century onwards, were more miscellaneous; newspapers, important throughout the century, mixed news, politics, advertisements, and fiction. Serialization existed across all forms. Keymer 2002, 116-17; Batchelor 2022, 15.

both regular and erratic intervals, over extended periods of time, sometimes indefinitely. Letters pages supplied a public forum for readers' responses, sometimes to serial fiction itself, which were occasionally acted upon. Fictional pieces printed in the press shared space with a considerable quantity and variety of other types of content, both factual and fictional, grave and gay, which vied for readers' attention. Many new items mingled recognizable styles of writing with innovation, often by adapting existing materials, whether generic traits or specific works. Laurence Sterne's *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-67) and *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768) were extensively adapted in a variety of forms from 1760 onwards, but his fiction seemed particularly mouldable to the generative processes of serial fictions which both mimicked and exaggerated Sterne's own compositional methods, and his works' relationship with serial publication.

Here, two serialized adaptations of Sterne - printed in the *Lady's Magazine*, and in the *Public Ledger* and *Morning Herald* - illuminate the role of serialization in Sterne's creative reception, and in eighteenth-century adaptation more generally, and how both thrived within the unique print environment provided by magazines and newspapers. They also expose the vulnerability of these materials: individual issues were subject to destruction, mutilation, or reuses that rendered their contents illegible - as Tristram finds when he loses his "remarks", stuffed into the pocket of his travelling chaise, discovered by the chaise-vamper's wife, and recycled as curling papers ("papillotes") for her hair (Sterne 1978, 2: 639-41): both the scraps of paper and the witty sentiments are entirely lost on this woman's head. Paper is a precious material that, like many truly precious things, can be discarded too readily as "waste" (Friant-Kessler 2014, 215-18). The fragile pages of a magazine or newspaper, while perhaps once considered merely ephemeral and disposable, are no different; they hold their own fetishistic charm - and, as we will discover, to lose an individual issue is potentially to lose one instalment of a serialized fiction, in this case disrupting the process of recovering and reconstructing Sterne's reception history as figured through adaptation.

## 2 Never-Ending Stories: Serialization in Magazines, Newspapers, and Sterne's Fiction

The serialization of fiction was not new when mid-century novelists came to use it, and nor was its association with press publications. From the early decades of the eighteenth century onwards, periodicals and newspapers printed excerpts from already published fiction, often over successive issues - a developing practice that, as Nicholas Seager suggests, "reflected and enhanced the novel's growing appeal,

as newspapers helped to widen and democratize the readership for fiction” (2015, 112). From 1760 onwards, however, periodicals, newspapers, and increasingly popular magazines provided venues for entirely new fictional works (Keymer 2002, 124-5). Tobias Smollett is typically credited with having produced the first fiction specifically for publication in this venue: “Sir Launcelot Greaves”, serialized in the *British Magazine* from January 1760 to December 1761 (Mayo 1962, 276-9; Keymer 2002, 129-32). Recent scholarship nonetheless promotes the almost concurrent appearance of Charlotte Lennox’s “The History of Harriot and Sophia”, in all eleven issues of her own periodical, the *Lady’s Museum*, from March 1760 until February 1761; like Smollett’s narrative, published in 1762 as *The Life and Adventures of Launcelot Greaves*, it soon appeared in book form as *Sophia* (1762), with only minimal changes (Schürer 2008, 32-3, 201-4; Buckley 2025, 154).

These two works pioneered some of the key features of serial fiction exclusively written for magazine publication, which allowed it to flourish in ensuing decades. Each instalment is a self-contained segment that possesses independent integrity, but which builds in links to the subsequent part to secure readerly comprehension and engagement, cliff-hangers being an obvious connective tool between the end of one instalment and the beginning of the next (Keymer 2000, 42; Buckley 2025, 160-2). Serialization, in this way, is a form of self-adaptation, in that it evolves with the production of each new part by picking up from the last. It also underlines the significance of context to the adaptive process: every instalment of “Harriot and Sophia” sits alongside other items in each issue of the *Lady’s Museum* – essays, translations, musical settings for songs, poems – which shape the reader’s reception of the novelistic piece. Fragmentation juxtaposes with completeness: the serialized instalment is part of a greater whole in the individual periodical or magazine issue, but its completeness is deferred until the final part and, potentially, the novel’s transition into book form – a type of further self-adaptation to which we will return. Each issue of a periodical or magazine is likewise aesthetically complete, at the same time that this completeness is partly contingent on the promised appearance of a subsequent issue – and, eventually, on gathering all issues to form the bound volumes whereby many readers created unique personal libraries (DiPlacidi 2018, 272-3). Dickens’s collectors are far from original.

Press publications relied on these interactions between temporality and spatiality. They allowed authors to experiment with length – space was circumscribed, but a serial instalment could nonetheless range from a few hundred words to over a thousand – and also to exercise a non-committal approach towards self-continuation. While enterprises such as Smollett’s and Lennox’s were conceived as attaining some form of completion, after 1760 a significant proportion of serialized

fiction in magazines and newspapers tested readers' credulity that they would ever reach a conclusion: the promise "*To be Continued*" often remained unfulfilled. Suspense was stretched, too: magazines typically printed serials at regular intervals, but newspapers played fast and loose with the gap between instalments, enhancing the element of surprise. We cannot assume all readers desperately anticipated the next part of a serialized fiction, given that these publications offered many attention-drawing items; some evidently awaited more, though, especially when a serial appeared to be winding up, awakening the sadness that can accompany the sense of an ending. "*Angelina*", one *Lady's Magazine* reader in the 1780s, wrote to its editors that, as the serialized *Adventures of Ella Worthy* "seem[ed] to draw to a conclusion", she strongly wished "that the author of that *inimitable* work would again exert her genius in favour of the admiring public, who, thro' the last two years, have been *charmed*" with her compelling narrative (*Lady's Magazine* 13, April 1782, n.p.).

