

STERNE/YORICK, THE SENTIMENTAL TRAVELLER AND CONTEMPORARY TRAVEL WRITING STUDIES: PROBLEMATISING THE CRITICAL AFTERLIFE OF A *SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY*

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Abstract: Jakub Lipski, *STERNE/YORICK, THE SENTIMENTAL TRAVELLER AND CONTEMPORARY TRAVEL WRITING STUDIES: PROBLEMATISING THE CRITICAL AFTERLIFE OF A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY*. „PORÓWNANIA” 1 (24), 2019. Vol. XXIV, P. 231-242. ISSN 1733-165X. This article addresses two critical *topoi* in contemporary travel writing studies – Laurence Sterne’s agency in the so-called paradigm shift from the scientific to the subjective in eighteenth-century travel writing and the vague concept of “Sternean/Shandean fashions”, which has tended to be used as an umbrella term for stylistic idiosyncrasies in post-1768 travel writing. The former is approached as reflective of a style of reception that yearns to establish a myth of origin at the cost of historical accuracy. The latter is analysed with reference to the East Central European notion of *sternizm*, and exemplifies a pattern of disconnection, where a critical term derived from a name begins an autonomous life of its own and loses contact with the point of origin.

Abstrakt: Jakub Lipski, *STERNE/YORICK JAKO SENTYMENTALNY PODRÓŻNIK I WSPÓŁCZESNE STUDIA LITERATURY PODRÓŻNICZEJ: PROBLEMATYZACJA KRYTYCZNEGO ŻYCIA W “PODRÓŻY SENTYMENTALNEJ”*. „PORÓWNANIA” 1 (24), 2019. T. XXIV, S. 231-242. ISSN 1733-165X. Artykuł podejmuje problematykę wkładu twórczości Laurence’a Sterne’a, a w szczególności jego *Podróży sentymentalnej* (1768), w rozwój literatury podróżniczej. Krytyce poddane zostają dwa toposy badawcze: wkład Sterne’a w tzw. przeformułowanie paradygma-

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tu, z podróżopisarstwa „naukowego” na „subiektywne”, oraz koncepcja „maniery sternowskiej”, często pochopnie stosowana w odniesieniu do różnorodnych przemian stylistycznych w literaturze podróżniczej po 1768 roku. Topos pierwszy potraktowany jest jako przykład stylu odbioru niepotrzebnie dążącego do ustanowienia mitu początku, często kosztem rzetelności historyczno-literackiej. Topos drugi, analizowany w odniesieniu do współczesnych zastosowań pojęcia sternizmu, stanowi ilustrację braku ciągłości pomiędzy koncepcją badawczą a pierwotnym punktem odniesienia.

We are clearly past the moment in literary studies when the author's words addressing his or her own work were taken for granted. On the other hand, much trust is still placed in Laurence Sterne's self-proclaimed novelty and to the extent that one may yield to a temptation to read Sterne as a revolutionary in prose fiction, travel writing, autobiography or sermon writing. Those who succumb to the temptation seem to forget that a claim for innovativeness was a common trope in eighteenth-century self-reflexive practices. Let us recall Henry Fielding and his preface to *Joseph Andrews* (1742),² Horace Walpole's remarks about originating "a new species of romance" in the preface to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto* (1765) (Walpole 2014: 13), or the bold statements of debuting Frances Burney distinguishing *Evelina* (1778) from the works of her predecessors.³ Sterne was no different and advertised both *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67) and *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) as highly original and, one could add, hitherto unattempted in the English language.

No Sternean would wish to undermine Sterne's achievements and deny him artistry. That said, the notions of revolution, broken grounds or turning points in literary criticism are mere constructs that help organise critical discourse, especially literary history, and fail to address the complexities of literary production. Being too enthusiastic about Sterne's revolutions, one might lose sight of the immediate context and anachronically relish his timelessness in the company of fellow modernists in prose fiction and fellow Romanticists in travel writing.

There have been attempts to dispel some of these myths of reception in Sterne studies. Thomas Keymer undermined the critical cliché that Sterne's digressiveness and excessive self-consciousness in *Tristram Shandy* could be seen as his claim for originality. As he put it, "far from representing some radically original scrutiny of novelistic convention, self-referential gestures of this kind had become just another part of the convention" (Keymer 58). Christopher Fanning, in turn, offered a contextualised discussion of Sterne's textuality, in which his experiments with the *mise-en-page* – a quality that is often taken to illustrate the writer's novelty – are seen as stemming from the Scriblerian tradition (Fanning 360-392). As for the sermons, they

2 "this Species of writing [...] I have affirmed to be hitherto unattempted in our Language" (Fielding 10).

