

## *A Sentimental Journey*: Lost in Translation

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This article is the first entry in a debate on a contribution on “*A Sentimental Journey*: Lost in Translation.” <http://www.connotations.de/debate/a-sentimental-journey-lost-in-translation/>. If you feel inspired to write a response, please send it to [editors@connotations.de](mailto:editors@connotations.de).

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### **Abstract**

This essay argues that Sterne’s pervasive interests in different forms of translation in *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) result in a text in which fuzzy, occult, and elusive language, calqued translation, wordplay, and suggestion are not merely forms of wit but fundamental to the project. The different resonances that are lent to Sterne’s keywords (sentimental, sensibility, soul, conscience, delicacy, grace, translation itself, and others) allow the dramatization of the curious relationships between the three worlds of humanity: spiritual, linguistic, and physical or material. To John Wesley’s English ear in 1772, the word *sentimental* is “not English. He may as well say Continental. It is not sense.” Frénais, translating the *Journey* in 1769, would agree: he says that he has only kept the word because there is no viable alternative. The text is constructed around the most elusive of words. In practice, translation is often occult to the point of perversity. In Calais, having eaten and drunk well, Parson Yorick tipsily rebuts the materialist philosophy of a “*physical precieuse*,” an imagined French bluestocking, by saying that he is confident that he could “overset her creed.” *Creed* descends from Latin, through the Italian *credenza*, to the French *crédence*: a sideboard. Immaterialism, spirituality, is translated to materials, through translation of a different kind which is endemic in the *Journey*.

That excellent use of a metaphor or translation  
Bacon, *Advancement of Learning* (1605)

To TRANSLATE, to turn out of one Language  
into another; to remove from one Place to an-  
other

Nathan Bailey, *Dictionary* (1726)

*Translation* is a very translatable word. Historically, the root sense is simply a change of state or condition, and this can include the change from a literal to a figurative meaning of a word, as indicated by Bacon. Bailey gives two of the main senses, and seems to accord them equal status. These are accompanied by many others. To translate a bishop is to remove him from one see to another, or, by association with the sense of translation as apotheosis (a direct elevation to heaven without passing through death), an elevation to a bishopric. A politician may be translated from the Commons to the Lords; a cobbler may translate an old pair of boots into a new pair. If one is enraptured or “transported” (itself a figurative sense, as when Yorick transports himself “instantly [...] to Messina in Sicily” in “THE PASSPORT: VERSAILLES”), one has been translated out of oneself (*A Sentimental Journey* 114; SJ from now on). Translating from one language to another is partly a mechanical process, but it is also an engagement with a field of linguistic play. Similarly, *language* may be either a fixed concept (French, English) or a wider notion, a mode of discourse, for instance *bad language* (for which one may apologize by saying *Pardon my French*). Words, as usual, slip and slide, will not stay still. Sterne joins in with the process of figuration by allowing Yorick to invent yet another category of translation, the reading of body language: “When I walk the streets of London, I go translating all the way” (SJ 77).

The suggestion that “it is not plot but language which is the unifying logic of *A Sentimental Journey*” (Kavanagh 138) is stimulating, but the idea of translation is a crucial clue to this tiny labyrinth, and to the dozens of different critical approaches which already exist. A natural hope of scholarly enquiry is to find a determinate approach which might herald a relevant informing context, an attractive ambiguity, or even that

elusive creature, a *meaning*. The concomitant fear is that *A Sentimental Journey* is “simply indeterminate and hence either to be rejected or indulged as ‘unreliable’ narrative,” or as tonally “insincere” (Dussinger, “Sensorium” 4; Dussinger, *Discourse* 149). But if the *Journey* is built around the figurative process of translation, the practice of indeterminacy may become something akin to a determinate principle. In literary terms one might say simply that “several meanings coexist and endow the text with a certain density” (Viviès 250) but indeterminacy is fundamental to language: “virtually every sentence is ambiguous, often in multiple ways. Our brain is so good at comprehending language that we do not usually notice” (Marcus 63). If it is a principle of language, it must also be an informing principle of literature at large, but this is particularly accented in the *Journey*.

#### THE PREFACE

Yorick, our narrator and protagonist, was conceived in translation. His origin was York and its environs, and Yorick indicates *of York*: it is one of the regional or dialect pronunciations, close to the earlier Viking or Old East Norse *Jorvik* (see Castro Santana). When Tristram first introduces him to the reader, describing him as a creature who is “heteroclite [...] in all his declensions,” he says that Yorick would take “the nature of the deed spoken of” and “usually translate [it] into plain *English* without any periphrasis” (Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* 27, 29). Tristram’s adjective “heteroclite,” which indicates *maverick* or *eccentric* when used of character, also carries the sense of a word whose roots are in different languages: “Yorick” is poised between two languages, as well as between words and deeds.

