Best known today for the innovative satire and experimental narrative of *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67), Laurence Sterne was no less famous in his time for *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), an iconic text of the sensibility vogue and a pioneering novel of consciousness, and for his controversial sermons. Born in Ireland in 1713, Sterne spent much of his life as an obscure and professionally thwarted clergyman in rural Yorkshire. But he brilliantly exploited the sensation achieved with the first instalment of *Tristram Shandy*, to become, by his death in 1768, a fashionable celebrity across Europe. His subsequent influence on a range of important literary movements and modes, from German romanticism to the postmodern novel, has been pervasive. This Companion is the first collection of essays to analyse the full range of Sterne’s published output, including *A Political Romance* and *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, in its historical and cultural context. Specially commissioned chapters by leading scholars provide an authoritative and accessible guide to Sterne’s writings, their entanglement with traditions of satire and the novel, their religious, philosophical, and scientific backgrounds, their play on gender and national identity, their disruptions of print and visual culture, and their surprising creative afterlives in modernist and postcolonial fiction. Including a detailed chronology and guide to further reading, *The Cambridge Companion to Laurence Sterne* offers a comprehensive new account of Sterne’s life and work.
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CHRISTOPHER FANNING is Associate Professor of English at Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario. He has published a series of essays about Sterne in his cultural and generic contexts (Scriblerian satire, the encyclopaedia, print culture, the sermon) in Eighteenth-Century Fiction, Modern Philology, Philological Quarterly, and elsewhere. He has also written on Mary Barber and Jonathan Swift.

ROBERT FOLKENFLIK’s publications on eighteenth-century narratives include Samuel Johnson, Biographer (1978), The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation (1993), editions of Tristram Shandy, Swift’s Tale of a Tub and Smollett’s Sir Launcelot Greaves, and numerous essays about the novel genre. He is Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Irvine.

ELIZABETH W. HARRIES recently retired as Helen and Laura Shedd Professor of Modern Languages at Smith College, and is now at work on a study of narrative framing. Her book The Unfinished Manner: Essays on the Fragment in the Later Eighteenth Century came out in 1994, followed by Twice upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale (2001).

JUDITH HAWLEY, Professor of English at Royal Holloway, University of London, is general editor of the Pickering & Chatto series Literature and Science, 1660–1834 (2003–4). She has written extensively about Sterne, bluestocking feminism, and other topics in the eighteenth-century and romantic period, and is currently working on a group biography of the Scriblerus Club.

THOMAS KEYMER is Chancellor Jackman Professor of English at the University of Toronto. His books include Sterne, the Moderns, and the Novel (2002), Pamela in the Marketplace (with Peter Sabor, 2005), and the Oxford World’s Classics editions of Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe and Johnson’s Rasselas. He co-edits Review of English Studies, and is co-general editor of The Cambridge Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Samuel Richardson.

MELVYN NEW is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Florida, and general editor of the Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne. His recent
**List of Contributors**


**Tim Parnell** is Lecturer in English at Goldsmiths’ College, University of London. He has edited *Tristram Shandy* (2000) and *A Sentimental Journey and Other Writings* (2003), and is co-editor, with J. A. Downie, of *Constructing Christopher Marlowe* (2000). His *Laurence Sterne: A Literary Life* is forthcoming from Palgrave Macmillan.


**Peter de Voogd**, Emeritus Professor of English Literature at the University of Utrecht, is founding editor of the *Shandean* and a former president of the International Association of Word & Image Studies. His publications include co-edited volumes on *Laurence Sterne in Modernism and Postmodernism* (1995), *The Reception of Laurence Sterne in Europe* (2004), and, with Melvyn New, the forthcoming *Letters of Laurence Sterne* in the Florida edition.

**Marcus Walsh** is Kenneth Allott Professor of English Literature at the University of Liverpool. He has edited, with Karina Williamson, *The Poetical Works of Christopher Smart* (1980–96), and has written widely on Smart, Swift, Johnson, and Sterne, on the history and theory of editing, and on biblical interpretation and scholarship. His *Shakespeare, Milton, and Eighteenth-Century Literary Editing* was published in 1997, and he is currently editing *A Tale of a Tub*.