3 Having mentioned Rousseau, Johnson, Marivaux, Fielding, Richardson and Smollett as her noble predecessors, Burney writes: "I yet presume not to attempt pursuing the same ground which they have tracked" (Burney 10).

have been discussed as part of the Church of England's homiletic tradition and even labelled "statements of commonplace Anglican thought" (Parnell 76). In general, Melvyn New and the other editors to the Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne (1978-2014) have done much to read Sterne as one writing in a particular milieu and in the context of his contemporaries and predecessors.

The case of travel writing studies appears to be different. Here, the "novelty of [Sterne's] vehicle" (*ASJ*, 15)⁴ is all too often taken for granted. This is especially the case when Sterne himself is not the primary object of interest. A peripheral remark, a sketch of the background, a search for sources of inspiration – the introduction of Sterne and *A Sentimental Journey* tends to be more than convenient to corroborate the critical narrative. Thomas Curley's "Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* and the tradition of travel literature" (1990) makes for an apt summary of this critical tendency. Curley writes how in *A Sentimental Journey* Sterne adapted "geographic conventions inherited from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment to become an unprecedented travelogue of subjective spiritual exploration" (Curley 2003). The thesis is supported by Sterne's own declaration that the narrative is "altogether of a different cast from any of my fore-runners" (*ASJ*, 15) and a remark that the *Journey* anticipated "some of the best Romantic narratives of travel". Curley asserts that Sterne was very well read in travel literature and that Volume VII of *Tristram Shandy* and the *Journey* responded to this tradition in both a critically parodic and appreciative manner. There is a long list of authors who would have inspired Sterne, but Curley nevertheless concludes that "[w]hatever its debt to humanistic and scientific conventions of travel, *A Sentimental Journey* is, finally, a radically innovative travelogue, imbued with a bracing emotional and imaginative response to human life that authors of the Romantic Age would make famous". According to Curley, the break with tradition lies in Sterne's "subjective approach and exclusive attention to unlocking the inner sanctum of the human psyche by means of his sympathetic imagination and feeling", which is achieved in "a breathless Shandean style" (Curley 213).

Curley's approach is illustrative of the two critical *topoi* in travel writing studies that I would like to address and problematise in this article – Sterne's agency in the so-called paradigm shift from the scientific to the subjective in travel writing and the vague concept of "Sternean/Shandean fashions", which has tended to be used as an umbrella term for stylistic idiosyncrasies in post-1768 travel writing. I will approach the former as reflective of a "mythical" style of reception that yearns to establish a myth of origin. The latter will be analysed with reference to the East Central European notion of *sternizm*, and will exemplify a pattern of disconnection, where a critical term derived from a name begins an autonomous life of its own and loses contact with the point of origin.

4 All references to Sterne's works are parenthetical and use the Florida edition.

In tackling the first critical *topos*, I would like to begin by asking: Was *A Sentimental Journey* the first “subjective” or “sentimental” travel account, exposing qualities that would become typical of Romantic travel writing? Was Sterne the solitary agent in the paradigm shift of the travel narrative as a genre?

In travel writing studies Sterne’s *Journey* is typically treated as a prototype of the sentimental travel account, breaking with the tradition of the “scientific” or “impersonal” travelogue and undermining the institution of the Grand Tour. For example, Magdalena Dąbrowska contextualises her discussion of the Russian sentimental travelogue: “It was then [the turn of the 18th century] that the genre of sentimental travel developed in Russia. The genre was initiated in 1768 by Laurence Sterne” (Dąbrowska 2012: 65; trans. mine). Similar statements appear in C. W. Thompson’s *French Romantic Travel Writing*, where we read about Sterne’s giving “the radically self-conscious and subjective turn [...] to sentimental travel” (Thompson 13). Izabela Kalinowska, in turn, approaching Adam Mickiewicz’s “Crimean Sonnets” as a travelogue, introduces Sterne as a background against which the tradition of Romantic travel of “internal landscapes” developed. Sterne is mentioned here as the one who rebelled against Grand Tour conventions and as such “marked a turning point in the history of travel writing as a genre” (Kalinowska 24). At times, travel writing scholars appear to be more cautious and avoid definitive statements, even if the implication remains that it was Sterne’s *Journey* that triggered the paradigm shift. For example, Carl Thompson devotes a whole section to what he terms the “inward turn” in travel writing and emphasises the role of Sterne. He refrains from labelling him the “first” and goes for the phrasing “an important early model” – not that there are any other early models mentioned in this respect (Thompson 111). As one would expect, when Sterne’s contribution is discussed, Thompson yields to the temptation and avails himself of conventional vocabulary, for example by writing that *A Sentimental Journey* “introduced techniques for the representation of the self” (Thompson 112).