Smollett's and Lennox's writerly development through serialization, apotheosed in book publication, like Dickens's, partly revolved around their recognizable authorial identities: Smollett was known to be the editor of the *British Magazine*, and responsible for its contents;<sup>3</sup> the *Lady's Museum's* title-page declared it was "by the author of the *Female Quixote*", and *Sophia* was published under Lennox's name (Schürer 2008, 42). By contrast, many subsequent serialized fictions were published anonymously or pseudonymously. They nonetheless perversely acquired a pseudo-named identity when they adapted the work of an already known writer, perhaps inadvertently attaching an "-ana" label that submerged one creative identity with another (Goring 2023, 182). The fluidity of authorship that press publications exercised with particular vigour played an important part in literary reception as configured through adaptation. Sterne's name provided a firmly embedded authorial root in this context, serving as an identifier (not always fairly) for many unnamed pieces that seemed similar to his in adopting characteristic traits and mannerisms, reusing characters' names, and mirroring Sterne's formal methods, including episodic fragmentation and serialization.

*Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* intrigued readers, then as now, for their seeming open-endedness: many of *Tristram Shandy's* stories are interrupted or half-told, creating a sense of ambiguity reinforced by the conversation-closing – and opening – "cock and bull" joke of the work's final volume (Sterne 1978, 2: 809; Keymer 2002, 100). *A Sentimental Journey* pseudo-concludes with a memorable cliff-hanger, Yorick's hand reaching out across an aposiopesis to reach

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, an advertisement for the *British Magazine* as 'by T. Smollett' in the *Whitehall Evening Post*, 2164, 29-31 January 1760, 4.

an “END” – of which type, we are left uncertain (Sterne 2002, 165). Fragmentation is similarly characteristic of Sterne’s fictive mode: *Tristram Shandy’s* chapters are of irregular lengths that vary the pace of narrative delivery; *A Sentimental Journey* consists of episodic fragments that mirror the stages of a journey that halts at various locations en route in an abstracted temporal sequence (Hardie-Forsyth 2021, 104-5). Serialization, too, is built into both works: *Tristram Shandy’s* sentimental account of the death of decayed soldier Lieutenant Le Fever is repeatedly broken off, a series of new chapters announcing “*The Story of LE FEVER, continued*”, as if to mimic the “*To be Continued*” formula familiar from serialized fiction in the press (the episode, in fact, was reprinted numerous times in newspapers and magazines as a condensed excerpt). As Keymer comments, Sterne is less interested in directly parodying “individual serial works, as opposed to the generic conditions they all expose” (2002, 132-3). Indeed, the serial publication of *Tristram Shandy* in five instalments, which appeared at irregular intervals over seven years – and the prospected second instalment of *A Sentimental Journey* (interrupted by Sterne’s death) – are undoubtedly related to the wider, diffusive culture of printing prose fictions in parts (Keymer 2002, 98).

The sense of incompleteness in Sterne’s fiction, or at least of partial completeness, combined with the relation between his works and serialization, created an inviting opportunity for numerous readers to intervene in and continue Tristram’s or Yorick’s narratives, or seemingly to conclude them. Additions to *Tristram Shandy* emerged even while composition was still underway (Keymer 2002, 105): spurious volumes appeared in the breaks between instalments – a “vol. III” and a “supplement” in 1760, a “vol. IX” in 1766. The case for *A Sentimental Journey* was different; Sterne’s death on 18 March (shortly after the publication of volumes I and II on 27 February) being widely advertised, a subsequent instalment could not be expected. But readers sustained the impulse to intervene: the first continuation, claiming to be volumes III and IV of Yorick’s unfinished work (now “completed” by his friend, “Eugenius”), was published in early 1769, another “Continuation” appeared in 1788, and a “Sequel” in 1793 (Gerard 2007, 124-5). Indeed, sequels and continuations rub against each other among gap-filling Sternean adaptations, destabilizing the distinctions Gérard Genette, for one, sought to establish between them:

When a work is left unfinished by reason of the death of its author or some other cause of final abandonment, continuation consists in finishing the work in the author’s stead, and can only be the work of another. The *sequel* performs an entirely different function, which in general consists in exploiting the success of a work that in its own time was often considered complete, and in setting it into motion again with new episodes. (Genette 1997, 162)

Both sequels and continuations appeared simultaneously during Sterne's lifetime and subsequently; they were joined by serializations - between "types" of which it is similarly "impossible in practice to sustain firm distinctions", Keymer asserts (2002, 112 fn. 1) - all collectively participating in the success, commercial and aesthetic, associated with Sterne's work.

Sterne's adapters tessellated subsequently created terminological distinctions in the methods they adopted for realizing their creative ambitions. The fragmentation and serialization associated with magazines and newspapers made them highly suitable venues for printing "new" fictional ventures part-modelled on these formal qualities in Sterne's writing, alongside its narrative and stylistic traits, characters, and humour. Serialized Sterneana was often not designed with the narrative arc striving towards completion found in "Launcelot Greaves" or "Harriot and Sophia": its creative purpose belonged to the school of make-it-up-as-you-go-along - at which Sterne proved an appealing master. An interplay between anonymity and pseudonymity underscored Sterne's "-ana" presence, reinforced by references, allusions, and recycled Shandean names, including in comic essay series printed in both magazines and newspapers. The majority of Sterne-inspired serialized fiction nevertheless adopted the sentimental journey mode, incorporating both sensibility and comic humour, drawing equally on *A Sentimental Journey* and *Tristram Shandy*. The two examples discussed here, from the *Lady's Magazine*, and from the *Public Ledger* and *Morning Herald*, display traits that unify serial fiction and adaptation: printing in parts; proximity to and distancing from the ostensibly original source-work; additions and alterations; recontextualization; and ambiguous authorship (Elliott 2020, 204-6). The publication environments in which they appeared - marked by proprietorial rivalries and prevalent copying - fundamentally shaped these works' creation and reception (and, vicariously, Sterne's), while their subsequent survival has been jeopardized by the fragility of these ephemeral paper materials.

