A Sentimental Journey

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LAURENCE STERNE

Laurence Stern was born in 1713 in Clonmel, a town in County Tipperary, Ireland. He earned a BA in 1737 and an MA in 1740 from Jesus College, Cambridge, in England. Between earning his two degrees, he became an Anglican priest. He subsequently served as a priest in various parishes in Yorkshire, England. In 1759, he published his first novel, *A Political Romance*, which satirized English church politics and was immediately censored. Later that same year, he published the first two volumes of his most famous novel, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, celebrated for its experimental, rambling style and bawdy humor. Subsequent volumes of *Tristram Shandy*—there are nine in all—were published in 1761, 1765, and 1767. In 1762-1763 Sterne traveled through France, and in 1765 he toured France and Italy, journeys that partially inspired his satirical and sentimental travelogue, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick* (commonly known by the shorter title *A Sentimental Journey*). Despite being married to another woman, he began an intense flirtation with Mrs. Elizabeth (Eliza) Draper in 1767. In February 1768, he published the first two volumes of *A Sentimental Journey*, in which the narrator makes several direct references to a beloved "Eliza." He died a month later.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

From 1756 to 1763, England and France were fighting one another in the Seven Years' War. In 1756, England allied with Prussia, while France allied with Austria. As Prussia and Austria were fighting over a territory called Silesia, these new alliances brought England and France into armed conflict in Europe. At roughly the same time, from 1754 to 1763, English and French colonists were fighting the French and Indian War in the North American colonies. Thus, when Laurence Sterne traveled from England to France in 1762, the two countries were at war on multiple fronts. Though published in 1768, after the war ended, *A Sentimental Journey* seems to take place during the war as well: early in Volume II, the narrator—Mr. Yorick—mentions that he had forgotten England and France were at war when making his travel plans, which is why he's nearly arrested for not bringing a passport. In addition to mentioning the Seven Years' War, *A Sentimental Journey* briefly alludes to the 18th-century debate over whether England should outlaw slavery. Though England did not fully outlaw slavery until 1833, Sterne publicly sympathized with the abolitionist movement, as Mr. Yorick's descriptions of the horrors of captivity and slavery in *A Sentimental Journey* Volume II make clear.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Laurence Sterne is famous as a bawdy humorist and a formal innovator of the novel. Like *A Sentimental Journey*, Sterne's more famous novel, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentlemen*, displays his penchant for dirty jokes, double meanings, and digressive anecdotes. Several characters from *Tristram Shandy* also make appearances in *A Sentimental Journey*, including *A Sentimental Journey*'s narrator, Mr. Yorick—whose name comes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where Yorick is the (now deceased) jester of the former king of Denmark. The character Mr. Yorick also serves as the pseudonymous author of Sterne's own homilies in *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, published in four volumes (1760 and 1766). Sterne loved and was inspired by a much earlier bawdy humorist, François Rabelais, a 16th-century French writer most famous for *The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel*, a risqué and satirical series of books about a father and son, both giants. One of Sterne's contemporaries, Tobias Smollett, negatively inspired Sterne by writing *Travels through France and Italy* (1766), a xenophobic nonfiction travelogue. Scholars believe that Sterne is satirizing Smollett's work throughout *A Sentimental Journey* and that the character Smelfungus is a mocking portrait of Smollett. Finally, Sterne inspired other writers in turn; for example, the twentieth-century Russian literary theorist and novelist Viktor Shklovsky named his early work *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs, 1917-1922* (1923) as an homage to Sterne.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick
- **When Written:** 1767
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 1768
- **Literary Period:** The Age of Sensibility
- **Genre:** Novel, Satire, Sentimental Fiction, Travelogue
- **Setting:** France
- **Climax:** Yorick becomes sick of French society and decides to leave for Italy
- **Antagonist:** Xenophobia
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Eliza. In 1773, after Laurence Sterne's death, letters he wrote to Mrs. Elizabeth (Eliza) Draper were published under the title

Letters from Yorick to Eliza.

The Big Screen. The 2005 comedy *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story* represents actors attempting to shoot a film adaptation of Laurence Sterne's novel *The Life and Times of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. It was directed by Michael Winterbottom and stars Steve Coogan, Rob Brydon, Gillian Anderson, and Naomie Harris.

PLOT SUMMARY

An English priest named Yorick, deciding to travel to France, packs and sails for Calais. In Calais, a Franciscan monk begs Yorick for alms. Yorick cruelly rebuffs him. After the monk leaves, Yorick regrets his cruelty and resolves to let his trip teach him to be a better person.

Yorick visits a carriage-yard to buy a carriage. There, he sees the monk speaking to a lady (later revealed to be Madame L—). Retreating, Yorick crosses paths with Monsieur Dessein, a hotel-owner and proprietor of the carriage-yard, who offers to show him some carriages. Shortly after, Yorick bumps into Madame L—, offers her his hand, and follows Monsieur Dessein to the carriage-house with her. Believing he sees suffering on her face, Yorick develops a crush on Madame L— and wishes to do something good for her. When they reach the carriage-house, Monsieur Dessein realizes he has the wrong key and goes to fetch the right one, leaving Yorick and Madame L— alone. The monk approaches them. Yorick apologizes for his earlier behavior and offers the monk his **snuff-box**. The monk and Yorick exchange snuff-boxes as a gesture of friendship, and the monk departs.

Yorick wants to offer to travel with Madame L— in a two-person carriage, but he worries people may infer an inappropriate sexual relationship between them. Monsieur Dessein returns with the right key, but a servant calls him away. Alone again, Yorick and Madame L— chat awkwardly about French men and flirtation. Then Monsieur Dessein comes back and tells Madame L— her brother has arrived at the hotel. As Madame L— is leaving, Yorick mentions that her brother's arrival has spoiled a proposal he wanted to make her; she replies that she guesses what the proposal is and that if her brother had not arrived, she would have accepted.

Yorick buys a carriage and rides to Montriul, where he hires a servant, a young man named La Fleur with no useful skills. Yorick and La Fleur travel on to Amiens, where Yorick sees Madame L— riding by in her brother's coach. Later, Madame L— sends Yorick a letter asking him to deliver another letter to Madame de R— in Paris and inviting him to visit her sometime in Brussels. Recalling that he has sworn faithfulness to Eliza back in England, Yorick vows not to visit Brussels without her. By a series of coincidences, La Fleur ends up running into Madame L—, who asks him whether he has a letter from Yorick for her. La Fleur, embarrassed, runs back to Yorick and convinces him to copy a love letter La Fleur has on hand so that La Fleur can give something to Madame L—. Unable to think up a letter of his own on the spot, Yorick goes along with La Fleur's plan and copies the letter. Then he and La Fleur leave for Paris.

In Paris, Yorick decides to visit the Opera comique and enters a shop to ask an attractive grisset (a term for a young French woman, generally of the working class) for directions. Though she repeats the directions several times, Yorick forgets them as soon as he leaves and returns to ask again. While there, Yorick mentions that the grisset must have an excellent pulse, since she has a good heart, and he lays his fingers on her wrist. The grisset's husband walks in, bows to Yorick, and leaves. Yorick is shocked by his behavior. A little later, he buys some gloves from the grisset and departs.

Yorick finds the Opera comique, where he shares a box with an old French soldier. In the standing section, they see a tall German man blocking the view of a dwarf and refusing to move. The old French soldier summons an opera employee to deal with the German. Yorick applauds him. Later, they chat; the soldier tells Yorick that all nations have good and bad aspects and that travel is good because it helps people learn about and love one another. Yorick heartily approves of the sentiment.

Walking home from the Opera, Yorick pops into a bookstore to buy some Shakespeare. The bookseller refuses to sell him the Shakespeare in the store, which belongs to Count de B****, who is having it bound. The bookseller mentions that Count de B**** is an Anglophile. A chambermaid comes into the store to buy a book; Yorick leaves the store with her, advises her against falling in love, and gives her a crown coin. When she mentions she works for Madame de R—, Yorick tells her he has a letter for her employer and says he'll visit the next day.

When Yorick returns to his hotel, La Fleur tells him the French police have come looking for him because he doesn't have a passport. Initially, Yorick blows off his potential trouble with the law. Then he overhears a caged **starling** in a hotel hallway repeating the phrase "I can't get out," which reminds Yorick of the horrors of incarceration and slavery. The next morning, Yorick rides to Versailles to visit a French official who could get him a passport. As the official is busy, Yorick decides to visit and beg for help from Count de B**** instead.

Yorick finds Count de B**** reading Shakespeare. He tells Count de B**** that, although they don't know each other, Yorick is relying on his fellow Englishman, Shakespeare, to introduce them. Count de B**** asks Yorick's name, and Yorick points to the name Yorick (the former king's dead jester) in *Hamlet*. Count de B**** pockets the play and leaves the room. A few hours later, Count de B**** returns with a passport. He tells Yorick that he could only have gotten a passport so quickly for a jester.

Yorick goes back to his hotel room, where the chambermaid is waiting for him to ask whether he has a letter for Madame de R—. He and the chambermaid end up sitting on the bed; helping her with a loose shoe strap, Yorick knocks her over and feels extreme sexual temptation, but he hustles her out of his room before anything happens.

Count de B**** introduces Yorick to various important people in Parisian society. After three weeks, Yorick gets sick of hobnobbing with them and decides to leave France for Italy. On the way, he decides to stop in Moulines to visit Maria, a young madwoman he heard about from a friend. He finds Maria in the countryside, cries with her, and walks her to Moulines; when they part, he thinks that if it weren't for his beloved Eliza, he would marry her.

Yorick's carriage is delayed on the way to Turin by a large stone in the road. Yorick stops at an inn for the night, where the innkeeper demands that Yorick share his room with a lady from Piedmont and her maid. Embarrassed at having to share a room for the night, Yorick and the lady talk through a series of rules they will follow to make the experience as painless as possible. Among the rules is that Yorick will not speak after they have gone to bed except to say his prayers. After they go to bed, however, Yorick tosses and turns so miserably that he ends up shouting, "O my God!" The lady scolds him. While making excuses for his outburst, the maid quietly enters the room, at which point Yorick ends up throwing out his arm and catching hold of her—(at this point, the story breaks off).

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Yorick (The Narrator) – Yorick, the protagonist and narrator, is an English priest. He is sentimental, humorous, and internally contradictory: both prudish and oversexed, both religious and skeptical of organized religion's hypocrisy. When the novel begins, he abruptly decides to travel to France. He leaves behind his beloved Eliza, to whom he has sworn to be faithful. When he first arrives in France, Yorick feels generous and open-minded but behaves rudely and xenophobically—he refuses to give alms to a Franciscan monk, harshly criticizes the monk's religious order, and claims that he (Yorick) has an obligation to give to his fellow Englishmen before giving to anyone else. Yorick regrets his rudeness, however; he later apologizes to the monk, exchanges **snuff-boxes** with him, and uses the monk's snuff-box to remind himself to improve personally over the course of his travels. Shortly after meeting the monk, Yorick also meets Madame de L—, a young Flemish traveler whose look of suffering tugs at his heartstrings. Despite having sworn faithfulness to Eliza, Yorick ends up in several flirtatious situations with Madame de L— and, later, with a Parisian grisset (a young woman), Madame R—'s chambermaid, and a young madwoman named Maria. These flirtations humorously reveal Yorick's unruly sexuality, which seems to underly much of his sentimental kindness to women, as well as his inconstancy, fickle mind, and fluid personal identity. In keeping with Yorick's fluid identity, his story ends on an inconclusive note. Though he seems to have become more open-minded toward foreigners after his encounter with the monk, he decides to leave France for Italy after suddenly getting sick of Parisians; and though he continually tries to avoid infidelity to Eliza, the story ends just as he entangles himself in yet another sexually fraught situation with a Piedmontese lady and her maid.

La Fleur – La Fleur is Yorick's French servant, whom Yorick hires in Montriul after having trouble handling his baggage by himself. Prior to working for Yorick, La Fleur served in the French army, where he learned to play the drum and the fife, and then went home, where he was unemployed. Though La Fleur has none of the skills that Yorick wants in a servant—he doesn't know how to shave Yorick or take care of Yorick's wig—Yorick appreciates La Fleur due to La Fleur's loyalty and positive, even-keeled attitude. La Fleur's name means "flower" in French, which hints at his vanity and his romantic nature. Yorick describes him as a "coxcomb," a man excessively concerned with his own appearance, and as they are taking their leave of Montriul, Yorick sees him kissing the hands of six different women and weeping. As Yorick largely approves of La Fleur's behavior, La Fleur serves to emphasize Yorick's loyalty to his friends, his sentimentality about women, and his self-indulgent sexuality. Later, La Fleur's romantic adventures in Paris—a brief liaison with a servant girl who he almost immediately discovers is unfaithful to him—serve as a kind of counterpoint or reinforcement for Yorick's Parisian flirtations with the grisset and Madame de R—'s chambermaid.

Madame de L— – Madame de L— is a young Flemish woman from Brussels who is about 26 years old and has tan skin and an "interesting" though not beautiful face. Yorick meets her in a coach-yard in Calais while trying to buy a carriage. He thinks she looks like a superior person and imagines, from her look of suffering, that she is a widow. Due to his overactive sentimentality and sexuality, he immediately develops a crush on her and decides to help her in some way. The owner of the coach-yard, Monsieur Dessein, keeps leaving Madame de L— and Yorick alone, which allows their flirtation to progress. Yorick is about to invite Madame de L— to travel with him in a two-person carriage, despite the risqué rumors such an arrangement might engender, when her brother arrives to travel with her. After Yorick and Madame de L— both leave Calais, they glimpse each other again at Amiens. Madame de L— sends Yorick a note asking him to deliver a letter to Madame de R— in Paris and inviting him to visit her in Brussels, where she promises to tell him her tale of suffering. Though initially her invitation delights Yorick, he recalls his romantic promises to

Eliza and resolves not to visit Brussels without her. As the first and most extended of Yorick's flirtations in France, Madame de L— serves to reveal Yorick's sentimentality about suffering women, his overactive sexuality, and his wavering faithfulness to Eliza.

Franciscan Monk (Father Lorenzo) – The Franciscan monk, whose name is later revealed to be Father Lorenzo, is a member of a Catholic religious order that takes a vow of poverty and relies on charity to support itself. Prior to becoming a monk at 45, he worked as a soldier and had a failed romantic affair. He begs alms of Yorick shortly after Yorick's arrival in Calais, France. Yorick rudely and xenophobically denies the monk, criticizes his religious order's vow of poverty, and claims that he (Yorick) has a duty to give to other English people before giving to foreigners. The monk's lack of anger and humble acceptance of Yorick's response make Yorick regret his rudeness and resolve to improve his manners. Shortly thereafter, the monk approaches Yorick in a carriage-yard—where Yorick is looking to buy a carriage—and offers him a **snuff-box**. Yorick tries to give the monk his own snuff-box as an apology; the monk denies that Yorick needs to apologize, and Yorick and the monk exchange snuff-boxes in a gesture of goodwill. Thereafter, Yorick uses the monk's snuff-box to remind himself to be more mannered and humane. The monk thus represents foreign travel's humanizing influence and religion's potentially admirable qualities. The next time Yorick passes through Calais, he learns the monk has died, visits his grave, and cries.

Count de B**** – Count de B**** is an Anglophile French aristocrat—he loves Shakespeare, English literature, and English people. Yorick first learns of the Count when he attempts to buy the Count's copy of Shakespeare's complete works, which the Count has sent to a Paris bookstore to be bound. After Yorick has gotten in trouble with the French police for traveling without a passport, he remembers the Count's fondness for English people and appeals to him for help. The Count not only obtains a passport for Yorick but also introduces him into Parisian high society. As an Anglophile Frenchman, the Count represents the humanizing effects of learning about other countries and caring about foreigners.

The Chambermaid – The chambermaid is a pretty young maid employed by Madame de R—, a Parisian lady to whom Yorick is supposed to deliver a letter from Madame de L—. Yorick first meets the chambermaid in a Parisian bookstore; he cautions her against falling in love, gives her a crown coin, and walks her partway home. Talking with her, he learns she works for Madame de R— and states his intention to visit her mistress in the morning. When he fails to keep the appointment, the chambermaid comes to his hotel room at Madame de R—'s request. In his hotel room, Yorick almost succumbs to the temptation to take sexual advantage of the chambermaid but eventually escorts her out instead. This episode reveals the potentially predatory nature of Yorick's overactive sex drive and his attention to women, which the novel for the most part treats as humorous.

Maria – Maria is a beautiful young "madwoman" who lives in the French countryside near Moulines. Yorick seeks her out after having heard about her from his friend Mr. Shandy (who encountered her in Laurence Sterne's other novel, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*). Though Yorick seems genuinely moved by Maria's suffering, his reaction to her also contains humorously overblown sentimentality—he keeps crying and mopping both their faces with his **handkerchief**—and sexuality. Thus, Maria betrays the mixture of genuine kindness, satirized sentiment, and base sexuality at play in Yorick's reactions to women.

Old French Soldier – Yorick meets the old French soldier at the Opera comique in Paris, where they share a box. When they see a tall German man blocking the view of a dwarf, the old French soldier convinces an opera employee to rectify the situation on the dwarf's behalf, which makes Yorick applaud. Later, when Yorick overhears members of the crowd yelling at a priest to keep his hands up while standing near some young women, the old French soldier explains the vulgar joke they are making, notes that all countries have good and bad points, and expounds on the value of learning about different kinds of people to grow in "mutual toleration" and "mutual love." Because of this cosmopolitan attitude, the old French soldier represents—like Count de B****—the value of learning about foreign countries and caring about foreign people.