His keywords, especially that of his title, *sentimental*, likewise lie between or among languages. *Sentimental* is heard by the English ear in 1772 as “not English: he might as well say *Continental*. It is not sense” (Wesley 207). This indeterminacy stems from the word’s operating as “a French sense-loan coined by Sterne,” with “a new signification that was current in French *sentiment*” (Erämetsä 72). It was a new “English formation, which was introduced into French with the translation of *A*

*Sentimental Journey*" in 1769, so the word was as enigmatic in French as it was in English (Erāmetša 22). Before this, and indeed after, the word in English would have implied something closer to *a journey of moral reflection expressed in fine sentences*, perhaps more in key with Richardsonian prose, or, in 1773, with that notorious "Man of Sentiment," the sententious "sentimental knave" Joseph Surface (Sheridan 13). Another keyword, *sensibility*, will turn out to be similarly poised between English and French manifestations, as will a third, *soul*, and indeed many others. But the sentimental vocabulary is used very sparingly in the *Journey*. *Sentimental* appears four times, three times in connection with the category of *sentimental traveller*, and once with that of *sentimental commerce*. *Sentiment* and *sentiments* are more frequent, but the sense shifts. *Sensibility* is used just twice, once in a rhapsodic apostrophe near the end and once early on, as part of a description of a glance from Madame de L\*\*\* as she bids Yorick *adieu*. *Sensibility* is rare in English before the mid-eighteenth century, and is "usually applied to physical sensation" (Erāmetšā 88), an organism's power to perceive through its senses. Sense is sensibility. One may discuss sentiment and sensibility in the *Journey* as if they were stable constructs, remarking for example "how firmly fixed 'sentiment' was from one end of the century to the other" (New's note in SJ 285-86), but the *Journey* contains at least four different kinds of sensibility, the boundaries between them unclear. This lack of clarity means that when Yorick utters his rhapsody the word *sensibility* is as open as the first sentence of his narrative. The reader tries for the meaning from the stylistic and emotional context, and from memory.

TRANSLATION  
upon  
TRANSLATION

Sterne's approach to translational play in the *Journey* is similarly subtle and fluid throughout the text, seemingly eluding all the concepts designed to investigate or describe semantic indeterminacy. Sometimes the scattershot effects of *fuzzy language*, which, like fuzzy logic, may suggest a fit interpretation or suitable conclusion in pointing towards

an area of consensus, seem relevant.<sup>1</sup> One might suppose that the Chevalier's "little *patès*" are *pâtés*, but as the section is headed "LE PATISSER," the pastry-seller, and as *petits pâtés* are pasties, one is probably wrong: but one was in the area (SJ 105, 104). The semantic area may, though, be widened again by the appearance of *patisser* in Anglo-Norman dictionaries, and hence in the *OED*, as indicating bargaining or making terms. The Chevalier says that his wife does the "*patisserie*": the Chevalier does the selling (SJ 106). Or is *patisser* a variant of *pâtissier*? Or has Yorick made a small slip? Any consensus in this simple matter evaporates.

In the case of "sentimental translation" (Fairer 122), the translation of body language and facial expression into "*short hand*" which will describe the turns of mind and feeling that such language indicates, the problem threatens to become more extreme (SJ 77). There are, says Yorick when faced with the beautiful Grisset, "certain combined looks of simple subtlety" which are so "blended, that all the languages of Babel set loose together could not express them" (SJ 74). In *Tristram Shandy* the narrator could give a clear definition of the general problem, the unsteady uses of words (vol. 2, ch. 2), and could give a point-for-point translation of the Widow Wadman's various glances and blushes (vol. 9, ch. 20). *Tristram's* interests in those unsteady uses are presented in a relatively obtrusive manner. But Yorick's "all the languages of Babel" is a hyperbole which asks readers for imaginative involvement in trying to interpret his striking oxymoron, "simple subtlety." A rhetorical touch allows "sentimental translation" to operate between narrator and reader in a manner which goes beyond that of *Tristram Shandy*: every reader their own interpreter.

In *Tristram Shandy* it is possible to date Yorick's death to 1748. His heyday is in the world of the 1710s, the world of Uncle Toby and Walter, the Shandean time. But Sterne published two collections of his own sermons as *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* (1760, 1766), who thus became Sterne's second literary persona. So here he is in 1768, miraculously translated back to life, traipsing sentimentally around the continent, and clearly starting his journey from London rather than York. After a

few lines of text Yorick has moved from London to Calais, though the journey itself has taken the customary day-and-a-half. York to London, death to life, England to France: Yorick does not travel, so much as find himself translated between different states and places. The usual travel-narrative is replaced by pieces of an internal scene, seventy fragments of experience presented from one location or another like psychologized seaside postcards. But the apparent narrative structure is disarmingly clear and firm. It has a travel-plan which ensures that it begins at the beginning, passes along the itinerary of Yorick's travels with the occasional flash-forward, fragment of memory, or rhetorical side-address, and ends with a very conspicuous END. Its fuzziness of genre, whether travel-book, novel, tale, satire, postcards, fragments, map, or chat, is sidelined.