### 3 "A Sentimental Journey, By a Lady" in the *Lady's Magazine*

Of the two magazines carrying the *Lady's Magazine* title in this period, it is the second, longest-running version (from 1770 to 1847) that published the lengthiest known work of serialized fiction (at around 270,000 words (Mayo 1962, 586)), which began life (at least) as a Sternean adaptation. The first instalment of "A Sentimental Journey, By a Lady" was published in the magazine's maiden issue, in August 1770; it last appeared in April 1777. The *Lady's Magazine* was a storehouse for fiction, entirely new, translated, and adapted; most was

sent in by reader-contributors. This “Sentimental Journey” was the magazine’s flagship piece, intended to encourage readers to buy the next issue, a plan which apparently succeeded given the magazine’s endurance and this serial’s seven-year life-span. Modern critics have tended to be less enthusiastic about this journey narrative: Robert D. Mayo, in his still-referenced 1962 study *The English Novel in the Magazines*, declares it is “difficult to understand how any pleasure could be derived” from this “tedious” and “affected” work (1962, 241). Batchelor, although more moderately recognizing its appeal as a fictional “travelogue”, critiques its “tenuous” plotting (2022, 50). Paul Goring, however, convincingly argues that “A Sentimental Journey, By a Lady” deserves a less dismissive approach for what it reveals about Sterne’s creative reception, adaptation more generally, and the unique environment magazines provided for both through publishing such serialized fiction (2020, 68-9).

The female narrator of “A Sentimental Journey, By a Lady” travels around Britain by coach, meeting quirky characters and accidents alike in a manner reminiscent of Smollett’s novels (Batchelor describes this as a “picaresque serial” (2022, 49)) – although *Humphry Clinker*, in which the coach journey model is memorably used, did not appear until 1771, a year after this journey’s first instalment. The story is broken up into sometimes very short, episodic moments, each identified by the name of a place (“Henley”), character-type (“The Groom”, “The Ploughman”), thing (“The Pin”) or event (“The Fall”). Although Batchelor finds a lack of coherence in this “patchwork of textual fragments” (2022, 50), their brevity and disruption mimic the stop-start movement of the journey, and they congeal to form a greater whole within each instalment and across the work’s parts.

That both *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* were in the author’s mind is evident in numerous allusions, parodic passages, and typographic features. In September 1770, the narrator compares her chaise to “the *desobligeant* mentioned in my uncle YORIC’s [sic] *sentimental journal*” (*Lady’s Magazine* 1, September 1770, 50-1). The family connection (adopted by numerous other imitators) re-emerges in her account of a dream, in which “the angel of death” calls her “Thou relation of the celebrated Yorick” (52). The narrative nevertheless incorporates several typographic features, including an extensive array of dashes and asterisks, which also recall *Tristram Shandy*. In October 1770, the narrator describes a burlesque scene in which a splendid dog named Nero accidentally knocks over his master, the landlord of the inn, who bloodies his nose in the fall. She modulates sympathy with the landlord with even greater admiration for Nero, whose reaction to the accident invokes contemporary attitudes towards animal affect, as Sterne, too, had explored (Ridley 2021, 58-9). Dashes frame the dialogue, and enhance the narrator’s sentimentalized juxtaposition of reason and feeling, as the landlord summons the dog:



by the literary anachronism of identifying Martinus Scriblerus as the proleptic interpreter of Sterne's "hieroglyphic" text, before breaking off mid-sentence, Shandy-style. Indeed, earlier in this instalment, a short episode titled "The Digression" muses on the frustrations of delaying the onward progress of a story, of too much open-endedness, and novelty-grabbing motivations. "I have sometimes have been half angry myself with my uncle Yorick for his tales without end", she writes, but adds (recalling Keymer's point about Sterne's parody of generic trends in serialized fiction, rather than specific examples) that "it was a received maxim a great while ago, That the longer a reader of a story was kept in suspence with regard to the unravelling of the plot, it was so much the better". The contemporary joke was common enough, that Sterne frivolously rambled on in *Tristram Shandy*, while sustaining "a long suspence" between instalments, to keep himself famous (and perhaps fed): "And thus the author not only exercised his readers [sic] patience but also their wit in finding out a conclusion to what perhaps he never intended to conclude; and merely by saving trouble, purchased fame and reputation" (*Lady's Magazine* 1, June 1771, 501). Ironically, the critique of "Yorick" implicates serialized fiction such as this, too, as complicit in the potentially never-ending propulsion of a tale delivered in parts.

Narrative inventiveness (including such visual quirks), indeed, was needed to sustain interest over an etiolated period. The longevity of this "Sentimental Journey" suggests a degree of success, although some critics are quick to point out that apparently it was eventually curtailed on account of readers' wishes (Mayo 1962, 358; Batchelor 2022, 49). But in August 1770, at least, this "Sentimental Journey" was clearly a major selling point for the newly established *Lady's Magazine*: it was adorned with an illustration (costly to commission and execute), and showcased the aesthetic modes, narrative styles, and tonal qualities that the magazine wished to advertise to its first readers. Its importance can also be gauged by its centrality (along with "The Pyrenean Hermit", another serial fiction) in a legal dispute that erupted not long after the magazine's establishment (Batchelor 2022, 65-6). George Robinson and John Roberts acquired the *Lady's Magazine* title from founder-proprietor John Coote in early 1771, to the objection of John Wheble, the magazine's original publisher. Wheble continued to publish his own rival *Lady's Magazine*: two versions ran concurrently from April 1771 to December 1772 (Roberts unexpectedly died in January 1772, leaving Robinson as sole proprietor (Batchelor 2022, 46-8)). For several months, then, different versions of "A Sentimental Journey, By a Lady" appeared concurrently in these parallel *Lady's Magazines* (Batchelor 2022, 68-9). Wheble's August 1771 issue, for instance, opens with "The Rescue" and a cluster of sentimentalized episodes, while Robinson

and Roberts's begins with "Oxford", part of the route its traveller pursues (Goring 2020, 76-9).