Grisset – The grisset (a term for a young French woman of the working class) is a good-looking woman who works in a Paris shop. Yorick asks directions to the Opera comique from her, flirts with her, and takes her pulse under the pretense of proving that she has a good heart.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Monsieur Dessein – Monsieur Dessein owns the hotel where Yorick first stays in Calais, France and the coach-yard from which Yorick eventually buys a carriage. While selling Yorick a carriage, Monsieur Dessein keeps darting off and leaving Yorick alone with Madame de L—, which enables Yorick's flirtation with her.

Eliza – Eliza is Yorick's beloved back in England, to whom he has sworn to be faithful. Yorick brings a portrait of her on his travels, writes to her, and recalls her when he feels sexually interested in Madame de L— and Maria.

Lady – The 30-year-old lady from Piedmont travels with a maid and is forced to share a room with Yorick overnight when they both stop at an inn with only one room.

Eugenius – Eugenius is Yorick's friend, who tried to give Yorick additional money for his travels, which Yorick refused. Yorick writes to him from France and thinks of him as a kind of foil,

since Eugenius's common-sense contrasts with Yorick's own sentimentality and impulsivity.

Madame de R— – Madame de R— (also called Madame R***) is a woman living in Paris who employs a chambermaid and to whom Madame de L— asks Yorick to deliver a letter.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

SENTIMENTALITY

Throughout *A Sentimental Journey*, the author, Laurence Sterne, seems to satirize sentimentality by showing his characters emoting melodramatically over silly things. Both Yorick (the narrator) and the characters he meets frequently indulge in inappropriate, disproportionate emotional responses. Early in the novel, Yorick sees an abandoned one-person carriage called a *Desobligeant* in the coach-yard of the hotel-master Monsieur Dessein. Imagining a whole adventurous history for the carriage, Yorick works himself into an intense sympathy with the abandoned carriage and scolds Monsieur Dessein for not selling the carriage to another traveler. As carriages don't have feelings, Sterne is clearly mocking Yorick's overactive sympathy. A little later, Yorick meets a German traveler, whose sons have died of smallpox, weeping and mourning a death—not of his sons, but of a donkey he believed was his friend. Again, Sterne is clearly satirizing the German traveler's misplaced sentimentality, which leads him to mourn an animal while recounting the death of his own sons quite matter-of-factly. Incidents such as these—in which characters have comically intense emotional reactions to less important events while ignoring more important ones—recur throughout *A Sentimental Journey*.

Despite Sterne's satire of overblown sentiment, however, other moments in *A Sentimental Journey* suggest that emotion helps us understand the world. Indeed, at some moments, Yorick's sentimentality leads him to a truer understanding of the world. When Yorick realizes that the French police may imprison him for entering France without a **passport**, he at first minimizes the danger he is in, trying to convince himself that prison wouldn't be so bad. Shortly after, he encounters a caged **starling** that repeats the phrase "I can't get out." Yorick's intense sentimental reaction to the caged starling makes him realize how terrible imprisonment would be and motivates him to seek help with his passport. With his freedom threatened, Yorick also comes to a moral understanding of the evils of slavery. Thus, in *A Sentimental Journey*, Sterne satirizes overblown sentiment but illustrates how appropriate emotional responses can improve people's understanding of the world.

TRAVEL

In *A Sentimental Journey*, several characters argue that travel—specifically, encounters with foreigners—can improve people morally by helping them to meet, understand, and love those different from themselves. The book's narrator, the Englishman Yorick, improves this way during his travels in France. Yorick begins his travels in France by behaving rudely to someone unlike himself. When a Franciscan monk begs Yorick for alms, Yorick not only refuses to give him anything but criticizes his religious order's voluntary poverty. Yorick also betrays his prejudice against other nationalities, claiming that if he were going to give money to anyone, he would give it to other poor Englishmen first. Because the Franciscan monk responds with humility and resignation rather than anger, Yorick immediately regrets his rudeness. He later apologizes to the monk, and the two men exchange **snuff-boxes** as a gesture of friendship. At subsequent points in the novel, the monk's snuff-box reminds Yorick of the cosmopolitan virtues to which he aspires. Thus, *A Sentimental Journey* suggests that Yorick's encounter with a foreign monk really has improved him.

Yet not all the characters Yorick meets improve this way after meeting foreigners, which suggests that the result of such an encounter depends on the attitude a person brings to it. When Yorick is making the rounds of Parisian society, the people he meets only want him to reinforce their own identities and views: the Marquis de B**** just wants Yorick to suggest the Marquis is still a womanizer, Madame de Q*** just wants Yorick to listen to and approve of her wit, and so on. None of them care what they could learn from the foreigner, Yorick, in their midst. *A Sentimental Journey* thus illustrates that encounters with foreigners, which travel provides, can improve people morally—but only if they are open to change and new experiences.

SEXUALITY AND KINDNESS

Yorick, the narrator of *A Sentimental Journey*, at one point argues that "nature has so wove her web of kindness, that some threads of love and desire are entangled with the piece"—in other words, kindness often contains mixed motives involving romance and sex, which we cannot remove without damaging our instinct to be kind. The novel largely supports Yorick's argument—but it also suggests that sexual attraction can lead to unkindness in the form of predatory behavior and infidelity. On the one hand, Yorick tends to be kind to women, due to his sexually tinged esteem

for women in general. For example, he pays polite attention to Madame de L— and expresses interest in her suffering, he gives money and advice to Madame de R—'s chambermaid, and he wipes up the scorned madwoman Maria's tears when she seems in need of human contact and sympathy. These actions show how Yorick's sexual attraction to women makes him considerate toward them. Yet Yorick's sexual attraction to women also tempts him toward unkind, even predatory acts. For example, he narrowly resists taking advantage of Madame de R—'s chambermaid, a young woman of a lower social class who is only visiting him on an errand from her employer. Moreover, Yorick has promised his "eternal fidelity" to a woman named Eliza, a promise he seems in constant danger of breaking due to his sexual attraction to other women. In *A Sentimental Journey*, then, sexuality both motivates Yorick to kindness and tempts him to behave unkindly—it's a double-edged sword.

NATIONAL VS. PERSONAL IDENTITY

In *A Sentimental Journey*, national identity is rigid while personal identity is fluid, a contrast that cautions against applying stereotypes to individuals. During his travels through France, the narrator Yorick is constantly looking out for and commenting on examples of French national character. He notes the particular phrases that French people use most often, criticizes the way French men flirt, and comments on French beggars' "urbanity." In one long passage, he criticizes French politeness and contrasts it with English authenticity. In all these instances, Yorick seems to affirm that individuals fall into certain rigid national types. Yet Yorick's own personal identity is so fluid he almost lacks definition. As he says at one point, "There is not a more perplexing affair in life to me, than to set about telling any one who I am." He is constantly changing his mind: he criticizes the King of France and then toasts his health, berates the Franciscan monk and immediately regrets it, develops a sudden dislike for the hotel-master Monsieur Dessein and then curses himself for it, and so on. Yorick's difficulty defining himself makes the reader question the rigid opinions of various national groups—can other people, whether French, English, or otherwise, be neatly categorized when Yorick himself cannot? Although *A Sentimental Journey* traffics in national stereotypes, it implicitly advises against applying them to individuals, who cannot be so easily defined.

RELIGION

A Sentimental Journey associates religion with hypocrisy and sexual repression, yet some characters' religious sentiments motivate them to admirable behavior. Thus, the novel suggests that religion can be either a negative or positive force, depending on the motives of the people practicing it. In a characteristic episode satirizing organized religion, the narrator Yorick persuades the aging Frenchwoman Madame de V***, who claims she "believe[s] nothing," to renounce her nihilism. He persuades her not by talking about God, but by claiming that only religion could protect a woman as beautiful as she is from male sexual attentions. The story implies that Madame de V*** becomes interested in organized religion again due to Yorick's sexual flattery—a vain and hypocritical motive, since Yorick is also arguing that religion *represses* sexuality. In episodes like these, the novel evinces a healthy skepticism for religion in general—and, perhaps, European Catholicism in particular. Yet not all religious characters in *A Sentimental Journey* are vain, repressed hypocrites. Traveling through France toward Italy, Yorick meets a peasant family who dance every evening after dinner to thank God with "a chearful and contented mind." The novel represents this joyous, physical, non-repressive religious worship as admirable. In *A Sentimental Journey*, then, whether religion is good or bad depends not on religion itself, but on the worshipers' motives and personalities.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

HANDKERCHIEFS

In Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, handkerchiefs symbolize how Yorick's genuine emotions often turn into silly, self-indulgent displays of sentimentality. Early in the story, when English traveler Yorick is leaving Montriul, France, a crowd of beggars surrounds him. Although he receives blessings from several beggars, he feels most satisfied when a shamefaced beggar dries tears of gratitude with a "little handkerchief" after receiving Yorick's money. While at first glance this episode may seem to illustrate Yorick's genuine generosity, his reaction actually suggests that he likes to indulge his own sentimental feelings rather than act with true altruism. After all, he clearly feels self-satisfied in this moment because of the beggar's tears, and his cutesy description of the handkerchief as "little" suggests that he's romanticizing the entire episode. Later, when Yorick fantasizes about learning the sad history of his partner in flirtation, Madame de L—, he imagines the "exquisite sensation" of drying her tears with his handkerchief—a description that mixes his real pity with his sexual interest in her and his self-indulgent desire to act as her comforter. Toward the end of the novel, meanwhile, Yorick meets the beautiful young madwoman, Maria, weeps with pity, and—in a clearly comical episode—takes turns drying Maria's face and then his own until his handkerchief is too wet to function. Throughout *A Sentimental Journey*, then, handkerchiefs mark moments when the author

satirizes Yorick's emotions as excessively sentimental or self-indulgent.

SNUFF-BOX

In *A Sentimental Journey*, the snuffbox the Franciscan monk gives to Yorick represents the power of travel—and, specifically, interacting with foreigners—to improve a person's manner and overall character. Yorick first meets the monk when the monk comes into his room in Calais to beg alms. Although, moments before, Yorick felt generous and at peace, he now scolds the monk, decides to give him nothing, criticizes his religious practices, and declares his own duty to give to other Englishmen before foreigners—a set of reactions that betray Yorick's fickleness and residual xenophobia. When Yorick and the monk meet again in a coach-yard, the monk offers Yorick some snuff (powdered tobacco). Yorick, realizing he has treated the monk unkindly, offers the monk his own snuffbox as a gift. The two men exchange snuffboxes, and, later in the story, Yorick uses the monk's snuffbox to remind himself to be polite and good-natured. For example, Yorick is tempted to make a sarcastic remark to another travel who makes an obvious comment; to stop himself, he takes snuff from the monk's snuffbox instead. Later, at the Opera comique in Paris, Yorick sees a tall German blocking a dwarf's view and—taking a pinch of snuff from the monk's snuffbox—deplores the German's behavior, thinking how differently the monk would have responded. Periodically reminding Yorick to be courteous, the snuffbox represents the lesson Yorick has learned on his travels: to appreciate people from other countries and treat them politely.

STARLING

In *A Sentimental Journey*, the caged starling represents the evils of slavery and incarceration. Yorick encounters the starling shortly after learning that the French police are after him for traveling without a **passport**. At first, he minimizes the danger he's in, thinking to himself that prison is just "a house you can't get out of." But when he encounters the caged starling, which regularly repeats the phrase, "I can't get out," the true evils of captivity strike Yorick: he is reminded of "the millions of my fellow creatures born to no inheritance but slavery" and imagines the suffering of an individual captive. The starling inspires Yorick to get a passport and save himself from incarceration. That is not the end of the starling's story, however. Yorick's servant, La Fleur, buys the starling for him, and Yorick brings it back to England, where he gives it as a gift to Lord A, who gives it to Lord B, and so on. Yorick ends up putting a starling on his family crest of arms, but neither he nor any of its subsequent owners free the bird. The starling's permanent captivity and passage from owner to owner suggests that while people like Yorick may care about slavery or incarceration when it affects them directly, they stop caring about such evils as soon as they are personally safe.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin Classics edition of *A Sentimental Journey* published in 2002.

Volume 1 Quotes

❝ When man is at peace with man, how much lighter than a feather is the heaviest of metals in his hand! he pulls out his purse, and holding it airily and uncompress'd, looks round him, as if he sought for an object to share it with[.]

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker), Franciscan Monk (Father Lorenzo)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

Yorick has just traveled from England to France. While eating dinner, he has remembered a French law that allows the French government to confiscate the possessions of foreigners who die on French soil. At first he mentally scolds the King of France for this law. Shortly after, however, he toasts the King of France, praises French people's national character, and thinks about how material possessions and money make otherwise kind people behave badly.

This passage introduces two patterns in Yorick's behavior that Laurence Sterne will satirize throughout the novel: overblown sentimentality and fickleness. First, Yorick's emotional reactions tend to be overblown. Just thinking about French property law leads him to hyperbolic statements about "how much lighter than a feather" metal can become depending on one's attitude toward money. Yorick's exaggerated and self-indulgent emotions create much of the novel's humor.

Second, Yorick is fickle. Immediately after praising peacefulness and generosity in this passage, he refuses to give alms to a Franciscan monk just because he doesn't like to have his personal resolutions tested. This sudden change in attitude, occurring so early in the book, foreshadow Yorick's fluid identity and struggle to define himself—which contrasts starkly with his willingness to rigidly stereotype other people based on their nationalities.

I have behaved very ill; said I within myself; but I have only just set out upon my travels, and shall learn better manners as I get along.

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker), Franciscan Monk (Father Lorenzo)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

Yorick has just refused to give alms to the Franciscan monk. While refusing, he has criticized the monk's religious order for begging rather than working and claimed that he has an obligation to give money to other English people before he gives to foreigners. The monk accepts Yorick's cruelty meekly and departs. As soon as the monk leaves, Yorick regrets his behavior.

This quotation introduces the idea, which recurs throughout the novel, that travel can improve people's manners and possibly their morals. At this point, Yorick does not explain exactly *how* travel improves people—he simply assumes travel will have that effect on him. From context—Yorick has just xenophobically refused to help a foreigner, on the grounds that he would rather give money to other English people—the reader can guess that travel improves manners and morals by making travelers more sympathetic to people unlike themselves.

Yet the quotation gives the reader reason to doubt that travel will truly improve Yorick. Yorick's brief dismissal of his own bad behavior here—the ease with which he reassures himself that he'll do better next time—may make the reader doubt his sincerity and suspect that the novel is satirizing his self-centeredness. Moreover, the fluidity of Yorick's personality—his whiplash changes from praising generosity, to refusing generosity, to feeling bad about his behavior, to forgiving himself—may make the reader wonder whether he has a consistent enough identity to change himself in a lasting way.

I guard this box, as I would the instrumental parts of my religion, to help my mind on to something better: in truth, I seldom go abroad without it; and oft and many a time have I called up by it the courteous spirit of its owner to regulate my own, in the justlings of the world[.]

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker), Franciscan Monk (Father Lorenzo), Madame de L—

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 21

Explanation and Analysis

The Franciscan monk has approached Yorick, standing with Madame de L— in the coach-yard, and offered him some snuff. Yorick tries to give the monk his own snuff-box as an apology for his earlier rudeness. Ultimately, he and the monk exchange snuff-boxes as a gesture of friendship. This quotation, in which Yorick reflects on what the monk's snuff-box has meant to him, implies that travel really has improved Yorick's character and that his improvement has a religious aspect.

Yorick's attempt to give his snuff-box to the monk may initially seem like an attempt to show off for Madame de L—. After all, Yorick has been flirting with Madame de L— and has worried that the monk may have told her something bad about him. Yet this quotation reveals that Yorick treasures the monk's snuff-box for its own sake, as a memento that helps him imitate the monk's "courteous spirit." The snuff-box thus represents an actual improvement that traveling and meeting the foreign monk has made to Yorick's character.

Since Yorick compares the snuff-box to "the instrumental parts of [his] religion," and since the snuff-box originally belonged to a monk, the novel also seems to imply a religious element or motivation to Yorick's personal improvement. At other points, the novel will satirize organized religion as sexually repressive and hypocritical. Here, however, it suggests that religion can be a force for good, if practiced with the right motives and emotions.

Now where would be the harm, said I to myself, if I was to beg of this distressed lady to accept of half of my chaise?—and what mighty mischief could ensue?

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker), Madame de L—, Eliza

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22-23

Explanation and Analysis

Waiting in the coach-yard with Madame de L—, Yorick has

just had the idea to ask her to travel with him. In this quotation, the novel satirizes Yorick's sentimental self-deception about his own sexual motives.

Yorick asks about the "harm" and "mischief" his invitation could cause as if it were a rhetorical question—as if nothing bad could ensue from him and Madame de L— traveling together. Yet the reader knows that Yorick has a beloved, Eliza, back in England, and that Yorick has been flirting with Madame de L—. Obviously, traveling with Madame de L— would be harmful because it would tempt Yorick to cheat on Eliza. Although immediately after this quotation, Yorick recognizes other people might infer a sexual relationship between him and Madame de L— if they traveled together, he doesn't admit to himself that such a relationship could actually occur. Yorick seems unable to recognize the sexual dimension of his behavior toward Madame de L— because he has a sentimental idea of himself as a disinterested protector of "distressed" women. Thus, this quotation is satirizing Yorick's sentimentality about women, which is at odds with his unruly sexuality.

❝ I pity the man who can travel from *Dan* to *Beersheba*, and cry, 'Tis all barren—and so it is, and so is all the world to him who will not cultivate the fruits it offers. I declare, said I, clapping my hands chearily together, that was I in a desart, I would find out wherewith in it to call forth my affections[.]

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

Yorick has just realized that he has only been in France for about an hour. He is reflecting on how many interesting experiences he has packed into such a short time. This quotation describes the relationship between sentiment and travel, arguing that emotional people are better able to take advantage of travel's benefits.

"Dan" and "Beersheba" are two locations that appear in the Bible. In this context, the phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" stands in for any extensive travel. Yorick is arguing that any foreign country will be "barren" for travelers "who will not cultivate the fruits it offers"—that is, travelers who don't try to appreciate the country's good points.