Yorick himself does not usually feel the need to translate, except when faced with the Fragment in Rabelaisian French in Volume II. His only French phrase in the first section, the "*Droits d'aubaine*," has to be explained in an editorial-style footnote (SJ 3). He does, though, want us to know that Madame de L\*\*\*'s inflection of "*C'est bien comique*" means that she meant "'tis very droll," rather than *that is hilarious*, and he will translate French speech into English, sometimes leaving traces of the original French word or construction—the form of translation known as calquing, from the French *calquer*, to trace (*papier calque* is tracing paper) (SJ 33). Monsieur Dessein's "figure to yourself" is not quite good English because it is a translation of *figurez-vous*, picture to yourself (SJ 19). The English becomes slightly blurry, and, for the common English reader, so does most of the French. This raises the possibility of further varifocal languages, tailored to different parts of the varying readership: "the text provides material whose meaning depends on the reader's mind, culture, system of reference, sensibility, obsessions, etc." (Viviès 251). There is the *ingénue* female reader, represented in the text by "Eliza"—Eliza Draper, Sterne's most recent and rather public innamorata (SJ 58). There are prudes and moralists, represented by Bishop William Warburton, who apparently gave Sterne money on the implicit understanding that he would tone down subsequent instalments of

*Tristram Shandy*. This proved to be a poor investment. There are the French *philosophes*, the “large Circle of men of wit and learning” that Sterne met at the Baron d’Holbach’s in Paris, represented by “Monsieur D\*\*\* and the Abbe M\*\*\*,” Diderot and Morellet, one professing atheist and one nominal Christian (SJ 147). There are other French readers; the common English reader as above; and the Devil—from Coleridge’s trenchant phrase about his sense of Sterne “dallying with the Devil” (Coleridge 5: 174). One senses that Coleridge knew that the Devil might see or hear worse things than he himself could. He represents the subversive side of Sterne’s nature, an important constituency.

In other words, Sterne’s use of language may reflect his sense of the variety of his readership. The reader of *A Sentimental Journey* is always a member of a community of differences which can, for convenience, be addressed as *we* or *us*, and the list above is by no means exhaustive. There will be one translational treat for the Spanish reader. Also the categories overlap: the *philosophes* may be almost as subversive as the Devil, and possibly include a different category of female reader.

### THE JOURNEY

“They order, said I, this matter better in France” (SJ 3). An assertion needs context if it is to make sense, but this appears to be there simply for the reaction-line: “You have been in France?” (SJ 3). The “civil triumph” of Yorick’s servant seems to become the “matter,” evidence of the freedom of the English lower orders to talk back to their masters (SJ 3). The absence of context reduces this first section to a fragment. But it is also plausible to read “this matter”—translated, *this material*—as introducing Yorick’s combative relationship with philosophical materialism and mechanism, topics which lurked in *Tristram Shandy* from the original episode of the winding up (or not winding up) of the house-clock, suggesting the imprisonment of the mind within the mechanical reflexes of the Hobby-horse. Here materialism will become a *leitmotif* which seems to be addressed or referred mainly to the *philosophes*, for whom there will be some good jokes, and it will manifest itself as a joke in translation as early as the second section of the story.

Another hidden language materializes in respect to Yorick's coat, which sports inverted commas round its phrase, as if it merited special attention: "'the coat I have on, said I, looking at the sleeve, will do.'" (SJ 3). In a novelistic language this is a simple, realistic, gesture and phrase. In another, it is a coded message to the bishops and others that the "frolicsome" quality of the *Journey* might offend them (Sterne, *Letters* 405). Sterne had responded combatively to a criticism of *Tristram Shandy* which implied that the story was "too free [...] for the solemn colour of My coat," the clerical black. "A Very Able Critick [...] who has Read Over tristram—Made Answer Upon My saying I Would consider the colour of My Coat, as I corrected it—That that very Idea in My head would render My Book not worth a groat" (Sterne, *Letters* 76). Yorick's coat is indeed black, like his "black pair of silk breeches" in the first section, though we do not know this until he arrives in Paris (SJ 3). So there are already at least three languages, modes of discourse, present: a French phrase and an editorial footnote add two more. There may well be others: languages tend to hide in the *Journey*, and even, in the case of the fragment of Rabelaisian French concealed under a pat of butter, to play hide-and-seek.

A Franciscan monk, whose name, it will turn out, is Father Lorenzo (Sterne's first name in translation) enters the room. Yorick is concerned to picture him for the reader, to begin his practice of translating phenomena into the terms of visual art. The monk has "one of those heads, which Guido has often painted" (SJ 8). Particular stress is laid on his eyes, on the "sort of fire which was in them," and on the quality of his gaze, which "look'd forwards; but look'd as if it look'd at something beyond this world" (SJ 7, 8). He finishes his request for alms with "a cast upwards with his eyes," and replies to Yorick's niggling phrase about the "great claims" made on charity with "a slight glance of his eye downwards," and then a "cordial wave with his head" (SJ 9). He carries "a slender white staff with which he journey'd" (SJ 8). Yorick makes no inference from these details.