The legal battle embroiling the *Lady's Magazine* reveals significant movements in approaches towards intellectual property – and the ambiguities of creative control concerning serialized fiction, and anonymous publication. The case was judged by Lord Mansfield in July 1771; although he ruled in Robinson and Roberts's favour, he concluded that, while they had the right to publish the magazine they had purchased, there were no legal grounds for preventing Wheble from producing his own version, too (Batchelor 2022, 63-7). A transcript of the trial was reprinted in the July 1771 issue of Wheble's *Lady's Magazine* under the title "An Account of the Trial at Law, respecting the Right of Property in the Publication of the LADY'S MAGAZINE. With Observations on the same" – an act of self-vindication reinforced by copious animadversions that annotated the text. As they reveal, the most intriguing point of the dispute and its ambiguous resolutions rested on "the thorny issue of who owned the right to publish new parts of an established serial" (Goring 2020, 76) – a fluidity of ownership over creative material that serialization made all too liquid. Could a work started by someone else, even one published in serialized instalments that could (theoretically) have been written by another, legitimately be continued elsewhere by a different person? If serial fiction is considered as a form of adaptation, in which each new instalment leads on from its predecessor and, effectively, adapts it in new directions, then there was nothing to prevent Wheble from producing a continuation of an already published work, even while it was technically still in the process of being created and printed by someone else. That, indeed, had been the case for Sterne himself, given the numerous sequels, continuations, and supplements that inflated his "original" texts.

Whether originality was attached to ideas, to existing publications, or to future ones rippled beneath the prosecution's case. The counsel for the plaintiffs, Mr. Dunning, argued that Wheble had illegitimately appropriated the "Sentimental Journey", which was "begun in the original numbers, and had been continued in the last number"; however, a footnote protests:

† This Sentimental Journey was another imposition, as far as it respected the original author. It was said to be written By a Lady; but unless a short Parson's long petticoats entitle him to that appellation, there was no Lady in the case. The Sentimental Journey in Wheble's Magazine is indeed really written By a Lady, and that one of the first distinction in literature. (*Lady's Magazine* 1 appendix [2], July 1771, 44)

The question of authenticity rests here both on gender and on anonymity: it seems to matter whether the title of the fiction, as apparently written “By a Lady”, is strictly truthful (Goring 2020, 99n15); Wheble’s version is supposedly more genuine, being “really written” by a woman, a claim that must nevertheless be taken at face value without the validation of knowing who that distinguished “Lady” is. The cloak of anonymity, which could be lifted to confirm Wheble’s assertion, is left draped, as if, strangely, to confirm its legitimacy.

Dunning argued that Wheble “has thought proper to find out authors”, but that Robinson and Roberts “have thought proper to find out the ideas of the original author, and they have continued the *Sentimental Journey*, and they have been so kind as to continue his novel of the *Pyrenean Hermit*” (45). The central issue of intellectual property, then, was complicated by uncertainty not over who the “original author” was – their existence as a physical body – but whether someone else could legitimately develop the “idea” they had begun (Brewer 2013, 195; Vareschi 2018, 130), as Dunning claims Robinson and Roberts were able (and even “kind”) to do. The legal right belonged to those who owned the publication venue where that idea was first pursued. The question-and-answer examination of John Johnson, the printer, nonetheless strives to assert continuity not only in ownership of the magazine’s title, but in who authored the apparently legitimate “*Sentimental Journey*” (Batchelor 2022, 65):

- Q. The *Sentimental Journey* was received from Mr. Coote?  
 A. That was from Mr. Coote; the beginning of the story I had from Mr. Coote.  
 Q. Whom did you continue to print for?  
 A. For Robinson and Roberts.  
 [...]  
 Q. Was the continuation of the stories in the same hand writing?  
 A. I have reason to think they were in the same hand writing as the former. (46)

The handwriting seems to confirm authenticity; but then, if the legitimate “*Sentimental Journey*” only “continued” the initial author’s ideas, and the “original author” herself was irrelevant, then the “continuation” need not be by the same hand. In fact, the crux of the judgment – and Wheble’s resistance – rested on whether a person could legally produce a “Continuation of the Original”: it is, a footnote argues, “casuistry worthy the superior abilities of the Bench” to argue that Wheble could legitimately “continue the work left off by Coote, and yet [had] no right to call it a continuation of the work originally begun by him” (52). The very existence of magazines – produced by “magazine-mongers” – relied on far more nefarious practices than

Wheble was accused of, the annotator claims, for “It is well known, that though a compiler, and perhaps an author may be employed to furnish matter for Magazines, the much greater part of such matter is absolutely pirated or stolen from other books, and prints” (52). Reproductive activities of all kinds were the stock-in-trade of these fast-flowing publications. The absurdity of the matter is conveyed in the closing footnote, which mock-marvels that, while the defendant’s character was defamed, he was dismissed “with only nominal damages” (one shilling), “and told that he may lawfully go on to do the very thing, for which he had been prosecuted” (52).