Earlier in the novel, Yorick declared himself a "Sentimental" traveler, that is, a traveler primarily interested in emotional experiences. By asserting his own ability to find good points even in a desert, Yorick is suggesting that his sentimentality—his strong, even overblown emotional responses—equip him to appreciate foreign countries more than less emotional people do. The novel is implying, then, that travel is beneficial—but only for emotional people, who can open themselves to new experiences.

❝ In saying this, I was making not so much La Fleur's eloge, as my own, having been in love with one princess or another all my life, and I hope I shall go on so, till I die, being firmly persuaded, that if ever I do a mean action, it must be in some interval betwixt one passion and another: whilst this interregnum lasts, I always perceive my heart locked up—I can scarce find in it, to give Misery a sixpence, and therefore I always get out of it as fast as I can, and the moment I am rekindled, I am all generosity and good will again; and would do any thing in the world either for, or with any one, if they will but satisfy me there is no sin in it.

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker), La Fleur, Franciscan Monk (Father Lorenzo), Madame de L—

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 33-34

Explanation and Analysis

Yorick is about to leave Montriul with his new servant, La Fleur. Yorick's landlord points out La Fleur saying goodbye to six different women at once and explains to Yorick that La Fleur has the bad luck to be constantly falling in love. Yorick essentially tells the landlord that constantly falling in love is a good thing.

In this quotation, Yorick is explaining for the first time his theory of the relationship between kindness and romance. He believes that he only commits "mean actions"—that is, behaves unkindly—when he is not in love, because in those periods his "heart [is] locked up." In other words, he is arguing that being in romantic love with a particular person opens his heart generally, increasing his "generosity and good will."

The novel has given the reader reason to believe that Yorick's judgment of himself may be true. After all, Yorick was cruel to the Franciscan monk until he began flirting with Madame de L—. Once he began flirting with her and

worrying about how she perceived him, he apologized to the monk and exchanged snuff-boxes with him. In his later travels, Yorick will use the monk's snuff-box as a reminder to be kind and courteous independent of his flirtation with Madame de L—. However, it seems reasonable to think that his initial reconciliation with the monk occurred due to Madame de L—'s influence. From this quotation, then, the reader learns that for Yorick, kindness, romance, and sex are interlinked concepts.

❝ 'Twas only in the power, says the Fragment, of the God whose empire extendeth from heaven to earth, and even to the depths of the sea, to have done this.

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

As an aside to the reader, Yorick is telling a story about the ancient Greek town Abdera. Abdera had a reputation as a cruel, violent, lawless place. One day, the playwright Euripides's play *Andromeda* was staged there. After hearing the character Perseus give a speech about the Greco-Roman god of romantic love, Cupid, the Abderians became love enthusiasts and gave up violence in favor of friendliness and art. This quotation has two functions: it reinforces the connection that the novel draws between romantic love and kindness, and it suggests that romantic love has a religious aspect.

The quotation leaves ambiguous which god it is referring to. Since Yorick has telling a story about ancient Greece that refers to Cupid, the reader may think that "the God whose empire extendeth from heaven to earth" is Cupid. In that case, the story is concluding that romantic love is the most powerful force in the world and, therefore, only romantic love could have converted the cruel Abderians to kindness. Thus, the quotation extends Yorick's earlier claim that romantic love makes *him* kinder to argue that romantic love makes *all people* kinder.

On the other hand, the Fragment discussing Abdera may have been written in Christian Europe, in which case "the God whose empire extendeth from heaven to earth" may refer to the Christian God, who is also associated with love—though not specifically romantic love. If the reader interprets "God" as the Christian God, Yorick may be suggesting that—contrary to the sexual repression and hypocrisy that he observes in European Christians—the Christian God approves of and embodies romantic love as much as any other kind of love. Whether the quotation is referring to the Greco-Roman Cupid or the Christian God, however, it clearly implies that romantic love has a divine source, thereby suggesting that romance and sex have a religious aspect.

❝ The *pauvre honteux* could say nothing—he pull'd out a little handkerchief, and wiped his face as he turned away—and I thought he thank'd me more than them all.

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 36-37

Explanation and Analysis

Yorick is leaving Montriul when beggars surround him. He has given away all he intended to give when he sees a "*pauvre honteux*"—that is, a "poor ashamed man"—who, unable to bring himself to beg, is crying outside the circle of beggars. Yorick, touched, gives the crying man a large sum.

This quotation illustrates the uneasy relationship among sentiment, generosity, and emotional self-indulgence in the novel. It seems that Yorick's sentimentality about the crying man's tears is a good thing, since it motivates Yorick to be generous. Yet Yorick's description of the man's "little handkerchief" and tears may strike the reader as condescending. Moreover, Yorick's implied pleasure at being "thank'd" suggests a kind of transactional self-indulgence—Yorick gives the beggars money in exchange for the sentimental good feelings that their gratitude and tears give him. Since handkerchiefs often mark moments in the novel where characters are indulging in overblown emotions, the appearance of "a little handkerchief" here may lead the reader to suspect that this quotation is satirizing Yorick's sentimental pleasure at the crying man's tears.

> Why should I dissemble the matter? I had sworn to her eternal fidelity—she had a right to my whole heart—to divide my affections was to lessen them—to expose them, was to risk them: where there is risk, there may be loss—and what wilt though have, Yorick! to answer a heart so full of trust and confidence—so good, so gentle and unreproaching?

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker), Madame de L—, Eliza, Franciscan Monk (Father Lorenzo)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

After parting ways with Madame de L— in Calais, Yorick has received a note from her in Amiens in which she invites him to visit her in Brussels, where she promises to tell him her sad history. At first, Yorick delightedly imagines hearing her tale, watching her cry, and drying her tears. Then, however, he remembers that he has promised to be faithful to Eliza back in England.

This quotation complicates the connection the novel has previously drawn between sexuality, love, and kindness. In one sense, Yorick's flirtation with Madame de L— has made him kinder, since it seems to have partially motivated his apology to and reconciliation with the Franciscan monk, to whom he was initially rude. In another sense, however, Yorick's flirtation with Madame de L— means being unkind to Eliza: breaking his promise of "eternal fidelity" to her and "divid[ing]" his love for her despite her "trust and confidence" in him. This passage reveals, then, that sexuality and romantic love can motivate kindness—but when they tempt someone to be unfaithful or predatory, they can also motivate cruelty.

> I think I can see the precise and distinguishing marks of national character more in these nonsensical *minutiae*, than in the most important matters of state; where great men of all nations talk and stalk so much alike, that I would not give nine-pence to chuse amongst them.

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Yorick has just arrived in Paris and summoned a French barber to dress his wig. The barber criticizes Yorick's wig and insists Yorick take one of his. Yorick objects that one of the curls in the wig the barber has offered him won't hold. The barber tells him that dipping the wig in the ocean—by which he means a water bucket—will fix the curl. Yorick reflects that hyperbole is characteristic of French speech.

This quotation reveals both some of Yorick's motives for travel and some contradictions in his ideas about identity. First, Yorick believes that "nonsensical *minutiae*"—that is, meaningless little details—reveal differences between people of different nationalities. One cannot learn about "national character" by reading about a nation's "great men"—their kings, presidents, prime ministers, and so forth—in the newspaper. Instead, one must observe how ordinary people in that nation behave. To make those observations, one must travel to the place itself. This quotation thus shows why Yorick thinks travel improves our understanding of people different from ourselves.

Yet Yorick himself acknowledges that "great men" from various nations behave "so much alike" that he can't tell them apart. This acknowledgment suggests that social class or personal identity may determine individuals' behavior more than "national character" does. Thus, even while Yorick is making observations about the important "precise and distinguishing marks" that a particular national identity leaves on people, he is implicitly contradicting himself and saying that other aspects of identity—class, personality, and so on—can override and erase national identity.

> Surely—surely man! it is not good for thee to sit alone—thou wast made for social intercourse and gentle greetings, and this improvement of our natures from it, I appeal to, as my evidence.

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker), Grisset

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

Yorick has stopped in a Parisian shop to ask for directions and begun a casual flirtation with a grisset—that is, a working-class French woman. On the pretext of proving her heart's goodness, Yorick takes the grisset's pulse. While he is doing so, the grisset's husband emerges from a back

room, bows to Yorick, and leaves. Yorick reflects that in Paris, shopkeepers stay in back rooms while their wives deal with customers. He concludes that staying in back rooms is bad for the Parisian shopkeepers' manners, whereas dealing with customers improves their wives' manners.

This quotation further clarifies Yorick's motives for travel and for flirtation. Yorick has previously suggested that travel is good because it exposes travelers to foreigners, that is, people unlike themselves. Now he seems to be suggesting that travel is good because it exposes travelers to any people at all, whether like or unlike themselves—"social intercourse and gentle greetings" in themselves lead to personal "improvement."

The quotation also suggests that while "social intercourse" in general is good, romantic socializing is particularly good. The phrase "man! it is not good for thee to sit alone" is an allusion to Genesis 2:18 in the Bible, in which God decides that it is not good for the first man, Adam, to be alone and so decides to make Eve, the first woman. By alluding to the biblical story of Adam and Eve—in Christian tradition, the first married couple—Yorick implies that romantic coupling is the base unit of the "social intercourse" that leads to personal "improvement." This attitude may help to explain why Yorick thinks sexuality and romance make people better and why he compulsively flirts with many of the women he meets.

❝ There is not a secret so aiding to the progress of sociality, as to get master of this *short hand*, and be quick in rendering the several turns of looks and limbs, with all their inflections and delineations, into plain words. For my own part, by long habitude, I do it so mechanically, that when I walk the streets of London, I go translating all the way; and have more than once stood behind in the circle, where not three words have been said, and have brought off twenty different dialogues with me, which I could have fairly wrote down and sworn to.

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker), Old French Soldier

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54-55

Explanation and Analysis

Yorick is visiting the Opera comique—a famous 18th-century French opera company—and has entered a box where an old French soldier is already sitting. When Yorick sits down, the old French soldier takes off his glasses, and Yorick bows to him. Yorick gives an exact translation of what he believes the old French soldier meant by taking off his glasses. Then he reflects on the importance of body language in communication.

This passage further complicates Yorick's frequent affirmations of national stereotypes. Throughout the novel, he expresses the belief that French people, English people, and so on have distinct national characters that separate them from one another and make it harder from them to understand one another. Yet in this passage, he asserts that "looks and limbs"—that is, body language—allow people to communicate very well. In fact, Yorick thinks body language is so expressive that he can use it to translate fewer than "three words" into "twenty different dialogues." Notably, in the context of this passage, Yorick is implying that body language works as well to communicate in Paris as it does in London—in other words, that body language is a human universal capable of overcoming the barriers to communication raised by differences in national character. Once again, then, Yorick implicitly undermines the importance of national stereotypes while elsewhere explicitly asserting them.

❝ [T]here is a balance, said he, of good and bad every where; and nothing but the knowing it is so can emancipate one half of the world from the prepossessions which it holds against the other—that the advantage of travel, as it regarded *sçavoir vivre*, was by seeing a great deal both of men and manners; it taught us mutual toleration; and mutual toleration, concluded he, making me a bow, taught us mutual love.

Related Characters: Old French Soldier, Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, the old French soldier sharing a box with Yorick at the Opera comique has just explained to Yorick a vulgar joke that the crowd is playing on a priest in the audience. Acknowledging the joke's vulgarity, the old French soldier argues to Yorick that every nation has both bad and good points. He goes on to point out "the advantage of travel" in helping the traveler realize these pros and cons.

This quotation is almost like the novel's thesis statement on

the benefits of travel. Travel can "emancipate one half of the world from the prepossessions which it holds against the other"—that is, free people from their prejudices about those of different nationalities—by exposing people to "manners" different from their own. It does so by teaching them "*sçavoir vivre*" (that is, "knowledge how to live") and instilling "mutual toleration" and "love" in people. Yorick has expressed similar sentiments elsewhere, but by expressing the idea so forcefully toward the end of Volume I, the old French soldier's speech reveals the importance of the idea to the novel as a whole.

By pointing out that people of each nation have "prepossessions"—that is, prejudices or stereotypes—against people of other nations, the old French soldier's speech may also lead the reader to question whether the national stereotypes that Yorick affirms elsewhere in the novel are accurate. Thus, this quotation subtly suggests that on the topic of national character, Yorick may be an unreliable narrator.

Volume 2 Quotes

❝ The mind sits terrified at the objects she has magnified herself, and blackened: reduce them to their proper size and hue she overlooks them[.]

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker), La Fleur

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

Returning to his Paris hotel, Yorick learns from La Fleur that the French police have been looking for him. He remembers that he, an Englishman, has traveled into France without a passport while France and England are at war. The hotelier comes to speak with Yorick about the police. Upon learning that Yorick has no passport, the hotelier predicts that if he does not obtain one, he will be thrown in jail.

In this quotation, the novel is satirizing Yorick's attempts to reassure himself that jail isn't so terrifying. Yorick is arguing that the "mind"—the individual's attitude, thoughts, and sentiments—can make problems seem larger than they are but can also "reduce" those problems. This argument implies that people's mental states are more powerful than objective reality in shaping their experiences. Given the emphasis Yorick places on individual emotions and sentiments, it isn't surprising that he would make this argument.

Yet the novel is about to pull the rug out from Yorick. Upon seeing a caged starling in his hotel, he is going to realize the true horrors of incarceration. The starling will function as a reminder that reality is more powerful than Yorick's mind or sentiments in determining what is true. In context, then, the novel is subtly satirizing Yorick's attempts to attribute world-shaping powers to individual thoughts and sentiments.

❝ Disguise thyself as thou wilt, still slavery! said I—still thou art a bitter draught; and though thousands in all ages have been made to drink of thee, thou art no less bitter on that account.

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 69-70

Explanation and Analysis

At this point, Yorick has learned that he may be imprisoned for traveling from England to France without a passport. Initially, Yorick tries to downplay the horrors of incarceration by arguing to himself that our mental states, attitudes, and emotions determine whether our circumstances—even extreme circumstances like imprisonment—are good or bad. Upon encountering a caged starling, however, Yorick suddenly realizes the weakness of his own argument.

In this quotation, Yorick is expressing that slavery is objectively "bitter" no matter how it "[d]isguise[s]" itself—no matter what attitude or emotional stance he tries to subjectively take toward it. Here, then, Yorick asserts that there are limits to the power of subjective sentiment to shape objective reality.

Yorick is also asserting that there are limits to the customs that tradition can make morally acceptable. Even though "thousands in all ages" have been enslaved, slavery is still "bitter"—that is, morally wrong. It is important to note that Yorick is placing a limit on the customs he will tolerate, because elsewhere in the novel he generally asserts that

tolerance is good and that differences in custom are simply matters of national character. It is also important to note that when Laurence Sterne published this novel in 1768, England had not yet made slavery illegal. In this passage, then, Sterne is clearly criticizing England's laws on slavery and implicitly calling for slavery's abolition.

I was going to begin with the millions of my fellow creatures born to no inheritance but slavery; but finding, however affecting the picture was, that I could not bring it near me, and that the multitude of sad groups in it did but distract me.—

—I took a single captive, and having first shut him up in his dungeon, I then look'd through the twilight of his grated door to take his picture.

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation occurs after Yorick learns he might be imprisoned for traveling to France without a passport. At first, he downplays the horrors of incarceration. Then he encounters a caged starling that impresses on him how terrible slavery or captivity would be. Previous passages about the starling emphasize the limitations of subjective attitudes and sentiments—the objective realities of slavery and captivity are more powerful than anyone's feelings about them. This quotation, however, shows how Yorick's sentimental reactions—to the starling and to his own imagination—can lead him to a truer understanding of the world.

Yorick is not capable of intellectually grasping "the millions of [his] fellow creatures born to no inheritance but slavery." When he says that he cannot "bring it near" to him, he seems to mean that the scale of slavery's evil is too vast for him, a single individual, to absorb. Therefore, he narrows his focus to "a single captive." There is something decidedly sentimental about focusing on one captive—or on one caged bird, for that matter—when millions of people are incarcerated or enslaved. Yet this narrow emotional focus helps Yorick to understand slavery's evil when trying to grasp it intellectually fails him. Thus, the novel is suggesting that while sentimental reactions can mislead us about objective reality, they can also help to understand the world when our intellect isn't enough.

I think there is a fatality in it—I seldom go to the place I set out for.

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

Yorick has taken a carriage to Versailles to find the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, in hopes that the Minister will help him get a passport. When he learns the Minister is busy and will not be able to see him for several hours, Yorick decides to ride elsewhere.

This quotation functions as another one of the novel's thesis statements about travel and about Yorick's fluid identity. First, the novel seems to be suggesting that in travel, the traveler's personal journey is more important than the destination—that is why the reader remains interested in Yorick's experiences and adventures even though he avoids visiting famous French monuments, seeing famous French art, or meeting famous French people during his time in France: whether he ends up in "the place [he] set out for" matters less than what he does along the way.

Second, Yorick is admitting his own changeability over time—he is always "set[ting] out for one place," having one opinion, or falling in love with one woman, only to change his mind and move in another direction. Yorick's fluid, difficult-to-grasp personality contrasts with the national stereotypes he regularly applies to other people and makes the reader wonder whether any individual can be so rigidly defined.

There is not a more perplexing affair in life to me, than to set about telling any one who I am—for there is scarce any body I cannot give a better account of than of myself; and I have often wish'd I could do it in a single word—and have an end of it.

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker), Count de B****

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

Yorick is visiting the Anglophile (enthusiast of English culture) Count de B**** in Versailles in hopes that the Count will help him obtain a passport. He finds the Count reading Shakespeare and tells the Count that Shakespeare, his fellow Englishman, will introduce Yorick. After chatting with Yorick for a while, the Count points out that Shakespeare, despite his many virtues, cannot tell the Count Yorick's name, so Yorick will have to do the honors.