The whiteness of the staff is a coincidence, but what pilgrim would carry a slender staff when they might have a strong one? Father Lorenzo lives in a “convent” (SJ 27), which does not imply journeying. Perhaps there is something in the scene that Yorick cannot see, which might then mean that the idea of *not seeing* became translatable between the character and the narrator. Yorick also cannot, of course, see that the monk’s name is translatable between character and author. The note to the “*Droits d’Aubaine*,” the monk’s gaze, Father Lorenzo, the coat: someone else, one or other kind of *third person*, may or may not see what the words indicate. But the fact that Yorick’s interpretations may need to be interpreted does nothing to detract from his character. He always wants to think well of his reader and of the people he meets, so he has assumed that his reader knows French, and knows Guido. What may be a physical disability has been translated into an appearance of spirituality.

Yorick was, he says, “predetermined” not to offer the monk charity, but does not seem to know why. “There is no regular reasoning upon the ebbs and flows of our humours; they may depend upon the same causes, for ought I know, which influence the tides themselves” (SJ 7). But *we* may know: Yorick is responding mechanically, by Anglican reflex, to a Catholic figure, and there is a great deal of post-Newtonian regular reasoning on such topics in the eighteenth century. He committed a similar solecism in the previous section, describing his after-dinner physical condition and then drawing a paradoxical corollary from it:

I felt every vessel in my frame dilate—the arteries beat all chearily together, and every power which sustained life, perform’d it with so little friction, that ‘twould have confounded the most *physical precieuse* in France: with all her materialism, she could scarce have called me a machine—

I’m confident, said I to myself, I should have overset her creed (SJ 5)

His word *precieuse* is derogatory and old-fashioned, but Yorick seems to know about the French bluestockings: there were certainly women in the d’Holbach salon, which was “much more mixed than historians

have assumed" (Lilti 21). One subtext here is that Yorick is feeling vigorous enough to imagine an *exchange of views* with the lady in question, whose interests in physics have been caught up in a suggestion of personal corporeality. Another lurks in his idiosyncratic phrase ending with "overset her creed," which is dignified or accented with its own line, rather than the inverted commas round the line about his coat. It contains a fine piece of smudged calquing. "Creed," belief, is from the Latin *credo, credere*, which gives the Italian *credenza*, belief, and the French *crédence*: a sideboard (a belief is a *croyance*).<sup>2</sup> In taking up the cudgels on behalf of immateriality Yorick is also violently rearranging the lady's material, her dining-room furniture. Sterne's French is sometimes better than Yorick's, but he has been there longer, almost three years.

Yorick's combative response derives from his sense that France is full of frightful materialist thinkers, but why should an Anglican fear materialist ideas? Sterne will use a phrase such as "the frame and mechanism of human nature" in a sermon as if the idea were unproblematic, and will comment on the "strong sympathy and union between our souls and bodies" (Sterne, *Sermons* 402). Such remarks by no means rule out a belief in an immaterial soul, but the question is left open. Materialists may hold spiritual convictions. It is not entirely clear why Yorick fears materialist philosophy, except that he has fears and is often assailed by negative feelings. Tobias Smollett's downside in his *Travels through France and Italy* (1766) was mostly externalized; rapacious landlords, banditti, bad climate, bad towns, poor architecture. Yorick's downside is internal, the postilion "tearing my nerves to pieces," a fear of materialist philosophy and a concern for the existence of his soul, the mind's terror at "the objects she has magnified herself" (SJ 55, 94). Yorick has as powerful a set of "miserable feelings" as "Smelfungus," but they are a talking point as well as a pathology (SJ 37).

## MADAME DE L\*\*\* AND THE CARTE DE TENDRE

He meets a lady, who is, we will learn, from Brussels: she wears black silk gloves “open only at the thumb and two fore-fingers,” and so accepts Yorick’s proffered hand: the physical contact is at fingers’-length; no pressing the flesh (SJ 20). He finds her face “interesting” (SJ 23), which, with Sterne and in the period more widely, is almost synonymous with *sentimental*, courtesy of the verb indicating *to affect* or *to move*. In *English*, the story might have been called *An Interesting Journey*. Her complexion is “a clear transparent brown” (SJ 23), so she is a woman of color. He interprets her facial expression as an “unprotected look of distress,” but we suspect his motives in this, not least because he does:

I felt benevolence for her; and resolved some way or other to throw in my mite of courtesy—if not of service. (SJ 25)

Such were my temptations— (SJ 23)

Courtesy and service are from the language of courtly love: *service* is also what a bull may do to, or for, a cow. The lady remarks pointedly on Yorick’s obvious embarrassment at their being left alone together: “who but an English philosopher” would comment at such length on it (SJ 24)? Yorick, the monk, and the lady rescue themselves from a further tangle of embarrassments, as the monk offers an exchange of snuff-boxes (“a stream of good-nature in his eyes”; SJ 27), and Yorick and the lady then find themselves on their own in a chaise. Surely nothing is to be expected from the English philosopher in such circumstances? But he has a trick up his sleeve: he translates himself into French.