Creative material, especially when published in such a venue – and even more so when serialized over multiple issues – swam in a pool of commonality, where it could be gathered, reformulated, and repurposed (Vareschi 2018, 143). For Batchelor, this created a collaborative, virtual “print community” in which readers “imagined themselves to be active participants” (2022, 52). Magazines allowed scope for readers’ feedback, for one thing; in the December 1770 issue of Wheble’s *Lady’s Magazine* a correspondent offers “A HINT to the Author of the SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY” (1, 219-20) in the form of an additional chapter;<sup>4</sup> the January 1771 issue carries the journey’s next official instalment, and a letter from the author in reply (1, 259). Magazines provided space for such back-and-forth exchanges, which could shape the future course of a serialized work in response to feedback – including parodic amplifications of the “original” idea. The pleasurable, playful nature of these “community” interactions nonetheless strains against the vicious antagonism of the court room concerning who held rights over the magazine’s creative material – its ideas, even – and so over its financial interests. Encouraging “our fair patronesses” to buy, read, and write both empowered and patronized a predominantly female audience whose contributions fuelled commercialism under an illusion of holding shares in the creative commons.

Even if adaptation did inspire a sense of participatory connection with other creators and materials, it also pushed a drive towards independence, enmeshing recognizable origins and desirable originality. “A Sentimental Journey, By a Lady” gradually moved away from its ostensible source text. Although the borrowed title indelibly linked the serial to Sterne, as did some of its contents, notably in earlier instalments, later issues pulled away from this originating point to forge their own path. This journey narrative possibly became

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<sup>4</sup> These pages are missing in the *Eighteenth Century Journals* (Adam Matthew) digitized version of the Library of Birmingham copy; they can be found in the *Google Books* version of one of two copies held in the Bavarian State Library in Munich. On different copies, see Batchelor 2022, 257 fn. 50.

the work of a different author or even of multiple hands, anonymity signalling the unknowability of authorship, especially of such a long-drawn-out piece. Goring argues that, whoever the author was, (possibly) she increasingly strove to show that Sterne provided a prompt for sentimental “embellishment”, but not “a model to copy”, as “she sought to distance her writing from Sterne and to eschew the idea that it was imitative” (2020, 70). Serial publication allowed such self-adaptation to thrive, and for a work to “evolve” (as Goring phrases it) over time and the space of the magazine’s pages to become something distinct.

Although “A Sentimental Journey, By a Lady” seems to have disappeared unceremoniously in April 1777, confirming some modern-day critical evaluations that it became too tedious to go on, not all readers agreed. Even at a temporal remove, some seemed to want more: the prefatory address “To our Correspondents” of October 1782 mentions that “M. H. whispers her wish of the *continuation* of the *Sentimental Journey*” – but, in this buyer’s market dominated by sales, “she will excuse us when we intimate that it was *dropped* on account of the desire of *many* Correspondents” (*Lady’s Magazine* 13, October 1782, n.p.). While Keymer challenges “John Sutherland’s somewhat jaundiced definition of serialization as a publishing method followed ‘usually for commercial convenience but occasionally for art’” (2000, 38), such an approach seems, in this context at least, to be in part true.

#### 4 “A Sentimental Excursion” in the *Public Ledger* and the *Morning Herald*

Periodicals and magazines have typically dominated discussions of later eighteenth-century novelistic serialization in press publications; but newspapers, while less obvious vehicles for publishing fiction, carried numerous items of poetry and prose, translated, adapted, and entirely new, including serialized works (Seager 2015, 112). Newspapers also inhabited an equally, if not more rampantly, commercialized context of proprietorial rivalries, piracy, and sales. A Sterne-inspired journey narrative anonymously written by Leonard MacNally and first printed in the 1780s in the *Public Ledger* reveals many comparable points with “A Sentimental Journey, By a Lady” in the *Lady’s Magazine*, but also newspapers’ distinctiveness as vehicles for serial fiction. Equally, it exposes the fragility of these paper materials in a particularly cruel way for the present discussion: the crucial issues of the *Public Ledger* on which it hangs – from 1780-83 – seem to be entirely missing. This is a rare gap in the Burney

Newspaper Collection held at the British Library (and digitized);<sup>5</sup> I have not been able to locate them in other institutional holdings, either. Therefore, what follows cannot be watertight, but – with some irony, in an account of serialization – it opens the potential for a second instalment if these materials ever resurface, attached to the head of a chaise-vamper’s wife or otherwise.<sup>6</sup>

Leonard MacNally (1752-1820) – an Irish grocer, actor, playwright, barrister, newspaper editor, political activist, and even political informer (Rigg, Evans 2004) – was a Sterne enthusiast: he authored one of the only eighteenth-century dramatic adaptations of *Tristram Shandy*, a two-act afterpiece first staged at Covent Garden in 1783. This “Sentimental, Shandean Bagatelle” enjoyed some success, given its repeat performances, contemporary reviews, and transition into a printed playtext (Taylor 2019-21). MacNally’s most accomplished Sternean adaptation, however, had already been published in 1781: the prose narrative *Sentimental Excursions to Windsor and Other Places, with Notes Critical, Illustrative, and Explanatory*. Sterne is directly identified as a source, and *Tristram Shandy* is a recurrent metafictional reference. Shandy-style humour dominates the narrator’s “excursion” to Windsor, during which several new encounters exercise his persona as a traveller alert to the ironies – and clichés – of his journey and its written description, not least through the suggestive connection he forms with a fellow-traveller named, aptly in the Sternean context, Maria.

*Sentimental Excursions*, like “A Sentimental Journey, By a Lady”, exemplifies adaptation’s capacity to draw off a recognizable source but also to absorb others, and to repurpose its materials to fit new times, places, and contexts – including its publication environment. MacNally’s journey narrative demonstrates with drama equal to the *Lady’s Magazine* example the flexibilities, and dangers, of printing serial fiction in the press. An Advertisement inserted at the beginning of *Sentimental Excursions* informs readers that it had already been published in instalments in the *Public Ledger*, but it also declares with some indignation that this material had simultaneously been copied from that newspaper into the *Morning Herald*. Borrowing between newspapers was common in this period, but MacNally’s

<sup>5</sup> *Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Burney Newspapers Collection*, Gale and the British Library, <https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=BBCN&sw=w&u=cambuni&v=2.1&pg=BasicSearch&it=static&sid=bookmark-BBCN>.