When *A Sentimental Journey* is treated as the first of a kind, the new genre tends to be defined with Yorick’s words: “’tis a quiet journey of the heart in pursuit of Nature, and those affections which rise out of her, which make us love each other – and the world, better than we do” (*ASJ*, 111). The idea that a genre can be “initiated” with the publication of a single text is itself a bold statement, but I would like to ponder further Yorick’s definition in the context of eighteenth-century *ars apodemica*, or the art of travel.

Two years before the publication of *A Sentimental Journey*, Sterne elaborates upon travelling in the sermon “The Prodigal Son” published in the third volume of *Sermons of Mr. Yorick* (1766). On the one hand, his remarks are clearly grounded in the discourse on the merits of travel in the context of the Grand Tour. Like a number of his predecessors, such as Richard Lassels in *The Voyage of Italy* (1670) or John

Locke in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), Sterne enumerates the advantages of travel (if we “order it rightly”):

— to learn the languages, the laws and customs, and understand the government and interest of other nations, — to acquire an urbanity and confidence of behaviour, and fit the mind more easily for conversation and discourse; — to take us out of the company of our aunts and grandmothers, and from the track of nursery mistakes; and by shewing us new objects, or old ones in new lights, to reform our judgements — (*Sermons*, 192)

Then, in a manner that foreshadows the definition in *A Sentimental Journey*, Sterne turns to focus on human nature. Having defined man’s natural disposition towards mobility – “The love of variety, or curiosity of seeing new things [...] seems wove into the frame of every son and daughter of Adam” – he gets to his main point:

— by tasting perpetually the varieties of nature, to know what is good — by observing the address and arts of men, to conceive what is sincere, — and by seeing the difference of so many various humours and manners, — to look into ourselves and form our own. (*Sermons*, 192)

Sterne highlights the possibility not only to unravel the mysteries of human nature but also to develop a deeper understanding of personal identity, in a way paraphrasing Michel de Montaigne’s metaphor that the world is “the mirror in which we must look in order to recognize ourselves from the proper angle” (Montaigne 116).

Seen in this light, Yorick’s definition of sentimental journeying does not radically break with the tradition of eighteenth-century travel. Defining the aim as the study of nature rather than objects of tourist interest does nevertheless highlight the educational value of travel. When the definition is used as a marker of the paradigm shift in travel writing, it is reflective of a critical misconception that is based on a one-sided reading of the definition. Its meaning is reduced to a sentimental slogan: a kind of “love others and know then thyself”. This reading ignores the double-voiced poetics of the journey, the ambiguities peppering the narrative and the frivolous remarks throughout. It is enough to pair the definition with the other formulation of Yorick’s aims – “But I could wish [...] to spy the *nakedness* of their [i.e. the French women’s] hearts” (*ASJ*, 111) – to see the perils of taking Yorick’s sensibility for granted. It is worth highlighting that this statement is followed by a criticism of conventional Grand Tour objects of interests and then by the “pursuit of Nature” definition. Yorick openly ignores the Palais Royal or the Louvre, but what he chooses to concentrate on instead transcends straightforward sentimentalism. When such critical preconceptions determine the reading of Sterne’s *Journey*, the effect invariably distorts what constitutes the text’s reality. For example, contrasting the *Journey*

with *Tristram Shandy* with the intention of presenting the former as the prototype for the sentimental travel account, Dąbrowska maintains that Sterne shuns lengthy digressions and abandons his innovative typography, which clearly is not the case (Dąbrowska 2009: 51). Such readings of the *Journey* are a belated manifestation of the policy of “sanitization” or “homogenization”, as Daniel Cook and M-C. Newbould, respectively, label the strategy of sentimental anthologies at the turn of the eighteenth century (Cook 290; Newbould 134). The idea was to ignore the complexity of the *Journey* and frame it into purely sentimental poetics.