This quotation illustrates the contradiction between how Yorick relates to other people and how he relates to himself. Throughout the novel, Yorick gives confident descriptions of other people's behavior, asserts various national stereotypes, generalizes about women, and so forth. Yet while he confidently describes other individuals and groups, he finds his own personal identity difficult to define or describe—he is always contradicting himself and changing his mind. That Yorick's own identity is so fluid and difficult to grasp makes the reader suspect that the rigid identities he assigns to other people—for example, foreigners and women—may not be accurate. Thus, this quotation subtly implies that on the subjects of personal and national identity, Yorick is an unreliable narrator.

> But there is nothing unmixt in this world; and some of the gravest of our divines have carried it so far as to affirm, that enjoyment itself was attended even with a sigh—and that the greatest *they knew of*, terminated *in a general way*, in little better than a convulsion.

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker), Count de B****

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

The Count de B**** has just succeeded in obtaining a French passport for Yorick—but only because French officials have confused Yorick (the narrator) with the dead jester named Yorick in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and decided that jesters can't possibly be dangerous. Yorick is reflecting that being confused with a jester has somewhat reduced his pleasure at gaining a passport.

In this quotation, the novel is satirizing Yorick's philosophizing—that there is "nothing unmixt in the world"—but also endorsing it. By the "greatest" "enjoyment," Yorick seems to mean sex, which "terminate[s]" in "little better than a convulsion"—that is, sex ends in orgasm, which Yorick describes in disparaging terms. The mixture of high-flown language and crude content is meant to be humorous, and it hints that the novel wants the reader to laugh at Yorick here.

At the same time, however, the novel itself contains "nothing unmixt." It both endorses and satirizes sentiment, represents sexuality as a source of both kindness and cruelty, both asserts and undermines national stereotypes, and both criticizes and praises religion. In this quotation, then, even as it mocks Yorick, the novel is describing its own self-contradicting perspective and storytelling style.

> If nature has so wove her web of kindness, that some threads of love and desire are entangled with the piece—must the whole web be rent in drawing them out?

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker), The Chambermaid, Madame de R—

Related Themes:

Page Number: 90

Explanation and Analysis

The chambermaid of Madame R— has come to Yorick's hotel room to ask whether he has a letter for his employer. Through a series of comic events, Yorick has accidentally tipped the chambermaid over on his bed. In this quotation, Yorick has interrupted his narration of events to defend his behavior against people who would criticize it.

This quotation gives perhaps the clearest articulation in the novel of the relationship between kindness and sex. Yorick is arguing that "nature"—by which he may mean human biology or human psychology—has created a "web of kindness" in humankind. This "web" refers to people's instinctive altruism, generosity, and so forth. Yorick believes that nature has constructed this "web of kindness" partially from "threads of love and desire"—that is, human beings' sex drives partially motivate their good social instincts. Yorick believes that "drawing [...] out" humans' sexual motives for good behavior would cause the "web of kindness" to be "rent," or torn. In other words, sexual repression is bad because in repressing our sexuality, we also repress our kindness, generosity, and other good social instincts.

> And does the difference of the time of day at Paris make a difference in the sin?—It made a difference, he said, in the scandal.

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker), The Chambermaid, Madame de R—

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

The master of the hotel where Yorick is staying has come to tell him to leave, because he had a girl (Madame R—'s chambermaid) in his room at night. Discussing the situation with Yorick, the master of the hotel tells him that he wouldn't have cared if a girl had entered Yorick's room in the morning.

In this quotation, Yorick is asking whether the "time of day," evening or morning, changes the "sin." In other words, he is pointing out that if the master of the hotel is worried about an inappropriate sexual relationship between Yorick and the chambermaid, that relationship could occur just as easily in the morning as at night. The master of the hotel replies that the time of day changes the "scandal." This reply reveals that the master of the hotel doesn't care whether Yorick and the chambermaid had sex or not. He only cares about appearances.

As the reader knows, Yorick and the chambermaid did not have sex. Yorick felt tempted to take advantage of her but resisted temptation and hurried her out of his room. Here, the novel is contrasting Yorick's good intentions and behavior with the master of the hotel's hypocrisy. This contrast suggests that despite Yorick's flaws and compulsive flirting, his forthright sexuality and authenticity are superior to the hypocrisy of the people around him.

> I told Madame de V*** it might be her principle; but I was sure it could not be her interest to level the outworks, without which I could not conceive how such a citadel as hers could be defended—that there was not a more dangerous thing in the world, than for a beauty to be a deist—that it was a debt I owed my creed, not to conceal it from her—that I had not been five minutes sat upon the sopha besides her, but I had begun to form designs—and what is it, but the sentiments of religion, and the persuasion they had existed in her breast, which could have check'd them as they rose up.

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker), Count de B****

Related Themes:

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

Count de B**** has introduced Yorick into Parisian society, where he meets Madame de V***, who claims to be a deist. Deism is a philosophy that renounces traditional organized religions like Christianity in favor of purely rational religion.

In this quotation, Yorick is arguing that traditional organized religion is good because it represses sexuality. He calls organized religion the "outworks" protecting Madame de V***'s "citadel." That is, he is comparing her to a city under siege and religion to fortifications around that city protecting it from attackers. His reference to her "beauty" and his own "designs" suggests that the attackers, in this analogy, are lustful men. According to Yorick's argument, only "the sentiments of religion" ("religion," in the context of 18th-century Europe, means some form of Christianity) will keep a beautiful woman like Madame de V*** from succumbing to inappropriate sexual relationships.

Yorick is clearly making fun of Madame de V*** here, since previously he has criticized her looks, and he shows no actual desire to practice sexual "designs" on her. Yet—due to his comical flattery—Madame de V*** loves his argument and later seems to reconvert to traditional organized religion. Madame de V***'s conversion is clearly hypocritical: while she seems to respond to arguments that religion is good because it represses sex, she only likes the arguments because they flatter her sexually. Thus, in this little episode, the novel is making fun of both sexual repression and organized religion's hypocrisy.

> I sat down close by her; and Maria let me wipe them away as they fell with my handkerchief.—I then steep'd it with my own—and then in hers—and then in mine—and then I wip'd hers again—and as I did it, I felt such indescribable emotions within me, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion.
>
> I am positive I have a soul; nor can all the books with which materialists have pester'd the world ever convince me of the contrary.

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker), Maria

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

While traveling through France on his way to Italy, Yorick has stopped to visit Maria, a beautiful young madwoman whom his friend Mr. Shandy previously met (in Laurence Sterne's other novel, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*). Maria, still mad, is now grieving the death of her father. In this quotation, the novel satirizes Yorick's sentimental self-indulgence yet leaves open the possibility that even Yorick's overblown emotions can lead to genuine religious experiences.

The business with Yorick's handkerchief is clearly meant to be satirical. Yorick has no reason to be crying. He self-indulgently weeps merely because Maria does. Moreover, the language around the handkerchief—"I then steep'd it with my own—and then in hers—and then in mine—and then I wip'd hers again"—is repetitive to the point of ridiculousness. As handkerchiefs have previously marked moments in which the novel is satirizing Yorick's sentimentality, the presence of Yorick's handkerchief in this passage hints that the reader shouldn't take his tears too seriously.

Despite satirizing Yorick's sentiments, the novel leaves open the possibility that they can lead to genuine religious experiences. His "indescribable emotions"—silly as they may seem to the reader—do spur him to ponder the nature of "matter" and his "soul," important religious questions. Thus, this quotation implies that even self-indulgent emotions can lead us to think about religion in a genuine way.

❝ Dear sensibility! source inexhausted of all that's precious in our joys, or costly in our sorrows! thou chainest thy martyr down upon his bed of straw—and 'tis thou who lifts him up to HEAVEN—eternal fountain of our feelings!—'tis here I trace thee—and this is thy divinity which stirs within me [...] that I feel some generous joys and generous cares beyond myself—all comes from thee, great—great SENSORIUM of the world!

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker), Maria

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

Yorick has continued to travel through the French countryside after saying goodbye to Maria. Though the countryside is beautiful, he continues to think about and be affected by Maria's sorrow. In this quotation, he is praising "sensibility"—that is, emotional responsiveness—for its powers and gifts.

Although the novel has previously satirized excessive emotion, here Yorick provides a convincing defense of "sensibility" or emotional responsiveness. Yorick argues that the capacity for emotion generates what is "precious in our joys," though he also acknowledges "sorrows." In addition, he suggests that emotion has religious benefits: it allows the martyr to access "HEAVEN" and allows Yorick to perceive "divinity" within himself. Finally, Yorick claims that feeling "generous cares beyond" himself—his ability to feel concern for other people and act generously toward them—is a function of his emotional responsiveness. In this moment toward the end of the novel, then, the story relents in its satire of excessive emotion to acknowledge emotion's good points: emotion allows us to experience our lives intensely, reveals religious truths to us, and makes us better, more caring people.

❝ I thought I beheld Religion mixing in the dance—but as I had never seen her so engaged, I should have look'd upon it now, as one of the illusions of an imagination which is eternally misleading me, had not the old man, as soon as the dance ended, said, that this was their constant way; and that all his life long he had made it a rule, after supper was over, to call out his family to dance and rejoice; believing, he said, that a chearful and contented mind was the best sort of thanks to heaven that an illiterate peasant could pay—

—Or a learned prelate either, said I.

Related Characters: Yorick (The Narrator) (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis

Yorick is traveling in the mountains when the horse pulling his carriage throws two of its shoes. Exiting the carriage, Yorick walks to a roadside house and accepts dinner from a peasant family. After dinner, the peasant family plays music and dances. In this quotation, Yorick observes the peasants' form of religious worship, which he has never encountered before.

Previously in Yorick's journeys, he has seen organized religion's sexual repression and hypocrisy—for example, Madame de V***'s newfound interest in religion when Yorick jokingly flattered her that only religion's repression of sex could protect a beauty like her from lustful men. In contrast with this repression and hypocrisy, the peasant family dances—a healthy physical activity—to demonstrate their "cheerful and contented mind[s]" and give "thanks to heaven" for them. The peasants' religion is simple, embodied, and authentic. While the novel has previously satirized religion, then, it here suggests that religion can be a beautiful thing when practiced by genuine people with good motives.

Yorick only learns of this genuine, beautiful religious practice due to his travels and, in particular, an accident on his journey. This fact emphasizes the argument appearing throughout the novel that travel helps us learn about others' customs and broadens our minds. It also shows once again that in this novel, what is important isn't Yorick's destination but the experiences he has as he journeys.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

VOLUME 1

The narrator (later revealed to be Yorick) is telling a gentleman about something that the French do better. The gentleman asks Yorick whether he has been in France. Yorick goes home and packs, and he sails for France the next morning. He brings clothing, a portmanteau, and a picture of a woman named Eliza. Recalling that France seizes the property of foreigners who die within its borders, Yorick mentally scolds the king of France for the unfair law.

Yorick's abrupt decision to travel to France reveals his impulsiveness. What he packs—some clothes, a "portmanteau" (a single suitcase), and a picture of a woman named Eliza—suggests his priorities. Rather than bring (for example) a second suitcase on an international trip of unknown length, he brings a memento of a woman, which implies that he is a romantic and not a very good planner. Finally, he changes his mind about France in a very short period. He begins the passage by praising France but, as soon as he's there, criticizes its laws. This about-face shows both Yorick's fickleness and the importance of nationality to the book.

In Calais, France, Yorick eats dinner and toasts the King of France to prove he is not angry with the King. He comments to himself that the French are not mean but gentle. Then he kicks his portmanteau and asks himself why the world makes good people bad. He thinks: "When man is at peace with man, how much lighter than a feather is the heaviest of metals in his hand!" Indeed, he thinks, peacefulness makes men charitable and healthy. He says to himself that if he were the king of France, an orphaned beggar would be lucky to ask for his portmanteau at that moment.

This passage introduces Yorick's tendency toward overblown emotional outbursts: in rapid succession, he toasts the King of France, kicks his suitcase, and philosophizing to himself about the benefits of peacefulness. Clearly, the book is satirizing Yorick, his changeable emotions, and his grand pronouncements about French people—none of whom he seems to have met yet. Yorick's absolute certainty that he would give away his suitcase to the next beggar who asked, meanwhile, makes the reader wonder whether Yorick knows himself as well as he thinks he does.

A Franciscan monk enters Yorick's room to ask for alms. Yorick thinks that men do not like to have their good characteristics tested by luck, and he resolves to give the monk no money. Walking up to the monk, Yorick estimates his age to be between 60 and 70 and notes his expression, which seems to stare "at something beyond this world." Yorick wonders how a monk could have such an expression.

Immediately before the monk arrived, Yorick was praising his own generosity, but as soon as a real person asks Yorick for alms—that is, a donation to support poor people—he decides not to give. This passage thus reveals the contrast between Yorick's emotions and beliefs about himself and his actual actions. Interestingly, Yorick is surprised that the monk seems to look "beyond this world," even though "beyond this world" is exactly where one might expect a monk who believes in the afterlife to look. Yorick's surprise at the monk's otherworldliness suggests that he is skeptical of monks and perhaps of organized religion in general.

The monk puts his hand to his chest and explains to Yorick his monastery's financial needs and his monastic order's vow of poverty. Yorick is impressed by the monk's "grace" and humility but nevertheless recalls his resolution to give the monk no money.

In Christianity, "grace" is a gift from God. By attributing grace to the monk, Yorick implies that he believes the monk is authentically religious. That Yorick still refuses to give the monk alms, despite believing in the monk's authenticity, shows his stubbornness and lack of generosity.

Yorick tells the monk that he commends to God those people who rely on others' generosity, since said generosity "is no way sufficient for the many *great claims* which are hourly made upon it." He acknowledges the monk's poor clothing and insufficient food but says that since the monk could get better food and clothing by working, the Order of St. Francis ought not beg for them and thereby take away from more deserving beggars. Besides, Yorick has a responsibility to give to his own poor countrymen first. He also insists on a distinction between people who work for their keep and members of religious orders who rely on charity. The Franciscan monk blushes but shows no anger. Instead, he simply leaves the room.

Yorick's sarcastic dismissal of human generosity here—stating that it "is no way sufficient for the many great claims *which are hourly made upon it"—contrasts starkly with his earlier belief that he would give his suitcase to the first beggar who asked. Indeed, Yorick now seems to be suggesting that too many people rely on the generosity of others and ought to shift for themselves instead. His claim that he should give to Englishmen before people from other countrymen, meanwhile, demonstrates xenophobia (prejudice toward foreigners), which is at odds with his earlier praise of France and toasting of the French king. Given Yorick's changeability from page to page, the reader may wonder whether he has any consistent personality traits or views at all. That the monk leaves without anger, despite Yorick's rudeness, suggests that Yorick was correct in perceiving authentic religiosity and humility in the monk.*

Yorick, regretting his behavior, thinks the only authority he had over the monk was to refuse him, not to be cruel to him. He remembers the monk's old age and imagines the monk returning to ask what he ever did to Yorick. Yorick concludes that he has acted badly, but that the trip he is taking will better him.

That Yorick immediately wishes he had behaved better reveals, once again, how impulsive and changeable he is. His belief that foreign travel will improve his manners, meanwhile, implies that socializing with people unlike oneself is good for a person. The reader must read on to discover whether Yorick will, in fact, improve.

Since Yorick needs a carriage to travel, he goes to a coach yard to find one. There he sees a "Desobligeant," a one-person carriage, which he likes. He climbs into it and asks a servant to fetch the hotelier Monsieur Dessein. Then he spies, across the yard, the Franciscan monk talking to a woman (later revealed to be Madame de L—) who has recently come to the hotel. Not wanting the monk to see him, Yorick pulls the carriage's curtain shut and starts writing the preface to his travelogue.

In French, the word Yorick uses for a one-person carriage, "Desobligeant," can also mean "unfriendly"—a good description of how Yorick behaved toward the Franciscan monk. The novel seems to be making fun of Yorick's rudeness by having him be immediately attracted to this "unfriendly" one-person vehicle. That Yorick hides from the monk inside the carriage, meanwhile, shows that he is ashamed of his earlier behavior.

In his preface, Yorick writes that nature has lessened humankind's unhappiness by keeping people mostly at home, where they generally have things that make them happy and that ease their suffering. He notes that people do have some ability to enjoy themselves away from home but cautions that, away from home, we have a limited ability to convey our feelings to others.

This passage, in which Yorick philosophizes about travel, reveals that he is something of a braggart. It also emphasizes his focus on emotion—he interprets people's decisions to stay home or travel through the lens of their feelings rather than other, more practical motives they might have, such as education or business.

Because people have difficulty communicating with those from different places, travelers in foreign countries are at a social and emotional disadvantage. Given this disadvantage, Yorick enumerates the possible reasons people could nevertheless have for traveling: sickness, stupidity, or "necessity." To these three reasons he adds a fourth, which he thinks is rare: to save money. Because they could as easily save money without traveling and because their motive is straightforward, Yorick calls this group "Simple Travellers." He then provides a list of different groups of travelers, ending with "The Sentimental Traveller," which he identifies with himself.

Here, the book is likely satirizing nonfiction travelogues that offer windy philosophical justifications for travel. Yet the passage also has some serious content: Yorick's suspicion that people may not be able to communicate with those foreign to them gives insight into his earlier xenophobia. Meanwhile, his identification of himself as a "Sentimental Traveller" emphasizes how important emotion is to Yorick's idea of himself.

Yorick writes that since his travelogue will be unique in the genre of travelogues, he could have claimed a group all to himself, but he wishes to be humble. He notes that if the reader has traveled, he should be able to pick out which group he belongs to and thus improve in self-knowledge.