<sup>6</sup> Missing items seem to bedevil studies of Sterneana that rely on ephemeral materials, as Paul Goring describes of a pamphlet clinching a dispute about Samuel Paterson’s *Another Traveller!* (1769), which the *Critical Review* had accused of being a Sternean imitation; the only known copy is presently lost, somewhere at large in Glasgow University Library (Goring 2022, 274-5).

declaration strikes at a particularly hot iron given the competing identities of these titles.

The *Public Ledger*, founded in January 1760 by John Newbery, was originally believed to be a Ministry organ, but later became recognized as an Opposition paper under the editorship of several well-known Irish figures, including (from around 1765) Hugh Kelly (Bataille 1985, 523-4), and MacNally himself at some point in the 1780s, although it is not clear when (Bataille 1985, 527; Ferrero 2005, 167-8). This newspaper had long demonstrated an interest in Sterne, in playfully imitative adaptation, and in serialization; it published Oliver Goldsmith's "Letters from a Chinese Philosopher" from 1760-1, while a series of letters from "Tristram Shandy" to "Bob Busby" printed in 1760 adopts Sternean traits and satirically comments on his work (Bandry 2002, 313-14). The *Morning Herald* was founded in November 1780 by Sir Henry Bate Dudley, whom Bonnie Ferrero describes as "flamboyant", and Hannah Barker as "notorious" (Ferrero 2005, 165; Barker 1998, 63). He had earned his reputation as a provocative journalist partly through his attacks on the Duke of Richmond, who represented the Opposition during Bate Dudley's editorship of the *Morning Post*: he was duly tried for libel and imprisoned for a year in 1781 (Barker 2004). Between the trial and sentencing (delayed by disruptions to the judicial system caused by the Gordon Riots) Bate Dudley was dismissed from the *Morning Post* and founded the *Morning Herald*, which generally maintained an anti-Opposition stance (and corruptly received government money), although it was mostly opportunistic in its political targets (Ferrero 2005, 166; Barker 1998, 63).

Newspapers' political allegiances in this period were fluid, and even unscrupulous; indeed, as Barker argues, "The need to maintain extensive distributions meant that newspapers were dependent not upon political patronage, but upon their appeal to readers" (1998, 4), bringing titles to compete for attention. Serialized fiction, mixing familiarity and innovation, was one way to encourage readers to buy the next day's or week's copy. The Advertisement to *Sentimental Excursions*, therefore, jabs at newspapers' commercial as much as political rivalries, and at the theft-based nature of the virulent recirculation of material - recalling the attack on "magazine-mongers" in the annotations to the transcript of the *Lady's Magazine* trial. Given the rapidity of newspaper production and the scale of circulation, adaptive processes visible across other domains in this period - including illegitimate copying - were amplified and speeded up.

The natural thing to do at this point would be to compare the two versions of "A Sentimental Excursion to Windsor", as it was printed in the *Public Ledger* and the *Morning Herald*, in a similar manner to the *Lady's Magazine* rival versions, to observe likenesses,

differences, and hence adaptive practices, and to plot a timeline of what appeared when and where. Both newspaper serializations could then be compared against the *Sentimental Excursions* book version to reveal what, if any, changes were made, as with *Launcelot Greaves* or *Sophia* and their earlier serializations. However, that will be impossible as long as the relevant copies of the *Public Ledger* remain lost. What we can do, though, is to juxtapose instalments of “A Sentimental Excursion” in the *Morning Herald* with *Sentimental Excursions* to try to grasp something of how newspaper publication conditioned serialization, and of MacNally’s creative, self-adaptive process in moving from newspaper to book.

Nine instalments of “A Sentimental Excursion to Windsor” were printed in the *Morning Herald* between April and June 1781 (there may be others, as yet unidentified). Their content reappears in *Sentimental Excursions*, confirming that this is the same story; but, whereas Lennox made only limited changes to *Sophia*, MacNally seems to have taken the opportunity of book publication to expand significantly on his creative enterprise, at least as far as we can assume similarity between the *Public Ledger* and *Morning Herald* versions. The first instalment of “A Sentimental Excursion” begins “in the month of May” with the journey from London to Windsor (*Morning Herald*, 139, Wednesday, 11 April 1781, 3). The book, however, adds a pre-chapter in which the narrator explains the motivation for his trip – social distractions, and ennui: “I Read and read, but could not retain a word of what I read. – So many friends flowed in upon me daily to breakfast, and so many friends to carry me out to dine [...]. I must cut off, said I, the *entail* of these engagements, and become master of my own time” (MacNally 1781, 1). A Sternean allusion (“cut off the entail” appears in *Tristram Shandy* (Sterne 1978, 1: 241)) is almost seamlessly woven into this opening.

The book’s second page presents the first of many lengthy footnotes (here, on legal discourse and literature): as the subtitle to *Sentimental Excursions* indicates, numerous “notes” of various kinds swarm across the volume’s pages, displaying a breadth of learned (sometimes facetious) references, political commentary, and social satire. These do not feature in the newspaper serialization: the shorter space accorded to its instalments encouraged concision, but the book capitalizes on expansion. MacNally also enlarges descriptions of characters and places, the story-line, and metanarrative discussions. A game of “travelling piquet” added in *Sentimental Excursions*, for instance, implicates the narrator and Maria in a euphemistically erotic way of passing the time. As Tristram says of the alluring Janatone at Montreuil: “—L— help me! I could not count a single point: so had been piqued, and repiqued, and capotted to the devil” (Sterne 1978, 2:590). Indeed, MacNally’s game is interrupted by “A Digression” in which the narrator pursues an imaginary dialogue with a devil, who

tells him that his master “has shewn your *excursions* to some critics, who all agree it will never sell without an *introduction*” (58).