The Englishman and the lady from Flanders find common ground in their amusement at the French male habit of making love (modern English for this might be *chatting up*) at first meeting. Yorick disparages the sentimental French knave’s offerings of verbal tit-bits: “—To think of making love by *sentiments!*” and “at first sight by declaration” to an “unheated mind” (SJ 33). The lady waits to hear more:

Consider then, madam, continued I, laying my hand upon hers—

That grave people hate Love for the name's sake—

That selfish people hate it for their own—

Hypocrites for heaven's—

And that all of us both old and young, being ten times worse frighten'd than hurt by the very report—What a want of knowledge in this branch of commerce a man betrays, whoever lets the word come out of his lips, till an hour or two at least after the time, that his silence upon it becomes tormenting. A course of small, quiet attentions, not so pointed as to alarm—nor so vague as to be misunderstood, —with now and then a look of kindness, and little or nothing said upon it—leaves Nature for your mistress, and she fashions it to her mind.—

Then I solemnly declare, said the lady, blushing—you have been making love to me all this while (SJ 33-34)

In making love while talking about making love, Yorick translates between words and deeds in a manner similar to that of our first introduction to him in *Tristram Shandy*, though far more skillfully. His cadences are hypnotic, his manner that of the most sophisticated of males. No wonder the lady blushes, hard enough to show through her brown complexion. An English philosopher! Who would have thought? And this is not a blush of modesty, because the lady is not modest, as her directness of verbal expression has already hinted. How has he learnt this language?

*A Sentimental Journey*, with its postcards addressed to us from different locations (England, Calais, Montreuil, Nampont, Amiens, Paris, Versailles, Rennes, Moulins, the Bourbonnois, Savoy), might be described as an exercise in persuasive cartography. The most famous and influential example of French persuasive cartography is the *Carte de Tendre*, produced in the salon of Madame de Rambouillet for Madeleine de Scudéry's historical romance *Clélie* in 1654: the salon of the original *précieuses* or (more respectfully) *salonnières*. *Clélie*, though massively

plotted and extended, belongs to the early phase of the expression of Scudéry's interests in ethics and philosophy.

It is possible to read the episode with Madame de L\*\*\* entirely in terms of the villages of the *Carte*. There is *Nouvelle amitié*, new friendship. Then there is *Complaisance*, a willingness to be pleasant (his initial remarks); *Soumission* (from her put-down: it is a feisty lady); *Assiduité*, persistence (she walks away, he reapplies himself); *Empressement*, alacrity ("as I generally act from the first impulse [...] I turn'd instantly about to the lady"; SJ 29). Then there are the *Petits Soins* of Yorick's "small [...] attentions"; *Grand Services* ("my mite of service": the offer of his coach); *Sensibilité*: her final look of "sensibility mixed with a concern" (SJ 35). Afterwards there will be the *Billet doux* or *Billet galant* (La Fleur's letter is hardly *doux*, though it seems that Yorick translates it into a different mode). But the translational relationship is playful, not allegorical. The *Journey* has an endless ability to suggest different texts, as well as different approaches: it is the most *suggestive* of stories. And we will meet Madame de Rambouillet herself a little later, as Yorick, a character who has technically been dead for twenty years, hands a lady who really has been dead for over one hundred years out of a coach so that she may relieve herself. It all seems quite natural, but in Joseph-Pierre Frénais's translation of 1769 this second absurdity is removed for the more *savant* French reader by the lady being translated to "Madame de R." (Frénais 1: 235; the two volumes are paginated separately).

Clélie offers no key to the *Carte*, which as she says conveys its meanings "d'une maniere assez particuliere" (in a rather unusual way). Her *amis* have trouble deciphering it: "aimable Clelie [...] dittes moy où j'en suis" (sweet Clélie [...] tell me where I am).<sup>3</sup> Women do not yield up their meanings easily. Hermenius performs acrostics on Valérie's disdainful letter, hoping to find a more favorable coded message. Eventually she points out that disdain might not necessarily imply rejection. *Works well within his limitations*, it might say on his sentimental report. Merriam-Webster gives 1673 as the date of the first use of *billet-doux*, but these little pilgrims have to puzzle it out in the 1650s. The *Carte* invents and transforms language in much the same way that the *Journey*

does. Yorick responds in key with Clélie's hint, translating *Petits Soins* playfully. The literal translation is *small cares*, but in the tricky language of sentimental commerce they become *little trinkets*, portable property for the lady to keep as her own. Yorick translates them again, so they become verbal trinkets, *sentiments*, small, quiet (knavish, teasing) attentions. Given the implicit stress on this left-hand route on the male's yielding to the female (*Grands Services, Obéissance, Soumission*), *Sensibilité* may be translated partly as the capacity of the *ami* to attune himself to the emotional and linguistic condition of his lady, and to respond in key. To judge by the lady's blush, Yorick has managed this to perfection. But despite the stress on male submission, the purpose of the *Carte* is to allow the male to display an attractive wit in his reading of it (who wants a *submissive* male?), and this Yorick has also done. The *Carte* is a map, a conversation, and a text, as is the *Journey*. A *précieuse* would be disdainful of the idea of a one-to-one correspondence, an absurd allegory or acrostic, but it is possible that Sterne was given a sentimental test by one or more of the stricter of them: *at least eight villages from the Carte, AND Madame de Rambouillet, AND sign it with your own name, please, Lorenzo*. It seems that Yorick benefits, on this occasion, from Sterne's skills in translation.