Once again, the novel is satirizing Yorick and his inconsistency—in the same passage, he claims uniqueness for his writing and then brags about his own humility. Yet Yorick's off-hand comment that readers might be able to recognize themselves in his catalogue of various travelers and so gain self-knowledge implicitly challenges the reader. Does the reader have any more self-knowledge than Yorick does? Is the reader any more consistent?

Yorick compares travelers to the Dutchman who planted grapes from Burgundy in the Cape of Good Hope, not hoping to drink Burgundy wine but hoping to drink wine of some kind—the quality of which would be a matter of luck. Yorick acknowledges that travel can lead to benefits, but whether these benefits are real or illusory is "all a lottery." Ergo, most people should stay home if they can receive the benefits of travel without traveling. Nevertheless, Yorick believes that no country is more educated, artistic, naturally beautiful, or wittier, than—

After Yorick rudely rejected the Franciscan monk asking for alms, he consoled himself with the thought that travel would improve his manners. Yet now Yorick is arguing that whether or not travel benefits travelers is a "lottery." Once again, Yorick's opinions are inconsistent, and once again, the novel makes fun of Yorick by interrupting him in the middle of his overblown praise of some country—which country, the reader never discovers, as Yorick breaks off mid-sentence.

Some Englishmen look into Yorick's carriage. Yorick exits the carriage and doffs his hat. One Englishmen asks Yorick why the carriage was moving, and Yorick replies that it was due to his vigorous writing. The other Englishman says he's never heard "of a preface wrote in a *Desobligeant*." Yorick says he would have preferred a "*Vis a Vis*" and, not wishing to socialize with other Englishmen while in France, heads back to his room.

Here, the novel mocks Yorick's enthusiastic pretensions to travel writing by revealing he was composing his preface so forcefully that he shook the carriage he was hiding in. The phrase vis a vis *means "face to face" in French. Yorick is saying, in other words, that he would have preferred a two-person carriage to a one-person carriage—that he wants company. Yet, in contrast with the earlier, xenophobic preference for other Englishmen that Yorick expressed to the Franciscan monk, he does not seem to want their company while in France.*

On the way to his room, Yorick runs into Monsieur Dessein. Suddenly imagining that the Desobligeant has been abandoned after exciting adventures, Yorick tells Monsieur Dessein that if he were the hotelier, he would sell the Desobligeant, as "every rainy night" the carriage abandoned in the coach yard must cause him pangs of sympathetic depression. Monsieur Dessein replies that while it pains him to keep the carriage, it would also pain him to sell it, since it would break down on the poor traveler very soon. They walk back to look at the other carriages.

This passage is poking fun at Yorick's overblown, inappropriately directed sentiments and overactive imagination. Though he has just rudely rejected the company of the other English travelers, he is now expressing tender sympathy for a carriage—an inanimate object that, of course, doesn't have feelings. Monsieur Dessein, a sensible businessman, redirects Yorick's sympathies by pointing out the problems that a rickety carriage might cause for travelers—human beings who do have feelings.

Yorick notes that buyers tend to regard sellers as their opponents in a duel. Going to buy a coach from Monsieur Dessein, Yorick begins to perceive him as an enemy or a marginalized person—"he look'd like a Jew—then a Turk." A moment later, Yorick has a change of feeling, turns, and curses his own lack of generosity out loud: "thy hand is against every man, and every man's hand against thee."

Yorick expresses his sudden dislike of Monsieur Dessein xenophobically, with antisemitic and anti-Turkish language (Jewish and Turkish people were both discriminated against in Europe at the time). Ever-changeable, Yorick almost immediately regrets his bad attitude toward Monsieur Dessein, which he expresses using language from the Bible. The line "thy hand is against every man, and every man's hand against thee" is an allusion to Genesis 16:12, when an angel tells Abraham's maidservant Hagar that her son Ishmael will be ostracized by all his relatives. By using the phrase in this context, Yorick is suggesting that his own xenophobia and lack of generosity will make him an outcast.


Having turned, Yorick finds himself face to face with Madame de L—, who exclaims "heaven forbid!" in response to his outburst. He gives her his hand, and they walk to the coach-house behind Monsieur Dessein. Monsieur Dessein realizes he brought the incorrect key for the coach-house and leaves. Left alone holding hands with Madame de L—, Yorick strikes up a conversation with her.

The reader already knows that Yorick traveled from England to France with a picture of a woman named Eliza. Yet he seems willing, even eager, to be left alone with a strange new woman and hold hands with her. This passage thus suggests that Yorick may be fickle not only in his opinions and emotions but also in his romantic commitments.


In an aside to the reader, Yorick admits that he drew the curtain of the *Desobligeant* earlier not only because he wanted to avoid the Franciscan monk, but because he suspected the monk of telling Madame de L— about how Yorick had refused to give alms. He was ashamed, because he had the sense that Madame de L— was "of a better order of beings."

Here, Yorick admits that he is sometimes an unreliable narrator: earlier in the book, he withheld information from the reader about his true motives for hiding in the one-person carriage. That he withheld information about his reaction to Madame de L—suggests that he is conscious of something inappropriate in his reaction to her. He also believes she is "of a better order of beings" despite not knowing her, which suggests that he is sentimental about women and perhaps judging Madame de L— based solely on her physical appearance.



Waiting for Monsieur Dessein with Madame de L—, Yorick again senses her personal superiority. When he sees her face, he estimates that she is about 26, tan, and not beautiful but "interesting"-looking. From marks of suffering in her expression, Yorick imagines that she is a widow, feels tempted to ask her about her trials, and decides to be very polite to her—even to help her somehow, if possible.

Up to this point in the novel, Yorick has been unpleasant to everyone—rude to the Franciscan monk, standoffish with the other English travelers, and suspicious of Monsieur Dessein. Now, all of a sudden, he is using his overactive imagination to give someone the benefit of the doubt. Because this someone is an "interesting" young woman, the reader may suspect that Yorick has both sentimental and sexual motives for his kind attitude toward her.

Lifting Madame de L—'s hand, Yorick tells her it must be a joke of Fortune to leave two strangers, male and female, possibly from different countries, alone and holding hands as if they were friends. Madame de L— replies that his response betrays his chagrin at their situation: when things are going how we like, we are simply glad of it and don't pass judgments on it.

Yorick's commentary on his and Madame de L—'s situation is ambiguous. He may simply be noting the social oddity, in 18th-century France, of an unmarried and unrelated man and woman being left alone together. On the other hand, he may be expressing unease, guilt, or even pleasure at the situation. Madame de L— chooses, somewhat flirtatiously, to interpret him as abashed or dismayed to be alone with her.

Having spoken, Madame de L— takes away her hand from Yorick. Yorick feels pained and humiliated, but as soon as she touches his sleeve, he feels better. He again sees suffering on her face, longs to comfort her, and holds her hand loosely. He thinks that he can reverse any poor opinion she might have of him due to anything the Franciscan monk told her.

At this point in the book, the reader already knows that Yorick is sentimental and emotionally volatile. In this passage, the reader learns that the presence of attractive women heightens Yorick's emotions: his feelings yo-yo according to whether Madame de L— is touching him, and he's sentimental when he imagines easing her suffering.

The Franciscan monk appears, approaches Yorick, and offers him his **snuff-box**. Yorick places his own snuff-box in the monk's hand. When the monk pronounces its good quality, Yorick asks the monk to take it as "the peace-offering of a man who once used you unkindly." The monk flushes and denies that Yorick did so. Madame de L— agrees such a thing seems implausible. Yorick, against the monk and Madame de L—'s continued protestations, insists on his own fault. For a moment, they all stand in silence. Then the monk suggests that he and Yorick exchange snuff-boxes. They do. The monk kisses Yorick's snuff-box, weeps, and exits.

It is difficult for the reader to know exactly how to interpret Yorick's kind behavior toward the Franciscan monk in this passage. Since Yorick has been worrying that the Franciscan monk said something bad about him to Madame de L—, it seems possible that he is being kind to the monk solely to show off for her, due to his sentimental and sexual interest in her. Yet the reader knows Yorick regretted his behavior toward the monk immediately after it occurred, before he saw the monk speaking with Madame de L—, which suggests his remorse may be genuine. In that case, Yorick's manners may be improving as a result of his travel, just as he predicted—and the exchange of snuff-boxes is a kind of ritual acknowledgment of that improvement.

Yorick notes that since receiving the Franciscan monk's **snuff-box**, he has treasured it as a memento that helps him access some of the monk's grace and humility. Yorick later learns that monk entered the monastery at age 45, after a failed military career and a heartbreak. The latest time Yorick goes to Calais, after the journey he is now recounting, he discovers that the monk—whose name is Father Lorenzo—has died. Yorick goes to visit his grave, takes out his snuff-box, and bursts into tears.

This passage suggests that Yorick's improvement in manners as a result of traveling and meeting the Franciscan monk is real, not a show Yorick is putting on for Madame de L—. After all, Yorick is reporting that he has kept the snuff-box and used it as an inspiration to be a better person, independent of his association with Madame de L—. The passage also suggests that despite Yorick's implied skepticism about organized religion (or at least Catholicism), some genuinely religious people like the monk can be sources of goodness and inspiration.

In the present of the story, Yorick is still holding Madame de L—'s hand. He decides it would be "indecent" to drop her hand without kissing it, so he does. Madame de L— blushes. The two Englishmen who interrupted Yorick while he was writing his preface in the *Desobligeant*, mistaking Yorick and Madame de L— for a married couple, approach them and ask whether they are going to Paris the next day. Yorick says he can't speak for Madame de L—. She tells them she is going to Amiens. One of the Englishmen notes that Amiens is on the way to Paris. Yorick, tempted to reply sarcastically, takes some snuff from the Franciscan monk's **snuff-box** instead.

This passage immediately illustrates how Yorick uses the Franciscan monk's snuff-box for self-improvement: when he feels tempted to be rude to someone, he uses the snuff-box instead. The passage also illustrates Yorick's somewhat skewed attitude toward women and flirtation. Whereas the word "indecent" is usually used to describe obscene or at least excessively forward behavior, Yorick thinks it would be "indecent" not *to be forward with Madame de L—, that is, not to kiss her hand. Yorick's unusual perspective on indecency here hints at his overt sexuality, as does the English travelers' mistaking him and Madame de L— for a married couple.*

Once the Englishmen have departed, Yorick has the idea to ask Madame de L— to travel with him in a two-person carriage. Immediately, his greed warns of additional cost, his caution suggests Madame de L— is an unknown person, and his cowardice suggests something bad may happen. After his discretion suggests people may think he has an inappropriate sexual relationship with Madame de L—, his hypocrisy, meanness, and pride all warn him that riding with Madame de L— could harm his place in society and career in the church.

Yorick has a whole crowd of personified emotions that give him advice, a detail that suggests both his overblown sentimentality and his fluid identity—it's almost as though he is not a single person but many. Interestingly, although his various personified emotions recognize that other *people might think he has an inappropriate sexual relationship with Madame de L—, he doesn't seem worried that such an inappropriate relationship might actually arise, which implies that his sexual attraction to her his largely subconscious.*

Yorick, who tends to ignore his second thoughts, is about to ask Madame de L— to join him anyway. He turns to speak to her and finds that she has walked off, pacing thoughtfully by herself. He concludes that she, too, is wondering whether they should travel together and may have some relative who would disapprove. To give her time to think, Yorick begins pacing by himself outside the door of the coach-house.

This passage highlights both Yorick's impulsivity (he admits that he usually ignores his second thoughts) and his relative lack of concern for propriety (he realizes Madame de L— might have relatives who might disapprove of her traveling with a strange man but doesn't consider that she herself might hesitate). At the same time, Yorick reveals his ability to be considerate in some contexts: he doesn't press Madame de L— and gives her time to think.

Yorick thinks that if Madame de L— had stayed near him, he would have rested content with his supposition that she was a distressed widow. Now that she is walking away from him, however, he recognizes that soon he may never see her again, and this possibility makes him want to know all about her. Yet he cannot think of a way to ask her.

Yet again, the novel is satirizing Yorick's overblown emotions: although Madame de L— has only gone a few steps away and is pacing in full view of him, he immediately imagines their final parting and becomes obsessed with knowing everything about her.

A French captain, coming down the street, introduces himself to Madame de L— and asks her a battery of questions, which reveal that she is Flemish and from Brussels. The captain comments that he once participated in a siege on Brussels, and he asks her name and marital status. Then, before she can answer, he vanishes. Yorick comments, "Had I served seven years apprenticeship to good breeding, I could not have done as much."

Yorick's comment about the French captain's manners—"Had I served seven years apprenticeship to good breeding, I could not have done as much"—implies that a certain knack for manners is not something one can learn. Instead, it's innate. Since the only marked difference between Yorick and the French captain that the reader knows of is their nationality, Yorick seems to be implying that "good breeding" (that is, politeness) is an innate part of French national character.

Monsieur Dessein returns with the right key to the coach-house and lets in Yorick and Madame de L—. Yorick tries to haggle with Monsieur Dessein for the coach he wants. Claiming that it has barely enough room for two people, he climbs into it. Monsieur Dessein asks Madame L— to get into the coach as well. After pausing, she does. Monsieur Dessein, called away by a servant, shuts Yorick and Madame de L—into the carriage and leaves.

Presumably, Monsieur Dessein asks Madame de L— to climb into the carriage to prove to Yorick that it can fit two people. Yet, comically, he is closing Yorick into a small space with a strange woman after already leaving them alone together once. It seems that despite Yorick's worries about discretion, he almost can't help finding himself in mildly inappropriate situations.

Madame de L— comments on how funny it is that chance has again left her and Yorick alone together. Yorick suggests it would be funnier if he immediately started flirting with Madame de L—as a Frenchman would. Madame de L— observes that flirtation is one of Frenchmen's strengths. Yorick counters that while they have that reputation, he thinks they're terrible at romance: springing direct flirtation on a woman betrays a man's attentions to the judgment of "an unheated mind." Instead, a man should begin by paying a woman "small, quiet attentions." Madame de L— turns red and tells Yorick that he must have been flirting with her this whole time.

In their discussion of flirtation, Yorick and Madame de L— both affirm stereotypes about flirtatious Frenchmen. Yet up to this point in the novel, the reader hasn't seen any Frenchmen aggressively flirting. Instead, it's Yorick himself—an Englishman—who has been flirting with Madame de L—, despite his implied romantic commitment to another woman, Eliza. Moreover, Yorick reveals that he has a theory of flirtation, using kindness to advance on women slowly rather than springing flirtation on "an unheated mind"—that is, on a woman not primed to be receptive. Here, then, the book is implicitly undermining national stereotypes about flirtatious Frenchmen by showing that Yorick, an Englishman, is the really flirtatious one. It is also implying that Yorick's kindness and attentiveness to women may always have a sexual undercurrent.

Monsieur Dessein returns and tells Madame de L—that her brother has come to the hotel. Yorick tells her that her brother's arrival interferes with a suggestion he was going to make. She tells him he doesn't need to tell her what it was, as a woman tends to know beforehand when a man is going to be kind to her. Yorick replies that nature gives his knowledge to women for their self-defense. She denies she would have needed to defend herself from Yorick, tells him she would have accepted his suggestion, and goes on to say that, if she had, she would have told him a story that would make him pity her. Then she exits the carriage and says goodbye.

Up to this point, Yorick has couched his flirtation with Madame de L— largely in terms of his sentimental interest in her suffering. By admitting that women sometimes need to defend themselves from men, he acknowledges that Madame de L— could interpret his overtures as sexually opportunistic, even predatory. Madame de L— herself, however, does not seem to find Yorick threatening. Moreover, by telling him that he would pity her if he knew her story, she affirms that Yorick's sentimental intuition about her suffering is correct. Thus, while the novel sometimes mocks Yorick's sexually tinged sentimentality, it here suggests that sentiment does sometimes help Yorick correctly understand situations.

Yorick buys a carriage, orders horses, and is walking back to the hotel when he hears a clock strike. He realizes that he's been in Calais for barely an hour. He muses to himself that life contains a wealth of experiences for curious and observant people. He pities those people who cannot find anything to engage their emotions when they travel and believes that he himself could do so even in a desert.

At this point, Yorick has both suggested that travel can improve manners and argued that whether travel improves travelers' personalities is a matter of chance. In this passage, he clarifies the apparent contradiction: travel can improve already curious and observant people, but it likely won't have any effect on incurious and unemotional people.

A man named Smelfungus once traveled all over Europe but, due to his cranky disposition, enjoyed nothing: he criticized the Pantheon and the Venus of Medicis. Another man, Mundungus, traveled all over Europe but got nothing out of it because he would not look around him. Yorick thinks men like Smelfungus and Mundugus would not be content even in heaven.

Critics believe that the novel is using the character Smelfungus to satirize a real, nonfiction travel writer, a Scotsman named Tobias Smollett, whose 1766 travelogue Travels through France and Italy *complained a great deal about foreign people and their customs. Smelfungus and Mundungus are examples of incurious or unemotional people whom travel cannot improve.*

Traveling from Calais to Montriul, Yorick must repeatedly exit his carriage to reattach his portmanteau, which keeps falling off. When he reaches Montriul, the landlord suggests he hire a servant and tells him of a young man who would like to serve an Englishman. Yorick asks why an Englishman. The landlord replies that Englishmen are generous and notes that, the previous night, an English lord gave money to the servant girl. In French, Yorick says that's too bad for Mademoiselle Janatone (the landlord's daughter). The landlord, thinking Yorick has made a language mistake, tells him he should say not "too bad" but "so much the better." Yorick notes that these two phrases are "the two great hinges in French conversation."

Once again, characters in the book are affirming national stereotypes that the book itself seems to undermine. The landlord in Montriul claims that Englishmen are generous, but readers have already observed Yorick, an Englishman, behaving ungenerously toward the Franciscan monk. Meanwhile, Yorick makes a grand claim about Frenchman's frequent use of the phrases "too bad" and "so much the better," but these phrases have not appeared frequently in Frenchmen's dialogue in the novel up to this point. Thus, the novel seems to question whether national stereotypes accurately describe individuals.