**Carol Watts** is Reader in Literature and Poetics in the School of English and Humanities, Birkbeck, University of London. She is the author of *Dorothy Richardson* (1993) and *The Cultural Work of Empire: The Seven Years’ War and the Imagining of the Shandean State* (2007), and has also written extensively on poetics and film. Her publications as a poet include *brass, running* (2006).


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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A rich and energetic tradition of writing about Sterne reaches back into the eighteenth century, and we collectively thank the many scholars whose work is built on or bounced off in the chapters below. The editor is grateful to all contributors to the volume for their collegial participation and spirit, and especially to Tim Parnell for his good counsel. Thanks also to the anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press for their advice on the volume proposal, to Mario Giovane and Erin Parker for their assistance in preparing the manuscript for production, and to Linda Bree and her publishing colleagues for their expert guidance throughout.
CHRONOLOGY

1713 (24 November) Born in Clonmel, County Tipperary, the second of seven children of Roger Sterne, an impoverished army ensign, and his wife Agnes; spends peripatetic childhood with spells in Yorkshire, Dublin, and garrison towns in England and Ireland.

1723–4 Sent to live under the protection of his wealthy uncle Richard Sterne of Woodhouse, Yorkshire; attends grammar school at Hipperholme, near Halifax, where he probably boards.

1731 (31 July) Roger Sterne dies at Port Antonio, Jamaica, probably of malaria, shortly after his promotion to lieutenant.

1733 (November) Enters Jesus College, Cambridge, as a sizar (student subsidised by his college in return for menial services); suffers serious pulmonary haemorrhage during undergraduate years.

1737 (January) Graduates as Bachelor of Arts; (March) ordained as a deacon and appointed assistant curate in St Ives, Huntingdonshire.

1738 (February) Becomes assistant curate in Catton, Yorkshire; (August) ordained as a priest and, through the influence of his uncle, Jaques Sterne, a senior churchman, inducted as vicar of Sutton-on-the-Forest, Yorkshire.

1740 (July) Returns to Cambridge to receive Master of Arts degree.

1741 (January) Installed in York Minster as prebendary of Givendale; (30 March) marries Elizabeth Lumley (1714–73). At the behest of Jaques Sterne, writes an uncertain quantity of political journalism for the York Gazetteer, a Whig newspaper, and publishes a pro-Walpole election address, ‘Query upon Query’ (27 October), in the opposition York Courant.
1742  (January) Installed in York Minster as prebendary of North Newbald, a more lucrative preferment than Givendale; (July) breaks with Jacques Sterne and announces his withdrawal from factional writing (though later items have been attributed to him).

1743  (July) LS’s poem ‘The Unknown World’ published in the Gentleman’s Magazine.

1744  (March) Acquires a second living as vicar of Stillington, a parish adjoining Sutton, through his wife’s influence; (November) acquires the Tindal Farm and adjacent land in Sutton, which he and Elizabeth manage with limited success until 1758.

1745  (1 October) Birth of LS’s first daughter, Lydia, who dies within a day; other children may have died in infancy.

1745–6  Probably active again as a political writer during the Jacobite rebellion, as author of an anti-Catholic polemic in the York Journal (1 July 1746) and other items of uncertain attribution.

1747  (Good Friday) The Case of Elijah and the Widow of Zerephath preached as a charity sermon in St Michael-le-Belfry, York, and published shortly afterwards in York and London; (1 December) birth of a second daughter, Lydia (1747–80).

1750  (July) The Abuses of Conscience preached as an assize sermon at York Minster and published in York; (December) receives minor preferment from Lord Fauconberg as commissary of the Peculiar Jurisdiction of Alne and Tollerton.

1751  (July) Preferred by John Fountayne, a Cambridge acquaintance recently appointed Dean of York, to the commissaryship of the Peculiar Court of Pickering and Pocklington. Agnes Sterne committed to gaol for debt at about this time; she continues to harass and embarrass her son until her death in York (May 1759).

1756  Acquires land as a result of the Sutton Enclosure Act, but does not gain legal possession until 1762.

1758  (December) Abandons the agricultural venture and leases Tindal Farm to tenants; Elizabeth Sterne suffers mental breakdown at about this time.

1759  (January) A Political Romance, satirising Dean Fountayne’s adversaries, published in York but withdrawn and destroyed.
under pressure from the Archbishop; only six copies now known to survive. Starts work on early drafts of *Tristram Shandy*, probably including the ‘Rabelaisian Fragment’, and contacts the London publisher Robert Dodsley; (December) *Tristram Shandy*, volumes 1 and 2, published in York.