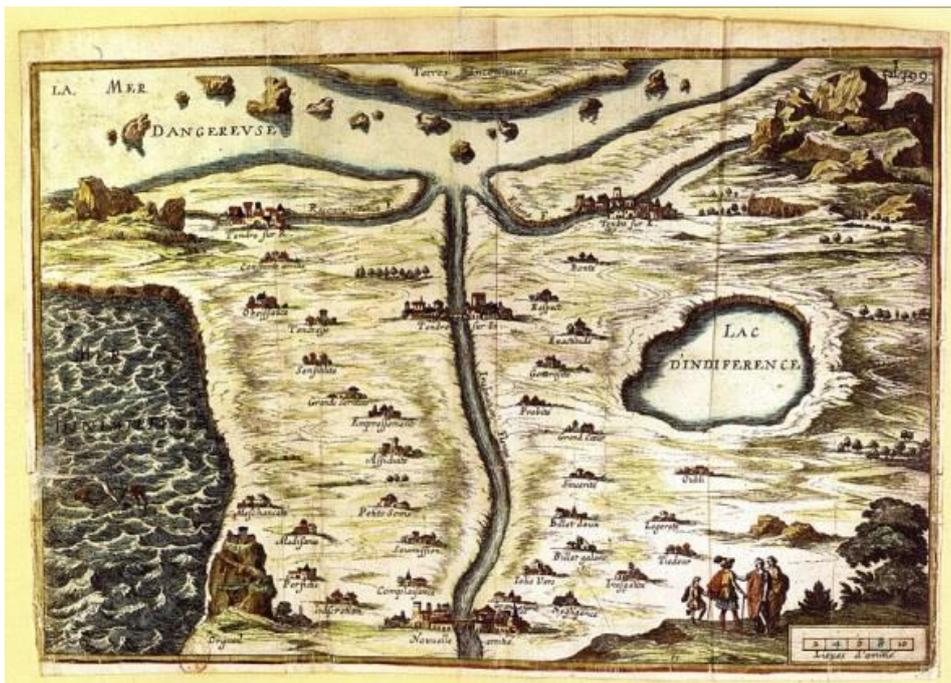


Fig. 1: The original *Carte de Tendre* (1654: attrib. François Cheaveau)<sup>4</sup>

Yorick is about to propose that Madame de L\*\*\* accept a place in his chaise. She interrupts him with a hand-gesture which appears identical to his (“laying my hand upon hers”), but which is subtly different:

—You need not tell me what the proposal was, said she, laying her hand upon both mine, as she interrupted me.—A man, my good Sir, has seldom an offer of kindness to make to a woman, but she has a presentiment of it some moments before— (SJ 35)

“Presentiment” is a remarkable word to find in a sentimental journey, a female form of sentimental feeling which allows the lady to anticipate the future. She is, it seems, familiar with male offers of “kindness.” Yorick translates her capacity for presentiment into English, with a twist: “Nature arms her with it, said I, for immediate preservation” (SJ 35). The twist is that in English this self-preserving foresight would be the feminine or feminized virtue of modesty, which is “a Guard to Virtue [...] a kind of quick and delicate *feeling* in the Soul [...] such an exquisite Sensibility, as warns her to shun the first appearance of every thing which is hurtful” (Addison and Steele 2: 399). Addison’s pre-emptive co-opting of the potentially dangerous quality of sensibility for a moral discourse is the sole illustration of “Sensibility” in Johnson’s 1755 *Dictionary*.

But Madame de L\*\*\*’s presentiment, her sensibility, proves to be almost the opposite of this. It will allow her to be intrepid rather than modest, and will lead her to say that she would have accepted Yorick’s offer of a place in his coach, so that she could have told him her story. She has an intuition that he is a fit companion, which corresponds to Yorick’s about her. The offer of her (life-?)story suggests that his initial sense of her body language is right, but the directness of her reply to his embarrassment, the capping of his hand-gesture, and the sardonic curtsey which she drops to the little French captain, have hinted that she will respond positively to sentimental, knavish teasing. Angels, we remember from *Tristram Shandy*, syllogize by intuition (vol. 2, ch. 2), but we mere mortals have to do it through our wayward imagination or our nose, and the nose, whatever else it may be, is the organ by which

we are led. That the intuitions of Yorick and the lady are so perfectly in tune—as long as they are talking together—is evidence that they are, for a few moments, with the angels. Communication becomes more *interesting* when it is surrounded by less successful effects, and this is the tale's only example of intimate, close-up, sentimental communication. It is one of just four or five episodes in which Yorick's perceptions are confirmed as successful intuition rather than as subject to that quixotic "imagination which is eternally misleading me" (SJ 159). Two of the others are communal, the scene with the peasant and his dead ass at Nampont, with Yorick's perceptions confirmed by the presence of other onlookers, and the scene in "THE GRACE" where his vision of "*Religion*" joining in the dance is confirmed by the grandfather's remark about the dance as a thanks to heaven (SJ 159). Finally, there is his revision of Tristram's episode with Maria of Moulines.

