

A Critical Edition of Isaac Brandon's *Fragments: In the Manner of Sterne* (1797)

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Isaac Brandon's *Fragments: In the Manner of Sterne* (1797) is a collection of nine sentimental stories or "fragments" that imitate the distinctive style of Laurence Sterne, renowned author of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* and *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*. Published almost thirty years after Sterne's death, this volume, commercially and critically successful in its time, demonstrates the importance of adaptation and appropriation in the print marketplace during the late eighteenth century. For my practicum project, I prepared a scholarly edition of this representative, albeit overlooked, book. I edited, transcribed, and annotated three of Brandon's stories and provided an introduction to the entire collection, situating the volume in its publication and reception contexts.

Designed to meet the needs of modern readers while preserving the essence of the original, my critical edition includes minor adjustments, annotations, and a note on the text. I used the text of the first edition as my copytext, standardizing a small number of typographical irregularities. The Leipzig reprint of *Fragments* is unauthoritative and did not influence my edition, and the second edition introduces some slight changes, to all appearances errors of the press. My annotations involve definitions, source materials, and points of historical and cultural detail. I devote several explanatory notes to Brandon's adaptations of and borrowings from important passages in Sterne's novels. Also included in my edition are two sentimental engravings from the volume, a reminder that adaptation in the print marketplace takes many forms.

In my introduction, I consider *Fragments* in relation to its publication, reception, and literary contexts. Drawing on a wide range of historical sources, I explore the unusually positive response to the volume. Sterne's celebrity generated an unprecedented appetite for adaptations, appropriations, and continuations, but these imitations were often poorly received by the public. In contrast, *Fragments* was generally considered to be the best imitation of the late eighteenth century, and its critical success occasioned the production of a second, more affordable edition. I also consider the complicated attribution history of the volume. Despite the lack of conclusive evidence, it has been standard to attribute *Fragments* to William Combe, another Sterne imitator. Consulting extant copies and library records, newspapers and magazines, personal archives, and bibliographic studies of the nineteenth century, I demonstrate Brandon's claim to *Fragments* and settle the question of attribution. Brandon's connections to the book trade feature prominently: correspondence between Brandon and John Murray II (publisher of Jane Austen and Lord Byron, among others) conclusively proves Brandon's authorship. My introduction closes with literary commentary, in which I connect the collection to Whig politics of the 1790s.