The landlord introduces Yorick to La Fleur, his new servant, and tells Yorick that he (Yorick) is to decide whether he appreciates La Fleur's quality as a servant. But the landlord himself will vouch for his loyalty.

La Fleur is the first major French character the book has introduced. As such, the reader may wonder whether La Fleur will adhere to the stereotypes about Frenchmen that Yorick has been affirming.

Yorick is sensible that he tends "to be taken with all kinds of people at first sight" and, as a result, steels himself against generous impulses. La Fleur, though, looks "genuine" to him, so he hires him immediately. He subsequently learns that La Fleur, having served in the military playing drums for a while and then having returned to his home country, only knows how to play drum, fife, and (somewhat) the fiddle. He cannot shave or dress wigs. Though Yorick takes himself to task a little for hiring an untalented servant, he nevertheless likes La Fleur's picturesque face.

Yorick displays a degree of self-knowledge by admitting that he tends "to be taken with all kinds of people at first sight"—readers have already seen him indulge in such a sentimental snap reaction to Madame de L—. Despite his self-knowledge, however, Yorick does not change his behavior: he has an immediate sentimental reaction to La Fleur's "genuine" appearance and hires him before figuring out that La Fleur has no useful skills. Here, the novel seems to suggest that understanding one's own emotional tendencies doesn't necessarily lead to greater self-control.

As an aside to the reader, Yorick says that La Fleur goes on to accompany him throughout his travels and that he (Yorick) never regrets hiring La Fleur despite his lack of useful talents, because of his levelheadedness in the face of trouble, which supports Yorick's mood.

Interestingly, Yorick's sentimental snap judgment about La Fleur turns out well for him. Once again, the novel seems to suggest that while Yorick's overblown emotional reactions may be silly, they do sometimes lead him to intuitively understand other people, such as Madame de L— and La Fleur.

The next day, as Yorick is planning to leave Montriul, he sees La Fleur surrounded by girls, whose hands he is repeatedly kissing. The landlord tells Yorick that the whole town will miss La Fleur and that the servant's only bad luck is, "He is always in love." Yorick muses that he himself is almost always in love, and he feels that he is a better and more generous person when in love—it is only in periods between love affairs that he behaves cruelly or ungenerously.

At first glance, this passage seems to affirm stereotypes about French people: La Fleur, the novel's first major French character, is a flirtatious womanizer. Yet the landlord, another Frenchman, seems to be criticizing La Fleur for his romantic behavior, which implies that a national stereotype will not apply to every individual of that nationality. Moreover, Yorick, an Englishman, finds himself sympathizing with La Fleur's stereotypically French romanticism—a detail suggesting that personal identity trumps national identity in determining people's sexual and romantic behavior. Previously, the novel has shown that sexual attraction motivates Yorick to be kind to the object of his attraction. Here, he claims that love affairs make him a kinder person in general. This claim seems to imply that sexuality and kindness are somehow intertwined behaviors.

Yorick briefly recounts an ancient story: there was a town in Thrace called Abdera known for violence and corruption. One day, the play *Andromeda* of Euripides was staged there. The people of Abdera loved the play, particularly Perseus's speech about Cupid. The next day, all the people of Abdera were talking of Perseus and Cupid and became obsessed with Love. They gave up their violent ways, became loving to one another, and made and listened to music. Only God could have accomplished such a change in Abdera.

Euripides was an ancient Greek tragedian who lived in the 400s B.C.E. His play Andromeda *has not survived in full but is referenced in other surviving works. It tells the story of the Greek hero Perseus saving the princess Andromeda from being eaten by a monster and falling in love with her. Yorick's story is about the violent people of Abdera becoming peaceful after they heard Perseus's speech about Cupid, the Greco-Roman god of love, in* Andromeda. *The outcome of this story reinforces the claim he made earlier that love and sex motivate people to be kinder. His further claim that God transformed the people of Abdera implies that love and sex have a religious aspect.*

As Yorick leaves the inn at Montriul, a group of beggars surrounds him. One beggar withdraws his claim on Yorick to make room for female beggars, which Yorick esteems. After Yorick has given out all the money he thinks he can spare, he sees a beggar he hasn't noticed before, who has held back due to his shame. Touched, Yorick gives him a large amount. All the beggars thank Yorick, but he feels that the shamefaced beggar who must dry his face with his **handkerchief** shows him the most gratitude.

At first glance, Yorick may seem to behave generously by giving the Montriul beggars money. His gratification that one of the beggars cries and must dry his face with a handkerchief suggests a more cynical reading, however—namely, that Yorick is and self-indulgently using the beggars' emotional reactions to feed his own sentimentality. This passage is the first of several instances in the novel in which a handkerchief marks an episode of satirized emotional self-indulgence.

Yorick enters his carriage, and La Fleur mounts a horse to ride alongside him. They come upon a dead donkey, which La Fleur's horse refuses to approach. When La Fleur tries to make it, the horse bucks him off. La Fleur cries "Diable!," remounts the horse, and beats it, but the horse bucks him off again and flees back to Montriul. La Fleur cries, "Peste!" When the horse has passed out of sight, La Fleur cries out a third curse that Yorick leaves to the reader's imagination. Yorick decides, for decency, not to swear at all while in France. He invites La Fleur into the carriage with him, and they travel on to Nampont.

The close attention that Yorick pays to La Fleur's various French curses seems to be satirizing nonfiction travelogues that focus too much on unimportant details. Yorick's decision not to swear at all while in France, meanwhile, betrays a squeamishness and excessive delicacy at odds with his unruly sexual attractions.


In Nampont, Yorick and La Fleur meet a man in mourning. Yorick initially thinks, from the man's tone, that he is mourning his child, but he's actually mourning the dead donkey Yorick just passed in the road. The man tells his story: he once lived in Germany, where he had three sons. Two died of smallpox, and the third got sick with it. The man swore to go on a pilgrimage to Spain if his own life was spared. As the man survived, he went on his pilgrimage riding on a donkey, and it became his friend. Yorick tries to comfort the man by telling him he must have been a good donkey-owner, but the man worries that he wasn't. Yorick reflects that people ought to love one another as much as this man loved his donkey.

In the episode of the German man with the dead donkey, the book is poking fun at people who are excessively sentimental in reaction to small matters but unemotional in reaction to large ones. The joke is that the German man's children have died, but he is crying over his donkey, not over them. Yorick's idea that people ought to love one another as much as the German man loved his donkey suggests that emotion can be a good thing—but only when it's directed toward the right objects.

Although Yorick wants his coach to go slowly, so he can contemplate the donkey-owner's story, his coach-driver puts the coach to a gallop. Yorick, irritated, falls asleep. When he wakes, he has reached Amiens, where he sees Madame de L— drive by. Later, Madame de L— sends Yorick a note asking him to deliver a letter to Madame R— in Paris. She also suggests that if he visits her in Brussels, she will tell him her tale of woe. Recalling that he has sworn fidelity to another woman, Eliza, Yorick vows not to visit Brussels without Eliza.

At various points in the novel, Yorick has argued that sexuality and kindness reinforce each other: sexual attraction motivates us to be kind, and kindness can be a form of flirtation. Here, however, he acknowledges that sexual attraction can make us behave unkindly: *his sexual attraction to Madame de L—has tempted him to break his promise to Eliza. Thus, the relationship between sexuality and kindness is more complicated that Yorick has acknowledged before.*

La Fleur gives wine to the servant who brought Madame de L—'s letter. To return the favor, the servant brings La Fleur back to Madame de L—'s hotel, where La Fleur plays the fife for the servants in the kitchen. Madame de L—, overhearing the music and discovering that Yorick's servant is the one playing it, asks La Fleur to come speak with her and inquires whether Yorick has sent her a letter in return. La Fleur, embarrassed that Yorick has not written Madame de L— a letter, pretends he has forgotten it and runs back to Yorick's hotel.

This passage further complicates Yorick's earlier claims that sexuality and kindness are mutually reinforcing. Having decided not to pursue Madame de L—out of respect for his promise to Eliza, Yorick now must decide whether to rudely refuse to respond to Madame de L—or to continue corresponding with her and risk infidelity to Eliza. It seems that Yorick's multiple sexual attractions will lead him to be unkind to one woman or the other.

Back at Yorick's hotel, La Fleur tells Yorick what happened and suggests he write Madame de L— a letter right then. Yorick can think of nothing to write. La Fleur suggests that Yorick plagiarize a letter from a drummer to a corporal's wife that he happens to have. The letter suggests that the drummer was having an affair with the corporal's wife and waiting for her husband to leave so he could see her. Yorick copies the letter with a few details changed, sends it to Madame L—, and leaves for Paris.

Yorick's dilemma about Eliza and Madame de L— ends farcically. Although he may keep the letter of his promise to Eliza, he seems to violate the spirit of it by sending another woman a plagiarized love letter. In addition, he is treating Madame de L— rather badly by sending her a love letter that originally belonged to someone else. Here, the book seems to satirize Yorick's flirtatiousness and kindness by suggesting that in his attempts to flirt with two women, he has ended up treating them both unkindly.

In Paris, Yorick looks out the window of his hotel, sees young and old dandies passing by, and despairs of his "dusty black coat" and single servant. He contemplates fleeing to a back alley and flirting with a shop girl to make himself feel better, but instead, he resolves to deliver the letter to Madame R— and asks La Fleur to get him a barber and clean his coat.

In this passage, Yorick reveals the link between his vanity and his flirtatiousness: when he feels "dusty," dowdy, and poor in comparison to Parisian dandies, he wants to flirt with someone to boost his mood. Again, the novel is suggesting that while Yorick's sexuality may motivate him to be kind, his sexuality can also be vain and self-indulgent.

When the barber arrives, he disdains Yorick's current wig and insists on selling him a new one. Yorick criticizes the wig's curls, and the barber suggests he dip it in the ocean—by which he means a bucket of water in the next room. Yorick thinks that calling a water bucket an ocean is quintessentially French, and he muses that these small details are more revelatory of national character than "the most important matters of state." Because the barber takes so long, Yorick puts off delivering Madame R—'s letter and goes for a walk instead.

Because Yorick values personal emotions over public affairs, he believes that minor personal details—such as the barber's exaggerations—reveal more about national character than "matters of state." Yet, curiously, he does not value personal and individual details so much as to reject stereotyping individuals according to their nationality. This tension—between Yorick's individualism and his belief in stereotypes—has run throughout the novel so far.

On his walk, Yorick enters a shop to ask a grisset directions to the Opera comique. Although the grisset repeats the directions multiple times, Yorick forgets them as soon as he leaves. He returns to the shop to ask again. The grisset expresses disbelief at his forgetfulness. Yorick excuses himself by saying he was thinking more about her, the grisset, than the directions. The grisset asks him to wait a moment while an employee takes care of some business. As Yorick and the grisset are waiting for the employee, Yorick tells the grisset that she has such a good heart, she must have an excellent pulse. She suggests he take her pulse, so he lays his fingers on her wrist.

"Grisset" is a French term for a working-class woman. Whereas previously Yorick has confined his flirtations to women (Madame de L— and, in the past, Eliza) who seem to belong to his social class, he's now seemingly interested in a woman of a lower social class than he is. Since the grisset depends on the business of people like Yorick for her livelihood, his flirtation with her seems less kind and more predatory than his flirtation with Madame de L—.

While Yorick is taking the grisset's pulse, her husband enters the shop. The grisset explains to her husband that Yorick is taking her pulse. The husband doffs his cap to Yorick and leaves. Shocked, Yorick contemplates how, in England, shopkeeper husbands and wives do everything together—whereas in France, shopkeeper wives deal with customers while shopkeeper husbands lurk in back rooms. He concludes that social interaction makes people better.

Previously, Yorick has expressed a belief that travel makes people better because it exposes them to people unlike themselves. Now he seems to broaden his claim about travel—interacting with foreigners—being good to include all kinds of social interaction: he believes the French shopkeeper is inferior to the English shopkeeper because he interacts with fewer people. Yorick displays a certain hypocrisy, here, when he feels shocked that the French shopkeeper doesn't mind Yorick flirting with his wife—after all, Yorick is the one who decided to flirt with her in the first place.

The grisset's employee returns carrying a parcel of gloves, interrupting Yorick taking her pulse, and Yorick tells the grisset he'd like to buy some gloves as well. None of the gloves she offers fit him. Yorick buys some gloves, anyway, hoping that the grisset will overcharge him. Eventually she does ask for slightly more money. Yorick pays it, bows, and leaves.

Yorick seems to want the grisset to overcharge him because, finding her pretty, he wants to do something nice for her. Once again, sexuality and kindness are intertwined in Yorick's behavior. Yet the exchange of money makes the flirtation between Yorick and the grisset seems a little more disturbing than the flirtation between Yorick and Madame de L—.

At the Opera comique, Yorick shares a box with an old French soldier, who reminds him of his ex-soldier friend Captain Tobias Shandy. When Yorick enters, the soldier takes his glasses off, and Yorick bows in return. He contemplates the value of body language in understanding other people.

Captain Tobias Shandy is a character in another one of Laurence Sterne's novels, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentlemen, *in which Yorick also plays a small role. Yorick's musings on body language suggest that human beings have certain universal traits in common and can understand one another while traveling, despite differences in nationality.*

Yorick recalls a concert he attended in Milan, where he and the Marquesina di F*** were walking down opposite sides of a hall, couldn't figure out how to pass each other courteously, and collided. Eventually, Yorick resolved their difficulties by freezing. After the Marquesina passed him, to followed her to apologize, handed her into her coach, and ended up riding to her home with her. He concludes by stating he enjoyed the Marquesina's company more than anyone else's in Italy.

Here, the inconsistent Yorick once again undercuts the point he was attempting to make. Although he was just praising body language for its ability to help people understand one another, he immediately shares an anecdote about failures of body language—he and the Marquesina kept second-guessing each other's movements and ended up knocking into each other. Characteristically for the flirtatious Yorick, this initial failure of communication did not prevent him from going home with the Marquesina shortly afterward.

The opera comique contains a standing section for when all the seats are taken. In the standing section, Yorick sees a dwarf. In front of the dwarf, blocking his view of the stage, stands a very tall German man. When the dwarf tries to explain his predicament to the German, the German ignores him. Yorick, taking some snuff from the Franciscan monk's **snuff-box**, thinks how graciously the monk would have reacted in the German's place.

Although Yorick remains inconsistent, he still remembers the Franciscan monk and the principles of friendliness, generosity, and religious humility that their exchange of snuff-boxes represents. Thus, the novel reveals that Yorick's travels have made some impression on him, even if he remains in large part the impulsive and fickle person he was at the novel's beginning.

The dwarf, outraged, threatens to cut off the German's ponytail, and the German implies the dwarf couldn't reach his ponytail to make good the threat. The old French soldier alerts an opera employee of the problem, and the employee pushes the German aside and moves the dwarf in front of him. Yorick claps. The soldier comments that, despite Yorick's approval, such a thing wouldn't be allowed in England. Yorick replies that in England, everyone sits. The soldier, admiring Yorick's wit, offers him some snuff.

Like most characters in the novel, the old French soldier affirms national stereotypes—he has decided ideas about what would and would not be allowed in England, a foreign country. Yet since the old French soldier offers Yorick snuff—associated, in the novel, with the Franciscan monk's snuff-box and thus with international friendship—the reader suspects the soldier will not be xenophobic.

Yorick hears someone yelling at a priest to put his hands up. He asks the old French soldier what's going on. The soldier explains that some audience members are insisting that a priest, standing behind some shop girls, keep his hands up during the opera. Yorick asks whether a priest would steal from shop girls. In response, the soldier whispers something to Yorick that makes him blanch and cry out against people's discourtesy. The soldier explains "it was an illiberal sarcasm at the church." He goes on to say that every nation has pros and cons, and that traveling to different nations is good because "it taught us mutual toleration; and mutual toleration [...] taught us mutual love." Yorick thinks the soldier is stating his exact thoughts, but better than Yorick could have expressed them himself.

The novel seems to imply here that the people are yelling at the priest to keep his hands up so that he won't grope the shop girls. This implication associates organized religion with sexual predation and hypocrisy. Yet, contrary to Yorick's earlier skepticism about organized religion in continental Europe, his belief that the people are being discourteous to the priest and the old French soldier's description of their behavior as "illiberal sarcasm" suggests that they are joking—no one really believes the priest is going to grope the girls. The old French soldier's statements about travel, mutual toleration, and mutual love almost seem like thesis statements for the novel: travel improves us by making us more sympathetic to foreign people, who may be unlike us.

Yorick recalls a time that he at first found a foreigner's behavior crude and embarrassing but later found it innocent. One day, he took a coach ride into the country with an acquaintance, Madame de Rambouliet. As they were returning, Yorick asked her whether she needed anything. She replied that she only needed to urinate. Yorick helped her down from the coach; he concludes, "had I been the priest of the chaste CASTALIA, I could not have served at her fountain with a more respectful decorum."

In Greek mythology, Castalia was a naiad or water nymph. In some versions of her story, she turned herself into a fountain to escape the god Apollo's sexual predation. The novel seems to make fun of Yorick's sentimentality about women here: by comparing Madame de Rambouliet to a mythological nymph, her urine to a "fountain," and himself to a priest, he seems to be talking in an overly precious and religious way about basic bodily functions. Yet, at the same time, this anecdote reveals that Yorick is able to tolerate and even celebrate foreign behavior that he might initially find unseemly.