"So perfectly" means of course imperfectly, incapable of consummation or fulfilment. Madame de L\*\*\*'s brother the Count has arrived in his coach, so we will never hear her story. All we are left with is the lady's glance of sensibility and concern. Perhaps this would have been the plot, in the way that uncle Toby's amours proved to be the destination of *Tristram Shandy*. Perhaps we would have heard Madame de L\*\*\*'s story in Paris or Brussels or Turin in Volume IV: perhaps not. A story heard is sweet, but ...

But: we may perhaps infer that there is something in the episode, a trailing of narrative threads, which Yorick cannot see. A feisty but visibly distressed and *interesting* exotic lady, with a *story*, about twenty-six, no visible servant or luggage, marital status unclear, designer gloves with a hint of lingerie hiding any ring, travelling towards Paris: her *brother* the Count happens to turn up *at the same hotel* at a critical moment. Why was she about to accept the offer of a place in a strange gentleman's chaise, which might have rendered her invisible, if Dessein were kept from knowledge of the arrangement? Clearly this *brother* is proxy to *the pursuit of a father to reclaim an errant child to virtue!* In Amiens she sends Yorick a letter by hand, for delivery to another lady, in Paris; perhaps arranging a rescue. Yorick fails to deliver the letter: so much

for sentimental friendship! But perhaps it contained an impassioned instruction to the other lady's brother to challenge *her* brother to a duel. We know from *The Vicar of Wakefield* where an undelivered letter might lead, if this were, or were to become, narrative as well as sentimental fiction. Two of the episodes of *A Sentimental Journey* will concern themselves directly with imaginative responses by reader or audience to aesthetic verbal stimuli, as a manifestation of sensibility. Our quixotic sentimental imaginations have been set a-vibrating, and we make up Volume IV for ourselves. Madame de L\*\*\* is the most *interesting* of Sterne's females.

### THE WORD AND THE THING

Yorick's close attention to Madame de L\*\*\*'s gloves anticipates a pervasive technique whereby objects in the fictional world seem to be about to become fetishes or something beyond themselves, without ever quite getting there. "The sentimental exchange is focused on the *token*, an evidential sign that carries translatable meaning and mediates between thing and idea" (Fairer 141). The material world is always about to become something else. Little trinkets become verbal trinkets. The worn smoothness of a King William's shilling becomes the polish of a Frenchman's *politesse*. The human body dissolves into the pulsing of blood, into blushes seen, felt, or illusory, into fountains of piss or floods of tears or the taste of wine on the palate, into Yorick's "issues" (SJ 124), or into art or body language. Yorick should not need to worry about materialist philosophy, given the endless instability to which material objects are subject. A glove, a *bidet* and a plucked rose pick up the quality of their linguistic contexts and occupy a teasing area between statement, symbol, innuendo, and *objet trouvé*. A *bidet* is something other than a "Post horse" (SJ 50; literally a trotting-horse or pony), but only some Parisian readers and the Devil will know this. The plucked rose is more widely resonant. Hands, which are mentioned more often than hearts, tremble next to meaning. A monogrammed handkerchief

becomes the token of a shared memory. The crown that Yorick gives to the supposedly innocent young lady at the start of Volume II, and the purse which she makes for it, are endlessly suggestive. A band-box becomes the most equivocal of signs: *I have something for sale which is not my body/is my body.*



Fig 2: La Toilette Intime, ou la Rose éfeuillée  
(Louis-Léopold Boilly, date and location unknown)<sup>5</sup>

“La Fleur having got one large jack-boot on the far side of a little *bidet*” (SJ 50)

“ye fair mystic nymphs! go each one *pluck your rose*, and scatter them” (SJ 84)

In turn, objects seem to mimic or suggest linguistic processes. Yorick finishes his “address” to the *fille de chambre*, but he has forgotten to address the note to be sent with Madame de L\*\*\*’s letter, and nothing further is heard of either (SJ 124). For a post-Richardson first-person narrative authority his way with a letter is appallingly bad, but thanks to the processes of sentimental reading, most of us forget the note and the letter too. A road-going vehicle, the *désobligeant*, becomes a social and psychological condition and then a narrative vehicle. The starling in its

cage is at first a voice, echoing Yorick's imagined pictorial metaphor ("Beshrew the somber pencil!") of his fear of being sent to the Bastille: "I can't get out" (SJ 95). Then it is a material bird in an iron cage. The strong wires of the closure lead to the bird's "mechanical" notes, which are chanted "in tune to nature," so a different art (SJ 95). An apostrophe to "LIBERTY" leads to the picture of the captive in his dungeon: "I saw the iron enter into his soul" (SJ 98)—the choice of the Psalter version of the verse from Psalm 105 allowing access to a highly translational phrase. On the road to Versailles, La Fleur seems to have found the "short history" of the starling, a tale-within-a-tale: then a joke about *getting in* and *getting out* (SJ 99). Then it moves back into art as Yorick provides a representation of his coat of arms, or rather Sterne's, as the starling is *sturnus* (the French *étourneau* indicates a noisy scatterbrain, as *piaf*, sparrow, implies chirping or a noisy child). Again the *first person* somehow reveals a *third person*: Sterne has now managed to include both his names, in Italian and then Latin translation. These eight or so pieces of prestidigitation take only some six hundred words.

