

The Two "Publics" of Thomas Bridges's *Adventures of a Bank-Note*
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One of the ways that social relationships were reshaped in the wake of the financial revolution of the eighteenth century was through the increased use of bank notes instead of bullion for transactions. While, at the beginning of the century, bank notes were generally restricted to businessmen and traders, by the end of the century, smaller notes were issued and more people used these in daily transactions. Two overlapping "publics," one which circulates the bank note and one which comes together through literacy in a print market, is evidenced by the publication of Thomas Bridges's *Adventures of a Bank-Note* (1770), which personifies the bank note as the main character with human sensibilities who interacts with seemingly random people as he changes hands and pocketbooks. The "character" of the bank note is intelligible insofar as he links together a motley set of people through his so-called adventures.

This pseudo-novel personifies the very thing that depersonalizes people in a public credit system: the bank note. Through the bank note, one's trust shifts from the person with whom one exchanges to the institution that issues the note (and, increasingly, the state that supports said institution). And yet, the bank note also has a "character" of its own -- at least according to Bridges. In one way, the novel, or what one critic refers to as an "objectnarrative," resembles contemporary works such as Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67). It comes, then, as no surprise to the reader when "Tristram Shandy" himself later appears as a character. *Adventures* is written with an intertextuality that not only allows readers to imagine other people as potential partners of transaction in the English public credit system, but also potential fellow readers in a virtual public sphere.

By focusing on this text, I plan to discuss the way the English public credit system emerged concurrently with rise of the literary public sphere. I'll suggest that the imagination of a "public" as such (and not merely tidy double-entry book-keeping) is ultimately the ground for a modern credit system. And, what is more, this imaginary public gets reinforced through the rise of literary fiction in the eighteenth-century.