VOLUME 2

The old French soldier's words on travel and toleration remind Yorick of Polonius's speech to his son in *Hamlet*, so on the way home from the Opera, he visits a bookseller intending to buy Shakespeare's complete works. The bookseller denies that he has Shakespeare's complete works. When Yorick points to a copy on the counter, the bookseller tells him that it belongs to Count de B****, who only sent it to the shop to be bound. The bookseller goes on to say that Count de B**** adores both English literature and English people. Yorick says the bookseller's courtesy makes him want to spend money in his store.

*This passage alludes to Act 1, Scene 3 of Shakespeare's tragedy Hamlet, in which the king's counselor Polonius gives advice to his son Laertes before Laertes travels abroad. Since the character Polonius is notoriously a braggart, the novel may be gently satirizing Yorick and the old French gentlemen's pat pro-travel sentiments by comparing them to Polonius's speech. On the other hand, the speech contains the famous advice "to thine own self be true," which the novel may be unironically endorsing. This passage also introduces Count de B****, another major French character notable for his love of British culture.*

A chambermaid enters the bookstore, asks for *Les Egarments du Coeur & de L'Esprit*, and pays for it. Yorick questions why she'd be interested in such a book, unless she has fallen in love or someone has broken her heart. The girl prays that God will guard her from that. Yorick advises her to stick to that sentiment, puts a crown in her purse, and suggests that she will remember his advice so long as she has the money—so she shouldn't spend it. The girl swears to save the money.

Les Egarments du Coeur & de L'Esprit *is a French novel by Claude-Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon, published 1736–1738. In English, the novel's title translates roughly to "Distractions of the Heart and of the Mind." In the 18th century, it was considered scandalous due to its sexual and romantic content. As Yorick did with the grisset earlier, here he also displays kindness toward a lower-class woman by giving her money. Yet the reader wonders whether he has ulterior sexual motives, given how he questions the chambermaid about her love life.*

Yorick and the chambermaid leave the bookshop. He asks her directions to the hotel de Modene. She gives two possible sets of directions, and Yorick chooses the one that allows him to walk with her longer. The chambermaid mentions that she serves Madame R—. Yorick, surprised, exclaims that he has a letter for Madame R—. He asks the chambermaid to send her mistress his good wishes and announce his intention to visit the next day. They walk along together a little longer. At one point, looking at her, Yorick wonders whether he and she could be related. When it comes time for them to part, Yorick considers kissing her but instead "bid[s] God bless her."

Yorick mixes sentimental, sexual, and religious impulses in his reaction to the chambermaid. His thought that he and the chambermaid could be related suggests a sentimental invocation of the universal brotherhood of humankind, while his desire to kiss her suggests that he is sexually attracted to her. That he finally wishes God would bless her instead shows that he uses religion to channel his emotional and sexual impulses—one of several different ways characters use religion in the novel.

Back at the hotel, La Fleur tells Yorick that the police came looking for him. Yorick knows why: England and France are at war, and he has entered France without a passport. The hotelier comes into Yorick's rooms to repeat La Fleur's story about the police and expresses his hope that Yorick has a passport. Yorick admits he doesn't. The hotelier asks whether Yorick has French friends who can help him get a passport, and Yorick says no. The hotelier suggests that Yorick will be thrown into the Bastile. Yorick says that as he's rented his hotel room for a month, he won't be leaving. The hotelier exclaims at Englishmen's strangeness and exits.

The war to which Yorick alludes here is likely the Seven Years' War, which took place between France and England from 1756 to 1763. It's characteristic of Yorick's sentimental individualism and impulsiveness that he's traveled to France while France and England are at war—he doesn't seem to have thought about how global political events might influence his personal actions. The Bastile—more commonly spelled Bastille—is a fortress prison in Paris, which protestors famously stormed during the French Revolution on July 14, 1789. At the time Laurence Sterne wrote A Sentimental Journey, *the Bastille was still a political prison controlled by the French monarchy. Yorick's flippant response to the threat of the Bastille suggests that he does not fully understand the danger he is in.*

Downplaying his passport problem, Yorick chats with La Fleur over dinner. Once La Fleur has left, however, Yorick ponders his situation. He remembers his friend Eugenius offering him travel money before he set out. Refusing, Yorick made a joke that the French would likely put him in the Bastile, at which point he would live on France's dime. Now, seriously threatened with the Bastile, Yorick takes the stairs to the courtyard while thinking that the Bastile is only as terrifying as the mind allows it to be.

Yorick doubles down on his sentimental individualism by insisting to himself that prison is only as terrifying as the mind allows it to be—he thinks that internal, personal emotions and attitudes, not external facts and situations, are what really matter. This attitude allows him to make a joke out of the threat of prison.

On the stairs, Yorick hears someone say, "it could not get out." He cannot see who it is and passes on. On his way back, he hears the same complaint, looks up, and recognizes it is a **starling** in a cage, repeating the same phrase over and over. Yorick tries and fails to open the cage. The bird's distress makes Yorick realize that imprisonment in the Bastile would be terrible. He criticizes slavery, praises liberty, and prays to God for freedom.

Whereas before Yorick's sentiments have led him to downplay the threat of prison, his sentimental reaction to the starling's captivity now helps him understand how horrible prison would be for him. Thus, the novel shows how emotions can sometimes lead Yorick astray but can also lead him to a better understanding of his situation.

Reentering his room, Yorick imagines how terrible imprisonment would be. At first he tries to imagine the world's enslaved peoples, but he finds it difficult to pictures such a large number. Instead, he imagines "a single captive"—first the captive's physical distress, emotional pain, and deprivation; then his time-keeping, his chains, his sighing—and bursts into tears. Yorick gets up, summons La Fleur, and announces that the next morning he will go visit Monsieur Le Duc de Choiseul.

At the time Laurence Sterne wrote A Sentimental Journey, *England had not yet made slavery illegal. Here, the novel suggests that the evils of slavery are too great to understand when we think about all enslaved people—when we focus sentimentally on a single person suffering under slavery or captivity, we are better able to understand how bad slavery and incarceration are. Monsieur Le Duc de Choiseul is a real historical figure, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1761–1766. Yorick's decision to go visit this personage indicates that Yorick is now taking seriously the danger of prison as a result of encountering the starling and imagining a suffering captive.*

The next morning, Yorick and La Fleur take a coach to Versailles. As Yorick doesn't find the ride interesting enough to describe, he instead explains what happened to the **starling**. A young Englishman brought it over from Dover, bought it a cage in Paris, and taught it to speak its phrase. When the young Englishman's master left for Italy, the young Englishman gave the bird to the hotelier. La Fleur ended up buying the starling from the hotelier for Yorick. After his travels, Yorick brings the bird home to England, where lord after lord asks for it and then gives it away. Yorick, in the bird's honor, puts it upon his crest of arms.

Given how emotionally Yorick reacted to the starling's captivity, the reader might have expected him to try to free it. Yet instead, he gives it to an English lord—who in turn passes it around. With this detail, the novel seems to be suggesting, cynically, that Yorick cares about the evils of captivity and slavery only while they are threatening him. After the danger has passed for him, he no longer cares about other captives. The novel here seems to be suggesting that sentimental sympathy for captives and slaves is a limited, insufficient way of advocating for them.

Yorick wonders with agitation how he should approach Le Duc de Choiseul. When he enters the Duc's building, however, a servant or employee tells him the Duc is occupied and will be busy for the next two hours. Yorick decides to drive to the nearest hotel, thinking: "There is a fatality in it—I seldom go to the place I set out for."

That Yorick quickly allows himself to be diverted from his important errand illustrates his fickleness once again. His fatalism about always ending somewhere different than he intended, meanwhile, seems to express the novel's philosophy of travel as a whole: rather than strictly planning out an itinerary, a person should go where life takes them, because the experience of travel matters more than the destination.


On second thought, Yorick orders the coachman to give him a driving tour of Versailles. He comments that Versailles is likely small. The coachman corrects him, saying many aristocrats have hotels there. Yorick thinks of contacting the Anglophile Count de B****, so he sends La Fleur to ask a man across the street where the Count de B**** has his hotel.

*All Yorick knows about the Count de B**** is that the Count loves English literature and English people. In a novel where so many characters affirm national stereotypes, the reader suspects that the Count de B****'s general fondness for English things may be enough to motivate him to help Yorick.*

When La Fleur comes back, he tells Yorick that the man across the street, though a Chevalier de St. Louis, is selling pastries. Yorick, curious, goes to ask the Chevalier his story. The Chevalier explains that "at the conclusion of the last peace," he was left without a job or any money, as the King of France cannot reward everyone. He sells pastries to support himself and his wife. As an aside to the reader, Yorick mentions that nine months later, the King of France learned of the Chevalier's plight and gave him 1,500 livres a year to live on.

A "Chevalier de St. Louis" is a soldier who belongs to the Royal and Military Order of St. Louis. Membership in the order was a reward for officers who served well. That the Chevalier is now selling pastries—a menial job for a decorated former officer—suggests that the French monarchy does not take care of retired French soldiers as well as it could or should. The conclusion of the story, in which the King of France rewards the pastry-selling chevalier, suggests that despite the monarchy's failings, the King is personally fair and generous.

As another aside to the reader, Yorick tells the story of the Marquis d'E**** in Brittany. The Marquis's aristocratic family left him in dire financial straits. The Marquis deposits his sword at the court at Rennes and enters business in Martinico. Two decades later, the Marquis has made enough money to return to Brittany with his family. Yorick is in Brittany to witness the Marquis return to Rennes. The Marquis touches his face with a **handkerchief**, takes his sword, examines it, and—seeing a spot of rust on it—weeps. Then he sheathes his sword and leaves with his family. Yorick recounts that he was jealous of the Marquis's sentiments.

*This anecdote is another example of a handkerchief representing Yorick's sentimentality, which the novel subtly satirizes. Although the Marquis d'E**** has suffered economic ruin and exile, Yorick is jealous of him because he gets to experience intense feelings—an attitude that the reader can recognize is self-indulgent and unempathetic, though Yorick himself does not.*

Yorick, finding Count de B**** reading Shakespeare, announces that he is visiting without an introduction because Shakespeare would make the introductions for them. He then explains to the Count about the bookseller's shop and his passport trouble. Making clear that he has "not come to spy the nakedness of the land," he asks for the Count's help.

*The phrase "spy on the nakedness of the land" is an allusion to the Bible, specifically Genesis 42:9, in which Joseph (who is serving as governor of Egypt) falsely accuses his brothers (who have traveled there to buy grain during a famine) of spying on Egypt for nefarious purposes. With this allusion, Yorick is acknowledging that England and France are at war but insisting that he has not traveled to France as a private individual, not an enemy combatant. He may also be using the biblical allusion to appeal to the Count de B****'s religious sympathies.*


Count de B**** chats to Yorick about a variety of subjects, including women. Yorick confesses his great love of all women—a love he thinks is necessary for loving any individual woman properly. The Count replies jokingly that while Yorick may not have come "to spy the nakedness of the land," if he happened to spy the nakedness of French women, it wouldn't bother him. Shocked by the Count's indelicacy, Yorick states that if he saw their physical nakedness he would cover it up, but that he is traveling in order "to spy the *nakedness* of their hearts"—that is, their true selves beneath "the different disguises of customs, climates, and religion." He goes on to explain that that is why he has seen no famous building or monuments in his travels: he is interested in people, not artworks and architecture.

*Yorick has contradictory attitudes toward sex: though he compulsively flirts with most women he meets, he reacts prudishly to the Count de B****'s off-color joke. Given his compulsive flirtation, the reader may suspect that his claim of wanting to see naked hearts, not naked bodies, is a sentimental cover for his baser sexual impulses. Yet his claim that he cares about individuals and about similarities between people of different nationalities is consistent with his change of heart toward the Franciscan monk and his conversation with the old French soldier. Thus, the reader may suspect that Yorick is self-deceived about his sexual impulses but still largely well-meaning.*




Count de B**** points out that while Shakespeare has introduced him to Yorick, Shakespeare hasn't mentioned Yorick's name. Thrown in confusion, Yorick thinks: "there is scarce any body I cannot give a better account of than of myself." Therefore, he opens the Count's copy of *Hamlet* and points to the name Yorick in it. Though at first baffled by Yorick's identification with "the king of Denmark's jester," the Count eventually realizes that Yorick's name is Yorick. He hugs Yorick, pockets his *Hamlet*, and exits the room.

Given Yorick's fluid and contradictory personality, it isn't surprising that he can give better accounts of other people than of himself. "Yorick" is also the name of a dead court jester in Shakespeare's Hamlet; Hamlet gives a famous speech to Yorick's skull in Act 5, Scene 1. Sterne may have named his character Yorick after Shakespeare's Yorick because Hamlet calls Yorick a man of "infinite jest," and Sterne intended his Yorick to be comedic.

While waiting for Count de B****, Yorick reads *Much Ado about Nothing* and ponders the power of literature to transport us away from unpleasant realities. The Count returns with a passport for Yorick, saying that laughing men aren't dangerous and that he could only have obtained the passport so quickly for "the king's jester." When Yorick objects that he isn't a jester, the Count points out that his name is Yorick and he makes jokes. Yorick points out that, unlike a jester, no one pays him to make jokes. He explains that England hasn't had a king's jester since Charles the Second, and now English people are too good for anyone to make jokes about them. The Count comments on the irony of this.

This passage explores the difference between personal identity and national identity. Although a personal identity like Yorick's is fluid and contradictory, nations don't care about that—they want to apply some rigid definition to him, like "king's jester," even if that definition is inaccurate. Thus, the passage suggests that national identities are rigid definitions inaccurately imposed on individuals from above. Ironically, Yorick contests the inaccurate definition that France has imposed on him by affirming some different broad stereotypes about English people—that they are upright and humorless.

Yorick thinks that his identification with "the king's jester" on his passport somewhat undermines his victory in obtaining it. He muses that "there is nothing unmixt in this world" and recalls a scholar named Bevoriskius who interrupted a serious treatise to complain about birds outside his window. Yorick then apologizes to the reader for the digression.

Yorick may be correct that the world contains no unmixed victories. That said, his silly digression about a serious scholar who complains about birds suggests that the novel is poking fun at Yorick's sentimental philosophizing.

The Count de B**** asks Yorick what he thinks of French people and insists that he speak honestly. Yorick says he thinks the French are too suave and polite. He compares them to coins that have ground against one another in a pocket until they have lost their individuating marks. By contrast, the English are like coins kept out of circulation that have retained their individuating marks, though "they are not so pleasant to feel." Feeling bad for this criticism, Yorick then enumerates French people's virtues, concluding that their only vice is excessive seriousness. Shocked, the Count tells Yorick that he has to go but invites him to come defend that statement at a later time.

By this point in the novel, Yorick has repeatedly praised travel and social interactions with foreigners for their civilizing effects. Now, however, he claims that too much socializing—too much "circulation," in his analogy of the French to currency—causes people to lose their individuality, which is a bad thing. It is unclear whether Yorick is just indulging in self-contradiction again here or whether the novel genuinely believes that social interaction has the trade-offs Yorick describes.


When he returns to his hotel, Yorick meets Madame R—'s chambermaid, who has come with a band box to ask whether Yorick has a letter for Madame R—. Yorick and the chambermaid go into his room while Yorick pens a note. Alone together, they both start blushing. Yorick feels some unvirtuous sensations, takes the chambermaid's hand, leads her to the door, and asks her to remember his advice.

A "band box" is a container for small pieces of clothing. That the chambermaid is carrying such a box suggests she may have been on other errands when she stopped in to speak with Yorick. Yorick's attempts to hurry the chambermaid out of his room, meanwhile, suggest that he not only is experiencing inappropriate sexual feelings for her but that he is consciously aware of them for once.

Somehow—Yorick isn't sure how—he and the chambermaid end up sitting on his bed together. The chambermaid shows him a purse she has made to hold the coin he gave her. Seeing some broken stitches on Yorick's clothing, she sews them up. Then she shows him her shoe-strap, which has come loose. Yorick, trying to buckle her shoe for her, tips her over.

Here, the novel is poking fun at Yorick's sentimental good intentions toward the chambermaid—somehow, despite his nominal desire to protect her virtue, he ends up knocking her over onto a bed.


Yorick breaks off his narration to give a speech about passion. He suggests that it isn't bad to have passions unless they cause you to act badly, and that eliminating passion might eliminate goodness too: "If nature has so wove her web of kindness, that some threads of love and desire are entangled with the piece—must the whole web be rent in drawing them out?" Yorick prays that he may continue to feel manly passions and act well under temptation. Then he guides the chambermaid out of his room, locks the door behind them, kisses her on the cheek, and takes her out of the hotel.

Here, Yorick gives the fullest description of his ideas about the relationship between sexuality and kindness: sexuality is one of the "threads" in kindness's "web," so that people cannot remove or repress their sexual instincts without damaging their instinct to be kind. Yorick thus concludes that struggling with sexual temptation is preferable to eliminating sexual feelings. Notably, the novel seems to affirm Yorick's perspective here—despite his previous borderline inappropriate actions toward the chambermaid, at this point he does avoid taking advantage of her and behaves kindly to her as he says goodbye.

Overwrought by the episode with the chambermaid, Yorick decides not to go immediately back to his room. Instead, he stands outside the hotel watching the street. Across the street, he sees a man begging exclusively from women and, in every case, receiving some money from them. Yorick wonders what the man could possibly be saying to beg so successfully from women and, pondering this question, goes back to his hotel room.

Yorick's intense reaction to the episode with the chambermaid suggests that while he succeeded in not taking advantage of her, it was difficult for him to overcome the temptation. His curiosity about the man who successfully begs from women, meanwhile, shows that while Yorick has worked out theories of kindness, sexuality, and flirtation for himself, he still finds women's behavior somewhat mysterious.

The hotelier comes to Yorick's room and demands that he leave the hotel, because he had the chambermaid with him in his room in the evening, which is against hotel rules. The hotelier says he wouldn't have minded if the girl had visited in the morning. Yorick asks whether the time of day makes a difference, and the hotelier responds that it "made a difference […] in the scandal."