To illustrate the weakness of the claim that Sterne alone paved the way for the “subjective” rather than “scientific” travelogue by radically breaking with the tradition of eighteenth-century travel, in particular the Grand Tour, I would like to refer to two travel texts that have been often contrasted with *A Sentimental Journey* – Tobias Smollett’s *Travels through France and Italy* (1766) and Samuel Sharp’s *Letters from Italy* (1767). The texts can be considered as the immediate context for the *Journey* both by virtue of publication date and because of the fact that they were identified by Yorick himself, who invented satirical nicknames for their authors: the “learned Smelfungus” for the former, and “Mundungus” for the latter (though this identification may raise doubts).⁵

Excessive subjectivity, often credited to Sterne, is a dominant feature of Smollett’s *Travels through France and Italy*. For one thing, it determines the traveller’s objects of interest, such as his apparent obsession with bridges; indeed, in a truly Shandean (if not Uncle Tobean) manner, Smollett mentions or describes in greater detail about three dozen bridges in his account; it also reveals itself in his non-standard responses to tourist and artistic highlights, a quality recognised by Yorick himself in the celebrated comment on the “learned Smelfungus”, who could not appreciate the value of the Pantheon or the Venus of Medicis. Writing about this idiosyncratic take on the arts, William Gibson insightfully argues that the traveller’s observations become “a form of iconoclasm” that allow him to make subjective remarks disconnected from the tradition of art appreciation and connoisseurship (Gibson 14; 109-136). In this, Smollett turns out to be a proponent of sensibility, prioritising authentic responses of the observing subject, for example, when he evaluates Guido Reni higher than Michelangelo (Smollett 264), or praises the true simplicity of the English garden (Smollett 262).

Smollett’s spleen, earning him the title of “Splenetic Traveller” as distinguished by Mr. Yorick (*ASJ*, 15), may be criticised in Sterne’s *Journey*, but it is reflective of the same “inward turn” that some travel writing scholars credit to Sterne exclusively. Grzegorz Moroz correctly argues that the label “sentimental travel book” may well apply to Smollett’s *Travels* despite the largely anti-sentimental travelling persona. What is more, following Casey Blanton’s definition of the sentimental travel book as

5 See *ASJ*, 272 (note 37.24).

the one that “foregrounds the narrator in an attempt to sentimentalize and/or glorify the narrator’s experience in hostile environments”, Moroz searches for proto-sentimental travel texts from the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Moroz 95; Blanton 13). This might take us a little too far, but the underlying assumption is apt: the “inward turn” was a far-reaching phenomenon, certainly beyond Sterne’s contribution.

If Smollett’s account suggests a self-centred travelogue predating *A Sentimental Journey*, Samuel Sharp’s *Letters from Italy* exemplifies a weariness with Grand Tour conventions that lies at the core of both Volume VII of *Tristram Shandy* and the *Journey*. Sharp breaks with the representational policy of the traditional Grand Tour account in a manner foreshadowing Sterne’s vindication of interpersonal encounter over typical objects of interest. This is made clear in the opening Letter 1:

I do not mean to trouble you, or my other Friends during my stay abroad, with descriptions of statues, churches, and pictures; for, besides, that I can say no more on that subject than what every account of *Italy*, every guide for travellers, furnishes in a most tedious abundance, I have generally found the reading of such descriptions insipid and tiresome [...]. (Sharp 1-2)

Accordingly, there is no passage devoted to the crossing of the Alps, but only a mention of the route – by way of Geneva – which was chosen by Sharp so that he could pay a visit to Voltaire. The description of the meeting is rather loosely organised, and most of it is a digression about Shakespeare’s language and Voltaire’s inability to sense it properly.

