Sterne’s Political Writings, 1741–1742

Our texts are based on single copies of newspapers or broadsides, with the exception of “Query upon Query,” where collation of multiple copies took place, as explained in the annotations. We have made several silent changes in formatting, regularizing the appearance of letters and their closings, omitting running marginal quotation marks, and normalizing punctuation after italics, where the printed versions are inconsistent. Decorative initial letters (drop capitals) and display capitals have also been normalized. All other emendations have been footnoted.

1. Broadside of August 31, 1741

A Paragraph taken from the York Courant, June 9th 1741.

YORK June 9th 1741.

Yesterday in the Afternoon before a very numerous Body of Citizens collected for that Purpose, was launch'd a new Keel belonging to the Famous John Garbut, well known in this City by the Name of General Garbut, and named the Kaye and Wentworth. It is to go upon the Coal Trade chiefly; And it is to be hoped that all the Honest Citizens will ever remember both the Name of the Vessel and the great Services done to the Publick by the Master of it, at the last Election.

From the York Gazetteer, June 16th 1741.

YORK, June 16th 1741.

The great Sense of Gratitude express’d in the last Week’s Courant, for the Services which Garbut had done the Public at the late Election for the City, has given Rise, to the following Queries, which are seriously address’d to the unprejudiced.

1st. Query. Whether, in Foro Conscientiae, there are not many kinds of Bribery besides That, of giving Money? If so, Whether Those who Caress and pay public Court to such a Fellow as Garbut, for the Services he has done them, are not guilty of one of the lowest and most infamous Species of it?
2d. Query. Whether Elections ought not by our Laws to be Free, unawed and undisturbed? If so, Whether a Person who raised and headed Tumults to perplex and prolong them, and was distinguished for Nothing but a riotous, insulting Behaviour,\(^6\) deserves either Thanks or Recompence, from any but Those, who are Enemies to the Constitution, and consequently to their King and Country.

3d. Query. Whether Those who can stoop to work with so low a Tool as Garbut, and when the Work is over can still stoop lower to Thank and Flatter him, have not let fall’n the Mask of Patriotism\(^7\) and discovered under it, more of the Spirit of Slavery than Liberty?

If these Querys should be answer’d to the disadvantage of the Author of the Paragraph in the Courant (as they must be, by every cool and impartial Man)

4th Query. Whether the Author of the said Paragraph from his many clumsy Attempts at Wit, and this last Instance of his surprizing Genius both for History and Politicks, has not left it a disputable Point in which of the Three he deserves most Contempt?

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YORK, August 31st 1741.

On Saturday last the famous John Garbut, well known in this City by the Name of General Garbut, Master of a New Keel called the Kaye and Wentworth, who was lately so much extolled in the York Courant for the Services he had done the Public, was apprehended at Selby, and committed to York-Castle for returning from Transportation, which is Felony without Benefit of the Clergy.\(^8\)

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2. “Query upon Query,” York Courant, October 27, 1741\(^9\)

The following Letter was sent on Thursday Night last to the Printer of this Paper, by the Friends of Cholmley Turner, Esq; and is inserted at their Desire.\(^10\)

To J. S. at Leeds.

SIR,

There will need little Apology for a Repulse to the rude Attack made
upon the Character and Conduct of one of our worthy Candidates, in a Letter which you have sign'd J. S. and inserted in the last York Courant;\(^\text{11}\) I would not doubt but the same Candour and Goodness of Disposition which before tempted You to take Pen in Hand, in Opposition to any Talent you had for such a Work, to rescue Mr Fox from a false Aspersion, (as you call'd it)\(^\text{12}\) will in so tender a Case as this, come in again to your Succour, and not only dispose you to bear a Reply, but even wish for one, however it may expose you to Ridicule or Contempt.\(^\text{13}\)

And now, Sir, to avoid the Trouble of transcribing You, You must be content to let me reduce almost the first Column of your Letter into a very little Room, which may be easily done, without any way endangering one Jot of the Meaning. Upon casting up the three first Paragraphs, the Sense Total amounts just to this single Proposition, “That last April Mr Turner (as appears by Letter) had resigned all Thoughts of acting in a publick Station; but, that at the Solicitations of his Friends, upon Lord Morpeth’s Death, He had altered his Intentions, which if He had not done, the Country had been at Peace, and there had been no contested Election.”\(^\text{14}\) A most admirable and important Conclusion! You have been pleased, Sir, to inform us, that before any Offer was made to Mr Turner, every Person of Figure had given an absolute Refusal;\(^\text{15}\) And if He had likewise refused—What then? Why then every Body had refused; and unless two Candidates had offer’d themselves, there could have been no such Thing as a controverted Election.\(^\text{16}\) I readily confess that had a Discovery of so profound a Nature happen’d to be made in a Neighbouring Island,\(^\text{17}\) it seems so curiously adapted to the Taste and Genius of that Nation, that past Doubt it would have been thought of singular Benefit to the Publick, and at once have been a ready Cut\(^\text{18}\) both to your Fortune and Reputation: But alas! Sir, it is a Discovery unluckily miscalculated for an English Meridian; ’tis so many Degrees either above or below our Researches, that it is quite lost upon us. But the worst Part of the Story is yet untold, which is this, “That if Mr Turner had not declared Himself a Candidate at this Time, His Actions now would not have been scannd over and censured: At this Juncure He might have escaped the merciless Fury of J. S.’s Pen.