This episode illustrates the hypocrisy surrounding sexual morality at the time A Sentimental Journey *was published: the hotelier doesn't seem to care what actually happened between Yorick and the chambermaid—indeed, nothing did—but only about the potential scandal.*

The hotelier continues that foreigners should have opportunities to shop in Paris, so there would have been no problem if the girl had visited Yorick's room with a band box. Yorick says the girl did have one, but he didn't buy anything from her. The hotelier says that in that case, he'll procure another girl. When the hotelier leaves, Yorick resolves to spite him by buying nothing. When a grisset arrives to sell him some lace, however, Yorick decides not to punish the grisset for the hotelier's offense and buys some of her wares.

At this point, the hotelier's sexual hypocrisy becomes farcical. After just complaining that Yorick had a girl in his room, the hotelier actually brings a girl to Yorick's room so that she can sell him things. Yorick's decision not to spite the grisset for the hotelier's annoying actions shows that despite his flaws and contradictions, he may be becoming more generous over the course of the novel.

La Fleur carries a message to Yorick at dinner that the hotelier apologizes for asking Yorick to change hotels. Yorick asks La Fleur to tell the hotelier that he is sorry for provoking the hotelier, and that he won't see the chambermaid if she comes back. La Fleur tells Yorick that turning away the chambermaid would be impolite and that if Yorick wants to have fun—Yorick interrupts La Fleur, saying, "I find no amusement in it."

This passage shows that despite Yorick's unruly and sometimes inappropriate sexuality, he does intend to be kind to the women he encounters. He refuses La Fleur's suggestion that the chambermaid could be an object of fun—refuses, that is, to take advantage of a lower-class woman—and decides to protect the chambermaid from himself by not seeing her anymore.

Later, putting Yorick to bed, La Fleur seems to want to ask something but doesn't come out with it. Yorick, meanwhile, is puzzling over the man who begged so successfully from women.

Yorick's continued fascination with the man who successfully begs from women hints at his confusion about his relations to women after the distressing episode with the chambermaid. It also reminds the reader that Yorick sees understanding other people as the purpose of travel.

The next morning, Sunday, La Fleur comes to Yorick's room excellently dressed, serves him his breakfast, and asks whether he can have the day off to spend time with his mistress. Yorick had planned to have La Fleur wait on him when he went to visit Madame R—. However, reminding himself that servants are people too, with desires of their own, Yorick grants La Fleur's request. Then he asks La Fleur who his mistress is. La Fleur explains that she is a girl working at Count de B****'s, whom La Fleur met while Yorick was getting help with his passport.

Once again, Yorick displays his increasing generosity by giving La Fleur the day off to visit his girlfriend. That La Fleur has found a girlfriend after such a short time in Paris reinforces La Fleur's characterization as a womanizer, and it also somewhat reinforces stereotypes about Frenchmen's flirtatiousness.

Yorick finds some mysterious writing on the piece of paper that La Fleur used to carry in his breakfast butter. In between and after writing letters to Eugenius and Eliza, Yorick puzzles out the writing, which is in "the old French of Rabelais's time," and translates it into English. It tells of a notary who has a fight with his wife and storms out of his house. Crossing a bridge over the Seine, the notary loses his hat in the wind. Lamenting his bad luck, he hears someone calling for a notary. He enters a room where he sees an old gentleman lying in bed. The old gentleman asks the notary to write down the story of his life, which he claims is extraordinary.

François Rabelais was a 16th-century French satirist notable for his bawdy sense of humor. By alluding to "the old French of Rabelais's time" in this passage, Laurence Sterne is paying homage to a previous great writer and placing his own work, including A Sentimental Journey, *in the Rabelaisian tradition of bawdy satire.*

Just as the gentleman is about to begin telling the story of his life, the writing breaks off. Yorick asks La Fleur, who has just come back to the hotel room, where the rest of the story is. La Fleur says he used the other two pages to wrap a bouquet that he gave to his mistress. Yorick asks him to get the pages back. La Fleur runs off and, shortly after, returns looking miserable. He says that his mistress gave the bouquet to a footman, who gave it to someone else, who in turn gave it to someone else, and so on. La Fleur laments his mistress's infidelity, while Yorick laments his own bad luck.

After the somewhat more serious episode in which Yorick narrowly avoids taking advantage of the chambermaid, A Sentimental Journey *returns here to its humorous, satirical treatment of human sexuality. That La Fleur has, in his short time in Paris, already involved himself in a long chain of infidelity suggests that human romance is fickle, absurd, and not to be taken too seriously.*

Outside the Opera comique, Yorick waits in line for a carriage behind two women, about 36 and 40 years old respectively, whom he judges to be spinsters. A man approaches and asks the women for 12 sous. They claim not to have money. Calling them "fair young ladies," the man continues begging and mentions overhearing a marquis and his brother praising the women's virtue and looks. The women each give the man 12 sous. Yorick realizes that the man is the beggar who only accosts women and that he succeeds by flattery.

A "sou" is a kind of French coin. This passage offers a somewhat sexist example of Yorick learning about human nature through travel. By observing the beggar who targets women, Yorick realizes the supposedly universal truth that one can manipulate women by flattering them—that is, by appealing to their vanity about their physical appearance.

Count de B**** introduces Yorick into Parisian high society. An old womanizer, the Marquis de B****, asks Yorick about Englishwomen. When Yorick begs him not to visit England, because Englishmen would have difficulty with the competition, the Marquis invites him to dinner. A farmer-general asks Yorick about high English taxes, and when Yorick tells him the English don't know how to collect taxes, the farmer-general invites him to some concerts. A woman named Madame de Q*** believes herself to be a wit. When Yorick allows her to talk at him without speaking at all, she tells everyone it's the best conversation she's ever had.

*Previously, the novel has suggested that travel morally improves travelers by helping them sympathize with foreigners and other people unlike themselves. Here, however, the novel illustrates how encountering foreigners doesn't necessarily improve people morally. Each Parisian that Yorick encounters in this passage only wants him to confirm their own self-image: the Marquis de B**** wants it confirmed that he is irresistible to women, Madame de Q*** wants it confirmed that she is witty, and so on. Thus, the passage suggests that socializing with foreigners only improves people who are open to new experiences, not people who just want their previous ideas and attitudes reinforced.*

Yorick theorizes that French women have three life phases: of flirtation, of religious skepticism, and of religious devotion. He meets Madame de V***, whom he diagnoses as wavering between the first two phases. When she tells him she has no traditional religious belief, he argues that religious skepticism is against her self-interest as a beautiful woman: only her religious sentiments can defend her against the passions she arouses in Yorick himself and in other men. Madame de V*** goes on to tell others that Yorick has been extremely convincing in defending religion.

*Here, the novel links organized religion with sexual repression and hypocrisy. Yorick, applying his stereotypes about French women to Madame de V***, convinces her to accept organized religion by flattering her, implying that religion's purpose is sexual repression—enabling beautiful women like her to resist male attention. Madame de V***'s enthusiasm for Yorick's argument is hypocritical: she likes his apparent support of sexual repression only because he also praises her own sexual attractiveness. Thus, the novel satirizes how organized religion uses sex to bolster support for itself while repressing sexual activity.*

At one of Madame de V***'s parties, while Yorick is discoursing about philosophy, the Count de Faineant gives him some advice on how to style his clothing. When Yorick compliments his wisdom, the Count hugs him. After three weeks of pleasing French society in episodes such as these, Yorick feels sick of high society and longs for nature. He decides to depart France for Italy.

In French, the name "Faineant" means something like "Do-Nothing." The Count de Faineant demonstrates his frivolity by interrupting Yorick's discussion of philosophy to talk about clothes. That Yorick suddenly tires of Parisian society shows that travel can only make travelers tolerant of foreign customs up to a point—Yorick has become somewhat accepting, but not entirely accepting, of the French.

On his journey out of France, Yorick decides to stop near Moulines to ask after a girl named Maria, whom his friend Mr. Shandy has written about. When he reaches Maria's parents' house, Maria's mother greets him and tells him that Maria's father died of heartbreak after Maria went mad. Though her father's death blunted Maria's madness somewhat, she is still outside wandering around.

Eighteenth-century readers of Laurence Sterne would have been familiar with the character Maria from Sterne's other novel, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman. *The overblown tale of woe that Maria's mother tells Yorick suggests that the novel will use Maria's character to satirize sentimentality once again.*

Yorick rides off in his carriage and sees Maria sitting under a tree. He gets out of the carriage, orders the coachman and La Fleur on to Moulines, and approaches Maria. Maria has a dog attached to her belt by a string. Crying, she tells the dog, "Thou shalt not leave me, Sylvio." Yorick supposes she is crying over her father's death. He sits beside her, wipes her tears with his **handkerchief**, and wipes his own. His strong emotions make him feel sure he has a soul.

The phrase "Thou shalt not leave me, Sylvio," is a satirical allusion to 17th-century poet Andrew Marvell's pastoral poem, "The Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Fawn." In that poem, a young woman's lover, Sylvio, gives her a pet fawn but then abandons her. The allusion suggests that Maria, too, has been abandoned by a lover. Yorick behaves kindly toward Maria, wiping her tears—yet his immediate focus on his own emotions and the religious thoughts they prompt in him suggest that a handkerchief is once again marking a moment where the novel satirizes Yorick's emotional self-indulgence.

Yorick asks Maria whether she recalls "a pale thin person of a man" who met her two years ago. Maria says she does, because the man was sympathetic to her and because her goat stole his **handkerchief**. Maria washed the handkerchief and kept it to return to the man in case he ever returns. Taking the handkerchief out of her pocket, she shows it to Yorick, who sees an S embroidered on it.

The "pale thin person of a man" that Yorick mentions is presumably Tristram Shandy, the hero of Laurence Sterne's other novel, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman. *That Maria remembers Shandy shows her real need for and appreciation of his and Yorick's kindness. On the other hand, the allusion to a comic episode in which Maria's goat steals Shandy's handkerchief hints that the novel is still satirizing sentimentality in this passage.*

Maria tells Yorick that she has walked to Rome, across the Apennines, to Lombardy, and to Savoy, all barefoot. Yorick exclaims that if they were in England, he would give her shelter, food, and drink, and would take care of her. He takes out his **handkerchief**. Noticing the handkerchief is soaked already, Maria offers to wash it. Yorick asks where she'll dry it. When she says she'll dry it in her bosom, Yorick asks whether her heart is warm. Distressed, Maria takes up her pipe and plays it instead of responding.

Maria's wildly exaggerated barefoot journeys and the soaked handkerchief both indicate that the novel is satirizing overblown emotion here. Yorick's reference to Maria's heart and her subsequent discomfort, meanwhile, show Yorick once again inappropriately flirting with a vulnerable woman he only consciously intends to be kind to.

After a moment of playing, Maria stands. Yorick asks where she's going. When she tells him she's going to Moulines, he offers to walk with her. Reaching Moulines, Yorick turns to say goodbye. He notes that Maria is so beautiful that if he could forget Eliza, Maria "should lay in my bosom, and be unto me as a daughter."

Yorick's desire that Maria "should lay in my bosom, and be unto me as a daughter" is a biblical allusion to 2 Samuel 12:1-6, in which the prophet Nathan tells King David a parable about a poor man with a single female lamb whom he raises like a daughter. In the parable, the poor man's rich neighbor slaughters the poor man's lamb. The inappropriateness of comparing Maria to the lamb in the parable, given the lamb's violent death, hints that the novel may be mocking Yorick's sentimental and religious feelings. Yorick's reference to Maria's beauty and to his beloved Eliza, meanwhile, suggests that he is not really thinking of Maria as a daughter but as a lover—another example of Yorick connecting, or even confusing, kindness to women with sexual attraction to them.

Continuing to travel through France, Yorick sees various happy scenes but continues to think of Maria's sorrow. He muses that sentiment, in which he senses some "divinity," causes both great happiness and unhappiness. He believes even the "roughest peasant" possesses sentiment, and he imagines that peasant finding and pitying an injured, dying lamb. Then he blesses his imaginary peasant and promises him that his happiness will "balance" the pain he feels.

Yorick is drawing an analogy between his own pity for Maria, whom he has just compared to a biblical lamb, and an imaginary peasant's pity for a dying lamb. On the one hand, Yorick is expressing a humanist and Christian idea in asserting that a poor peasant can experience as much sentiment as he, an upper-class man, can. On the other hand, his dismissal of the poor peasant's pain on the grounds that it will somehow balance out may strike the reader as glib—which hints that the novel is once again satirizing Yorick as emotionally self-indulgent and self-centered.

As Yorick's carriage is starting up mount Taurira, the horse drawing the carriage throws first one shoe and then another. Yorick climbs out of the carriage, sees a house in the distance, and tells the coachman to drive toward it. Getting closer, Yorick sees it is a nice farmhouse, surrounded by grapes, corn, a garden, and woods. He enters the house and finds a peasant family eating dinner: an old husband and wife, their children, and their children's spouses. The old husband invites Yorick to eat with them. He sits down at table with them and greatly enjoys the meal—an enjoyment he attributes to the family's wonderful hospitality.

Here, the novel shows how travel can expose the traveler not only to different nationalities but to different social classes—due to a chance event, a horse throwing its shoes, Yorick has the opportunity to meet rural peasants who, unlike him, work the land for their living.

After dinner, the old husband gives the signal to his family to dance. He plays an instrument and his wife sings, while the rest of the family dances. Yorick senses some religious emotion in the dance. After the dance is over, the old husband tells Yorick that the family has always danced after dinner because "a chearful and contented mind was the best sort of thanks to heaven that an illiterate peasant could pay." Yorick replies that it is the best thanks an educated priest could pay, too.

In this passage, travel exposes Yorick to a new form of religious worship. Whereas the novel has previously satirized religious people as hypocritical and sexually repressed, this passage illustrates how religion can support happiness and gratitude. Thus, the novel suggests that the benefits of religion depend on the motives and emotions of the people practicing it.

Yorick is traveling toward Turin when a large stone, having tumbled down a mountain, blocks the road his coachman planned to take. Because the peasant workers need more time to move the stone, Yorick and his coachman stop at a roadside inn for the night. After Yorick has occupied the only room, a lady and her maid arrive at the inn as well. The hostess tells them to share Yorick's room, as it contains three beds.

Yet again, Yorick's travels are characterized not by thorough and well-executed planning but by chance events—a stone in the road changes his trip's whole trajectory. Given the humor the novel has previously derived from Yorick's interactions with women, the reader may suspect that his sharing a room with a strange women may lead to comic awkwardness.

Yorick agrees to accommodate the lady and plays the host for her, giving her the best seat and ordering them some wine. Seeing her glance at the beds, Yorick becomes embarrassed. He notices the beds are close together, located in a kind of alcove, and too small for the lady and her maid to share one. Though the chambers contain another room, it's a "damp cold closet" unsuited for any of them to sleep in. Yorick feels that the stone in the road is nothing compared to this problem. It doesn't help that he and the lady, a woman from Piedmont of about 30 years old, feel too polite to discuss their predicament.

Yorick does attempt to display his usual slightly flirtatious kindness toward the Piedmontese lady. As the reader likely anticipated, their sharing a room is nevertheless leading toward comic awkwardness: their beds are too close together, they can't figure out an alternate sleeping arrangement, and they feel too awkward to have a frank conversation about the problem.

Yorick and the lady eat dinner. The lady sends her maid to fetch some good wine from their carriage and, after drinking it over dinner, she and Yorick begin talking about their problem. After two hours, they come up with a kind of verbal contract: the maid will pin up the bed-curtains to create a division between the beds; Yorick will wear his black silk breeches all night; Yorick will not speak all night, except to say his prayers. Here, Yorick notes that he and the lady didn't figure out, in their verbal contract, how they would unclothe themselves for bed, and he declines to tell the reader what they ended up doing.

Here, the novel mocks sexual repression by showing Yorick and the lady—after drinking some wine—coming up with an absurdly specific list of rules to avoid sexual impropriety while they share a room. The novel highlights the ridiculousness of their behavior by revealing that despite their hyper-specific rulemaking, they never figured out how they were going to change in front of each other.

Once in bed, Yorick tosses and turns until out of frustration he lets slip, "O my God!" The lady points out that he has broken his promise not to speak. Yorick apologizes but points out it wasn't a speech so much as an outcry. The lady reiterates that he has broken his promise. Yorick claims his outcry counts as a prayer. The lady refuses this excuse. Yorick hears several of the pins closing the bed-curtains fall to the ground.

The novel ramps up its satire of sexual repression in this passage by having Yorick and the lady bicker over the right interpretation of their absurdly specific rules. Yorick's unconvincing claim that he wasn't swearing, just praying, pokes fun at religion, which can sometimes be used as a hypocritical cover for bad behavior.

The maid, hearing that Yorick and the lady are arguing, has crept out of her own bed and interposed herself between their two beds. Yorick, swearing upon his "word and honour," throws out his arm and accidentally catches some part of the maid's body or clothing (the text breaks off before Yorick can say exactly what he grabbed).

This short final passage humorously and satirically undermines the character development that Yorick has undergone throughout the novel. Though he has gone all over France and had transformative experiences, he is still acting impulsively and finding himself in awkward, compromising sexual situations. Thus, although the novel affirms that travel can improve people, it seems to question at the end whether travel can entirely transform someone's identity.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Prendergast, Finola. "*A Sentimental Journey.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 18 Apr 2022. Web. 18 Apr 2022.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Prendergast, Finola. "*A Sentimental Journey.*" LitCharts LLC, April 18, 2022. Retrieved April 18, 2022. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/a-sentimental-journey.

To cite any of the quotes from *A Sentimental Journey* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Sterne, Laurence. A Sentimental Journey. Penguin Classics. 2002.

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Sterne, Laurence. A Sentimental Journey. London: Penguin Classics. 2002.