1760

(March) Arrives in London and is lionised by metropolitan society; (April) second edition of *Tristram Shandy*, volumes 1 and 2, published in London by Robert and James Dodsley; (May) *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, volumes 1 and 2, published by the Dodsleys with a prestigious list of subscribers; (May) returns to Yorkshire to take up the living of Coxwold (which becomes his Yorkshire home – ‘Shandy Hall’) thanks to Fauconberg’s patronage; (December) returns to London to see continuation of *Tristram Shandy* through the press.

1761

(January) *Tristram Shandy*, volumes 3 and 4, published by the Dodsleys; Sterne remains in London for six months, retiring to Coxwold (June) to resume *Tristram Shandy*, and returning to London (December) to see volumes 5 and 6 through the press with new publishers, Becket and Dehondt.

1762

(January) Travels to Paris, where he is welcomed into leading social and intellectual circles, but suffers another pulmonary haemorrhage; (July) joined in Paris by Elizabeth and Lydia, and the family heads south to spend the winter in Toulouse.

1763

Remains in the south of France, in fluctuating health, and the family settles in Montpellier for the winter.

1764

Returns alone to England via Paris, where (March) he preaches in the British ambassador’s chapel before David Hume; moves back to Yorkshire for the summer, in poor health and financial trouble, to continue *Tristram Shandy*.

1765

(January) *Tristram Shandy*, volumes 7 and 8, published by Becket and Dehondt; remains in London for the winter, promoting the novels and drumming up subscriptions for further volumes of *Sermons*: (May) returns to Yorkshire, where he suffers another consumptive attack; (October) embarks on a second continental tour, crossing the Alps to visit Turin, Milan, Florence, and Rome in November and December.
1766 (January) Reaches Naples, where he stays until March; (April) Sermons, volumes 3 and 4, published by Becket and Dehondt; (June) returns via London to Coxwold.

1767 (January) A solitary ninth volume of Tristram Shandy is published by Becket and Dehondt; conducts a sentimental liaison in London with Eliza Draper (1744–78), the wife of an East India Company official; (April) Eliza’s return to India prompts him to address to her his ‘Bramine’s Journal’, the later part of which survives as the Journal to Eliza or Continuation of the Bramine’s Journal; (May) returns to Coxwold, in ill health, to write A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy, where (October) Elizabeth and Lydia rejoin him.

1768 (January) Returns to London, dangerously ill, with volumes 1 and 2 of A Sentimental Journey, which Becket and Dehondt publish in February; (18 March) dies of consumption in his Old Bond Street lodgings, and is buried (22 March) at St George’s, Hanover Square, before being reinterred in an outlying cemetery. His corpse is stolen, recognised on a Cambridge dissecting table by anatomy students, and quietly reburied in London.

1769 (June) Sermons, volumes 5 and 7, published by Becket; Elizabeth and Lydia return to France, where (1772) Lydia marries Jean-Baptiste-Alexandre-Anne Médalle.

1773 Letters from Yorick to Eliza published, apparently on Eliza Draper’s authority, containing ten letters predating her return to Bombay.

1775 (October) Lydia Médalle travels to London to publish, with Becket, Letters to the Late Rev. Mr. Laurence Sterne, To His Most Intimate Friends; these volumes include LS’s incomplete ‘Memoirs’, ‘An Impromptu’, and an expurgated text of the ‘Rabelaisian Fragment’.

1904 First publication of the Journal to Eliza, in Wilbur Cross’s edition of LS’s Works.

1969 (8 June) Reburial of LS’s remains in the churchyard at Coxwold following redevelopment of the St George’s, Hanover Square, burial ground.
ABBREVIATIONS


PR  A Political Romance, intr. Kenneth Monkman (Menston: Scolar Press, 1971)


Sermons  The Sermons of Laurence Sterne, ed. Melvyn New (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1996) (references are to the sermon number, followed by the page number in the Florida edition; thus ‘Sermons 23.214’ refers to sermon no. 23, p. 214)


TS  The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman: The Text, eds. Melvyn New and Joan New (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1978) (references are to Sterne’s original volume and chapter numbers, followed by the page number in the Florida edition: thus ‘TS 5.16.446’ refers to vol. 5, ch. 16 in the original, p. 446 in the Florida edition)