The subsequent chapter duly brings us the “Introduction”, mirroring the unexpected appearance of *Tristram Shandy*’s preface in volume 3 (the work’s second instalment); indeed, as the author acknowledges, “It will be said I have imitated Sterne” (MacNally 1781, 59). The “Introduction” (missing from the newspaper version) thus engages directly with its literary origins and its anticipated critical response within wider reviewing culture. A footnote comments:

As the Reviewers, from the quantity of literary drudgery they are forced to go through every month, cannot possibly have time to read *the whole* of every book they give an opinion on; it is probable our author introduced his *introduction* in this place, in hopes the reviewers would not read so far.--Next month will shew whether the reviewers have reached his *introduction*; indeed the probability is, that they will not peep farther than into the title page.---

ANONYMOUS. (MacNally 1781, 59)

This provocative acknowledgement of the realities of reviewers’ practices (hundreds of publications were assessed on an ongoing basis: skim-reading must have been the friend of even the most conscientious hack) emphasizes the temporality of writing, publishing, reading, and reviewing – the laboriousness of the process largely outweighed by rapidity, in the churn-churn of new materials, new reviews. There is, too, an ironic edge to the anticipation of “Next month” – will *Sentimental Excursions* earn a review? (it did) – given the novel’s earlier, serialized incarnation, where more erratic periods of anticipation tested the newspaper’s readers.

Consciousness of temporality in relation to space (there were only so many words accorded to a newspaper serial, after all) both binds and differentiates the versions of this story in the *Public Ledger/Morning Herald* and in *Sentimental Excursions*. Besides adding new material in the book version, MacNally introduces paragraph breaks to temporize the reading experience; the tightness of the newspaper column did not allow for much largesse. Wondering about the identity of the mysterious Maria in “Windsor. The Inn”, printed in the *Morning Herald* on Wednesday, 23 May, the narrator ponders on a number of possibilities, all listed in the breath of a few, compacted lines (no. 175, 3); the book’s page could be more generous, and allow for some Sterne-like listing:

Who is she?  
Whence came she?  
Who is her father?  
Who is her mother?  
Who are her brothers?  
Who are her sisters?  
Has she any brothers and sisters, uncles, aunts, or cousins?

These questions I put deliberately to myself, stringing them together in succession, as the facetious *Sancho Panza*, the laugh-and-be-fat-sub-hero of *Don Quixote's* adventures, strung his proverbs. (MacNally 1781, 81)

The list reformulates the phrasing in the newspaper version but exploits mise-en-page to emphasize the anaphora, vertically “stringing” out the “succession” of words horizontally compressed in the newspaper’s column. The quip about Sancho Panza is an addition, fleshing out MacNally’s field of reference – both to Cervantes and to *Tristram Shandy*, which alludes to *Don Quixote* more than once. Sterne, indeed, is central to chapters found in both newspaper and book versions titled “TRISTRAM SHANDY” and “A SHANDEAN CONVERSATION”, which broach seemingly missing content in Sterne’s fragmented work, and provide another reminder about the value of paper as more than merely waste: Maria hands the narrator *Tristram Shandy's* “blank chapter” (intended for Widow Wadman’s portrait) on which to inscribe Sterne’s undelivered chapter on “button holes” (*Morning Herald*, 192, 12 June 1781, 3; MacNally 1781, 166).<sup>7</sup>

Both newspaper and book versions align in projecting the work’s polemic aims and its engagement in contemporary political issues, reinforcing the role that recontextualization plays in adaptation. In a chapter titled “Slave Trade” the narrator, Maria, a veteran military captain, and the spinster Miss Verjuice collectively express horror at “the plunder of the human species” (MacNally 1781, 219) – a topic of energetic public debate during this period (Carey 2005, 187), motivating anti-slavery sentiments found in other examples of Sterneana around this time (Lew 2019-21). The book’s chapter develops the *Morning Herald's* shorter “Slave Trade” episode of 18 June (no. 197, 3); in *Sentimental Excursions*, the conversation expands with an impassioned speech by the captain concerning “the unhappy NEGRO”, divested of his “native liberty”, separated from family and friends, and sacrificed to the “avarice” of European commercial interests (MacNally 1781, 223).

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<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the typographically intriguing follow-up, “The Button-Hole”, is missing from the available newspaper issues.

On 23 June, however, the *Morning Herald* printed a short episode entitled “The Extinguisher”, which brings the erotic subtext to a climax: the narrator, alluding to *Othello*, tells how he “put out the light”, plunging Maria and himself into ambiguous darkness: “----AND THEN!!!----” Although the paper promises that the story is “*To be Continued*”, the next we hear of “A Sentimental Excursion” in the *Morning Herald* is an advertisement printed on Monday, 25 June for *Sentimental Excursions to Windsor, and Other Places* – that is, MacNally’s book version of his *Public Ledger* newspaper serial, pillaged by the *Morning Herald*. Besides being a seemingly brazen confession, in promoting a book from which it had been pre-filching, the *Morning Herald*’s advertisement usefully summarizes the book’s chapter headings – an additional check-list for spotting any differences between versions. The list ends with “The Extinguisher”, the final chapter of *Sentimental Excursions*, which is the same as that printed in the *Morning Herald*’s apparently final instalment, although the book version adds a cluster of ironic questions, facetiously answered in footnotes (MacNally 1781, 249). The conclusions, then, seem to correlate.