Attempts at undermining or even ridiculing the “scientific” travelogue were not first made by Sterne or his immediate predecessors. When on his Grand Tour, sometime around 1740, Horace Walpole wrote a *jeu d’esprit* “Walpole in Rome”, which is a humorously chaotic catalogue-like account of the highlights Walpole decided not to see:

**** Having heard that the best view of the city was from the top of St Peter’s, which, as everyone knows, is not only the highest church in Rome, but in the world; for the tower of Babel, which as Sigonius supposes was a temple, is no longer standing; and the tower of Pequin, being an idolatrous place of worship, cannot properly be called a Christian church; I having a great desire to see at one prospect this mistress of the world – did not go up. (Walpole 1948: 239)

Had this text been written three decades later, would it not have been considered as couched in a “Shandean style”? A passage like this one makes us ponder some more general questions about eponymous qualifiers of literary styles. What makes a style “Shandean”? How much Sterne is necessary for a style to be labelled

“Sternean”? Needless to say, I am not trying to argue that Walpole’s literary prank would have been a model for Sterne – it would have been highly unlikely for a piece first published in the twentieth century. However, what this passage and the rest following in the same vein testify to is the fact that more than two decades before the publication of Volume VII of *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* Walpole’s playful prank was testimony to a conviction that the genre and its conventions had become, as it were, exhausted.

To conclude this section, I would like to refer to a more balanced (and better-informed) approach to the “paradigm shift” offered by Barbara Korte. Having characterised Yorick’s account in a rather conventional manner, she aptly concludes that *A Sentimental Journey* “consolidates tendencies which were also emerging in the travelogue proper and which became an increasingly important generic feature towards the end of the eighteenth century” (Korte 57); in particular, she sees the *Journey* as testimony to the gradual “increase in subjectivity” in contemporaneous travel writing (Korte 56). She recognises Sterne’s influence on thus directed development of the genre, but is far from crediting him with the title of father or originator. I share Korte’s opinion, and the wording “consolidates” and “testimony” is a much more accurate recognition of Sterne’s role.

As was hinted earlier, to a large extent Sterne’s presence in historical and genealogical contexts in travel writing studies is a belated manifestation of late eighteenth-century trends in reception that created a Sterne who never was. As Peter de Voogd has recently written, “sentimental imitations rather than *A Sentimental Journey* itself created a curious vogue all over Europe [...] and thus a Sterne who never existed” (Voogd 276). The numerous editions of *The Beauties* as well as a plethora of sentimental imitations codified an understanding of Sterne that turned out to be a useful critical concept, especially for the study of the Romantic travelogue seen as a culmination of the subjective and fragmented tendencies in the life of the genre.

This leads me to the second aspect of Sterne’s legacy in travel writing studies that I wish to ponder: the category of *sternizm*, used in East Central European literary studies as an umbrella term for narrative and stylistic idiosyncrasies in literature from the late eighteenth century onwards. The coinage itself is not exceptional – in Polish criticism it finds equivalents in *byronizm*, *ossianizm*, *youngizm* or *walterscottizm*. The term itself is based upon a paradox, which is noted by Kazimierz Bartoszyński, the author of an encyclopaedia entry that foregrounds *sternizm* as a significant phenomenon in Polish Enlightenment and Romanticism. Bartoszyński is right to distinguish between *sternizm* and Sterne’s own characteristic features, drawing attention to the fact that the tendencies known as *sternizm* lived a life of their own, often disconnected from Sterne himself (Bartoszyński 581). In other words, there is Sterne and his works, on the one hand, and a phenomenon that takes its name after Sterne but need not be directly linked to the author, on the other. As before, it again boils down to reception.

Even if Sterne's impact on a particular author was indeed the case (as documented by explicit references and paratextual material, such as correspondence), conventional critical commentary petrifies an understanding of Sterne's poetics that fails to do justice to its complexity. For example, Maria Wirtemberska, daughter of Izabela Czartoryska, was clearly an admirer of *A Sentimental Journey* and repetitiously made clear the point of reference for her own literary ventures. However, the following assessment of Wirtemberska's *sternizm* does little to link her to Sterne convincingly:

Like Sterne, Wirtemberska preserves an arrangement of chapters that corresponds to reality. She analogically constructs the main character, who connects an account of the journey with detailed impressions and judgments. In a manner similar to the author of *A Sentimental Journey*, she frequently resorts to the technique of a detailed representation of scenes and people encountered. The choice of the objects of presentation reveals individual preferences. (Kurządkowska 43; trans. mine)

Dissecting the above, we end up with the following features of *sternizm*: sub-sequent chapters referring to the places visited, a narrative of impressions and judgments, and a non-conventional choice of scenes and people encountered described in detail. As this list makes clear, the only quality that might indeed relate to *A Sentimental Journey* is non-standard focus, though, as pointed out before, this was not an exclusively-Sternean feature.