Indeed, Mr. J. S. I know not how high your Vanity may rate a Deliverance of this Nature, but I have been at some Pains in making a Calculation of the real Damage which Mr Turner may be supposed to have

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\(^\text{11}\) York Courant
\(^\text{12}\) J. S.
\(^\text{13}\) Ridicule or Contempt
\(^\text{14}\) April
\(^\text{15}\) Offer was made to Mr Turner
\(^\text{16}\) Discovery of so profound a Nature
\(^\text{17}\) Neighbouring Island
\(^\text{18}\) Cut
sustain’d by it, and upon the nicest Estimate it appears, That the different Effects of your Censure or Applause, upon Mr Turner’s Character, are so undistinguishable, that even so small a Thing as your own HUMILITY would be able to turn the Balance either Way.

Your Fourth Paragraph, which, to do it Justice, is the most elaborate, surprizes us with a fresh Set of Discoveries. You inform us, “That if Mr Turner gave no Votes contrary to the publick Welfare, that then His Time has been spent in the Service of his Country; but if on the contrary He acted in Opposition to the general Sense of the Nation, Then He could not be said faithfully to have discharged his Trust.” I fancy the Meaning of this mysterious Assertion converted into plain English amounts to no more than this, That if Mr Turner acted well, He acted well; and, vice versâ, If He acted wrong, He certainly acted wrong. This Specimen of your Casuistry, and the Paradox subjoined to it, “That Age, and consequently a Knowledge in Parliamentary Affairs, is a Disqualification for a British Member;” As the First is supported with great Logic, I know not how to venture a Reply; and as the Second is grounded upon false Suggestions I think it does not deserve one.

The Paragraph preceeding your Queries is so full of Secret History, a Kind of Learning in which Honest Men are seldom well versed, and rarely ever lay much Stress on, that ’till You are pleased to re-publish it with proper Vouchers for every Fact You assert, with a Key subjoin’d to explain the Whole, I cannot well tell what to say to it. In the mean Time, Sir, permit me to rest here a Moment, whilst I make a Reflection, which is this, That the throwing out of random Accusations upon a whole Body of Men without the least Proof, the least Shadow of Evidence, is a Piece of Injustice and Barbarity ill agreeing with that Spirit of Meekness and Charity which should be the Characteristic of a Teacher of Truth.

I have now, Sir, waded through your Letter, and with some Difficulty am at last arrived at your Queries, and indeed, I wish I could either compliment You or Myself with acknowledging, that I have found any Thing in them to justify my Labour. I fancy the following Set of new Queries will save me the Trouble of answering yours one by one; a plain and honest Answer to each of mine, will naturally direct You to the true Solution of your own.

Query I. Whether the Convention, which the Querist is so full of, is any Thing else in his Mouth, (whatever it is in others) but a Cant Word,
adopted without Meaning, and eccho’d out amongst the People to in-flame and abuse them?26

Q. II. If the Ministry had taken no Steps towards a Peace, and had proceeded to the War with Spain before they had ever attempted to treat, Whether their Enemies could have wish’d a more popular Cry against them?

Q. III. Whether it is not both the Interest and Study of the Minority, and the Instruments which they employ, to blacken the Administration at all Hazards, both for doing or not doing the same Thing?

Q. IV. If the Triennial Bill had stood its Ground when Mr Turner voted for the Repeal of it, whether the Triennial Commoctions of the Populace consequent upon it, would not have favour’d the Designs of the Enemies to the Hanover Succession, and thereby have given new Hopes and Vigour to the Spirit of Jacobitism?27

Q. V. Whether Numbers of the Tories did not vote against the Repeal of that Bill upon that very Motive?

Q. VI. Whether most, if not all, the Gentlemen in the Opposition, however changed, did not actually vote for the Repeal of it?28

Q. VII. Whether Mr Turner, in voting against the Repeal of the Septennial Bill, did any Thing more than act consistently with Himself?29

Q. VIII. Whether the Querist, by a numerous standing Army, does not intend such an Army as is necessary to check the Fury of the People spirited up to any Enterprize by Party-Artifices and false Clamours?

Q. IX. Whether Mr Turner was ever for any Vote of Credit which was not absolutely necessary for the Safety and Honour of his Country?

Q. X. Whether Mr Turner’s Service and Regard for the Sailors was ever made a Query of before?

Q. XI. Whether the Leading Men of that Party which brought in the Place-Bill, secretly wish’d it any Success? or whether They did not bring it in, on Purpose to throw it out, to reinforce their defeated Cause with a Topic for Declamation at the approaching General Election?

Q. XII. Whether a Majority of those Gentlemen did not wish in their Hearts for the very Places against which They affected to vote?

Q. XIII. Whether Mr Fox’s Tenants upon his fine Estate in Ireland, will not be enabled to make him both greater and more punctual Remittances, on Condition that they be permitted to sell their Wooll to France? If so,