However, on Thursday, 5 July the *Morning Herald* printed a column titled “A Sentimental Journey to Windsor (*Continued*).” This is the first of twelve instalments of a new sentimental excursion, but which continues the thread of MacNally’s story. Of course, it is possible that MacNally himself developed his excursion in the *Ledger*, which was appropriated anew by the *Herald*. We cannot verify one way or the other on the current evidence. What we can observe is how the new narrative develops the “Sentimental Excursion” storyline, using its characters and existing threads, and deploying the potential of serialization as adaptation to retain familiarity with the earlier instalments – and with the book – but also to evolve its own new course. The extended excursion demonstrates, too, how newspapers served as fecund organs for disseminating increasingly agitated public and political debate surrounding the Slave Trade (Carey 2005, 157-9), as it elaborates on Abolitionist themes already found in MacNally’s original narrative. The final instalment appeared on 24 October 1781, just a month before the widely deplored murder of 132 enslaved people aboard the slave-ship *Zong* on 29 November (Walvin 2011, 95-6).

The first instalment of the *Monthly Herald*’s continuation of “A Sentimental Excursion”, printed on 5 July, picks up where both newspaper and book had left off:

--And then!----What then? though the candle was extinguished to illustrate a passage in Shakespeare for Maria--Maria lighted the candle--the candle went out--and then!--what then?--we were in the dark a second time--I can blow it in, said Maria--but it would not do-- (*Morning Herald*, 212, Thursday, 5 July 1781, 3-4)

The innuendo echoes that of several continuations of Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, which take Yorick's pendant "hand" to unabashedly erotic places. But, after this suggestive opening, the narrator falls into a "REVERIE" that pursues much more serious matters. Alluding to his forthcoming profession at "the bar" (which makes MacNally himself a candidate for authorship), the narrator muses on his earlier conversations about the Slave Trade with the captain, whose "account of the planters [sic] cruelty had possession of my whole mind". He pursues what we can describe as a white saviour fantasy, in which he will "procure a *Negro* boy" and "give him the best education" at university before entering "an Inn of Court". The narrator himself "will rise in my place in the senate, and present a petition from the Negro slaves in the West-Indies and America, praying emancipation, and the rights of nature", but it will be "my *Negro*" who performs the coup de grace: he will "appear at the bar, as the advocate for the rights of the children of Africa" - decked out in "his native ornaments" and nearly naked for dramatic effect. "The NEGRO'S SPEECH" is subsequently given a chapter of its own, in which this imaginary character eloquently describes the pillaging of African nations, the physical and psychological cruelty of slavery, and the immense loss of life across the Middle Passage - the slave effectively ventriloquizing his master's voice. In the subsequent instalment of 9 July, the House of Commons, moved by this speech, introduces "a resolution against the slave trade" and establishes a bill that is passed by both Houses, "without opposition", and which received royal assent "before I awoke" - an act blessed by a heavenly angel, who declares that "the horrors of war" and all natural disasters in the West Indies will be ended from now on (*Morning Herald*, 215, Monday, 9 July 1781, 3). The dream concludes with two bishops undertaking to "convert the Negroes enslaved by us, to Christianity", as missionaries in both America and Africa.

The excursion subsequently pursues its route through several instalments, focussing on the narrator, Maria, and the captain, and including several digressions (on "Cuckolds", drama, and Montesquieu) and a poetic "Elegy to My Watch", stolen by a "little Gypsy".<sup>8</sup> It is with Maria's first-person narration, her gradually revealed life story an ongoing thread of this continued excursion, that the *Morning Herald's* episode of 24 October concludes: "But let me first inform you who this friend was", a revelation anticipated in a next instalment that, apparently, never appeared.

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<sup>8</sup> *Morning Herald*, 250, Saturday, 18 August 1781, 3; *Morning Herald*, 264, Tuesday, 4 September 1781, 2.

## 5 Conclusion – or to Be Continued?

The final twist comes in 1783. In August, the *Morning Herald*, still under Bate Dudley's editorship but now in the political turmoil of the 1783-4 constitutional crisis (Barker 1999, 63), printed "A Sentimental Excursion" – yes, another one, which spanned thirteen instalments until October that year. Is this another sequel to the earlier "Sentimental Excursion(s)", fully flexing the muscles of serialization as adaptation (and not least of readerly memory)? This possibly new excursion bears similarities to its predecessors, formally and tonally. But it also reveals a fundamental quality of this type of journey narrative: serial publication allows such fiction to expand with infinite variety, working on tried-and-tested formulae and recognizable traits to render them appealing, but in which points of origin become increasingly hard to trace. Repetition, with innovation, was the stock in trade of serialized fiction – especially when printed in self-generating ephemeral magazines and newspapers – and, whether "A Sentimental Journey, By a Lady" or "A Sentimental Excursion to Windsor", it could potentially go on forever, new creators developing old "ideas" in different venues.

Perhaps MacNally had greater writerly ambitions in publishing his more elaborate, and more artistically challenging *Sentimental Excursions*, and left his serial's continuation to other hands; according to the memoirs of the Irish actor John O'Keefe, who knew his contemporary personally, "Tired with literary fagging, Mac Nally went [from London] back to Dublin, and pursued his profession as a barrister. I was told he excelled all his contemporaries in keen and sarcastic wit" (1826, 1: 45). But the newspaper world in which MacNally's journey narrative was first seeded – like that of contemporary magazines – nevertheless continued to supply what its readers seemed to want: a little light fiction, perhaps well-written, providing some thought-provoking diversion amid the slurry of news items, advertisements, and lists of ships, stocks, race horses, and more. Magazines and newspapers alike supplied perhaps the most fertile terrain for adaptive practices to flourish in this period: their adept handling of the potentialities of serialized fiction provided an adroit selling-tactic and a creative opportunity, and, perhaps, some welcome light relief in the cycle of news and of commerce, which exercises a darker serial recurrence of its own.

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