Such a disconnection tends to result in abuses or appropriations of Sterne and his method, and his alleged influence on texts or passages whose authors would not have thought of Sterne at all. To give but one example, Łucja Rautenstrauchowa's *In and Beyond the Alps* from 1840 has been read as an overtly sentimental travel account (which may well be the case), clearly reflective of the Sternean fashions in Poland (which raises doubts). To illustrate the disconnection between Sterne himself and *sternizm*, I would like to quote two passages that have been considered Sternean. The first is meant to exemplify "Sternean [...] focus on solitary reflection":

Little birds have already finished their evensong and were asleep in the bushes. Only in places did timid little stars glide their light along granite rocks through this dark night, or somewhere in the valley, one could see through the thick glass the little subdued lights of some poor household. [...] Half asleep in the darkest corner of the carriage, I was musing about the Alps and about my Italian tour, for which I was making thousands and thousands of plans. (Ożarska 62-63)

The second, in which the traveller sympathises with a poor stranger, is labelled "pure imitation of Sterne":

Oh, do cry, thought I deep in my soul, do cry, poor you, with all the tears of your heart; you, who are at daybreak buried under black clouds which will not let you bask in parental sunshine! You, who are embarking on life along a thorny path; when your peers enjoy their mothers' caresses and smiles, only cold selfishness, perhaps pride or contempt, await you in this world [...] Lucky will you be to arouse pity! [...] Oh, what terrible misery it is to call a stranger's *pity* your *luck*! (Ożarska 64)

The passages may well be labelled sentimental, and thus illustrative of belated, clichéd sentimentality. But why does conventionalised sentimentalism prompt one to invoke the name of Sterne? If a poorly written account full of tears, solitary musings and emotional exclamations is enough to make us read a given passage as an example of *sternizm*, then we must realise the distance separating the work of Sterne and the "ism" coined after his name, or, more appropriately, the name of "Sterne who never existed", to repeat Peter de Voogd's apt remark.

Just as conventionalised sentimentality has been identified with "Sternean fashions", the figure of the sentimental traveller has been gradually deprived of the complexity with which Sterne endowed his Yorick. As I have argued elsewhere, Sterne's Yorick was a polyphonic character, oscillating between real life and fiction, sensibility and bawdiness, authenticity and playful irony (Lipski 185-198). Yorick's name has been frequently invoked with reference to Maria Wirtemberska's Malvina, who appears in *Malwina czyli Domyślność Serca* (1816; the English translation – *Malvina, or, The Heart's Intuition* – was published in 2001) and *Niektóre zdarzenia, myśli i uczucia doznane za granicą* (1816-1816). Indeed, Wirtemberska mentions Yorick's name herself, in a scene of alms-giving (Chapter XIV) clearly modeled on Sterne's analogical episode. That said, there is little in Wirtemberska's narrative that would corroborate the identification of Malvina with Yorick, all too often taken for granted. Alina Aleksandrowicz-Ulrich, a perceptive reader of Wirtemberska's work, underlined the limits of a "Sternean" reading of Malvina already in 1968. As she put it, "[Malvina] embodies a different type of sentimental traveller than Sterne's Yorick. She is indeed characterized by varying emotional states, but she lacks Yorick's complexity and ambiguity" (Aleksandrowicz-Ulrich 16).

I have not been trying to argue for Sterne's derivativeness and lack of originality, nor questioning his undeniable impact on English and Continental travel writing, especially in the final decades of the eighteenth century. As a matter of fact, by raising doubts about the two critical *topoi*, I aim to draw attention to the inherent limits of some of the popular binaries in literary criticism: convention versus innovation, originality versus derivativeness, novelty versus tradition. These tropes permeate critical discourse with a considerable frequency, but, more often than not, they tell much more about the critical standpoint rather than addressing the discussed texts themselves. Sterne's afterlife, especially his presence in travel writing studies, makes for particularly strong evidence showing that these binaries distort

rather than elucidate literary history. I have attempted to shed more light on this by discussing the limits of *sternizm* as a critical concept. *Sternizm*, when used without due attention devoted to Sterne himself, becomes a vague synonym for sentimentalism or Romantic irony; a qualifier highlighting a certain set of features distinguishing a given travelogue from the early eighteenth-century tradition. Sterne and his work need not be an essential part of this.

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