#### REVEALED RELIGION?

Sterne as sermonist and author is a presumed authority on the Bible and cognate topics, so there is a natural tendency to credit his *protégé*, parson Yorick, on the topics of Biblical commentary and Christian reading. But mention of Biblical figures is rare, and these figures are ironized by their contexts. The sole function of "Alexander the Copper-smith" was to cause St. Paul "much evil" (SJ 112; 2 Tim. 4:14). Yorick's only spiritual discourse, briefly alluded to in "PARIS," was apparently on the necessity of a first cause, but this would hardly qualify him as a Christian. He may fear materialist philosophy, but he does not seem to assert faith, because he is not assertive. Biblical language, though pervasive, is parenthetical ("hope deferr'd," from Proverbs 13:12), or slightly revised, "it is not good for thee to sit alone" / "it is not good that man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18), or a tag, "from *Dan* to *Beersheba*" (SJ 97, 73, 36): used several times in the Bible. Yorick throws in his "mite" (SJ 23): the widow of Mark 12:42 "threw in two mites". There

are what the introduction and notes to the *Florida* edition of SJ refer to as “echoes” of, “allusion” to and “paraphrases” of Biblical verses, but nothing is quite accurate (SJ li, 338, 280). To *paraphrase* is to translate loosely. Some phrases which have a ring of the Bible are taken instead from the Apocrypha (Yorick mentions Esdras) or are closer to the Psalter: “I saw the iron enter into his soul”—“the iron entered into his soul” (Ps. 105:18)—“*walking in a vain shadow*”—“man walketh in a vain shadow” (Ps. 39:7; SJ 98, 115). It seems that Sterne translates Yorick into a member of his congregation, casually familiar with Biblical tags and phrases but not capable of rendering more than three words in a row accurately.

Sterne’s teasing about Yorick’s religious identity is best illustrated by a superb joke for the *philosophes* and their female friends in “PARIS.” Yorick flatters the ageless Madame de V\*\*\* into a belief that it is not yet time for her to give up her empire of love and become a deist (for all practical purposes, an unbeliever), the second “epocha” of the worldly French female. He tells her

that I had not been five minutes sat upon the sofa 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.

We are not adamant, said I, taking hold of her hand—and there is need of all restraints, till age in her own time steals in and lays them on us—but, my dear lady, said I, kissing her hand—’tis too—too soon—

I declare I had the credit all over Paris of unperverting Madame de V\*\*\*.—She affirmed to Mons. D\*\*\* and the Abbe M\*\*\*, that in one half hour I had said more for revealed religion, than all their Encyclopedia had said against it—(SJ 147)

Apart from the egregious quality of his persuasion, there is the question of what exactly it was that Yorick *revealed*, and what position the lady was in when she had been *unperverted*. She has, after all, put off the epocha of deism and been restored to her first empire of love, not accelerated into the third, a “*devôte*,” someone pious or bigoted (SJ 146). But a bishop, or any of the grave and learned who read only with their

eyes, will be deaf to such Devilish undertones, will allow the affirmation of what Madame de V\*\*\* appears to affirm, and will believe that Yorick is as innocent as he seems to be.

### THE SPIRITUAL AND THE MATERIAL

Two uses of Biblical language ask for close attention, the first because it concerns translation. In "THE ACT OF CHARITY: PARIS," Yorick comments on the fineness of the sentiments, the expressions, of French plays, saying that "whenever I have a more brilliant affair upon my hands than common, as they suit a preacher just as well as a hero, I generally make my sermon out of 'em—and for the text—'Capadosia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphilia'—is as good as any one in the Bible" (SJ 141). The idea that Yorick makes his sermons by translating French plays would be as inflammatory to the Anglican bishops as the scene in *Tristram Shandy* where he cuts up one of his sermons and gives it to the assembled dignitaries to light their pipes with. The text which Yorick refers to so casually, Acts 2:9-10, is about supernatural translation, the Pentecostal episode where the Jews from the diaspora or *galut* who have gathered in Jerusalem miraculously hear the Galileans speaking in languages that they can understand. The two episodes perform a similar translational figure of speech, operating between the pious and spiritual, and the profane or physical, though in the *Journey* the figure has also become literal, actual, translation.

The other phrase which asks for exegesis is used in "MARIA": "thou shouldst eat of my own bread, and drink of my own cup" (SJ 152). This is then expanded in "MARIA: MOULINES," after Yorick's approving description of Maria's womanly qualities: "she should *not only eat of my bread and drink of my own cup*, but Maria should lay in my bosom, and be unto me as a daughter" (SJ 154). These are very close to 2 Samuel 12:3, which is part of the story of the only lamb of a poor man, who is naturally rather fond of it. The rich man has flocks. In the next verse, the poor man's lamb is barbecued ("dress'd") by the rich man, who is unwilling to give up one of his own for a travelling visitor. This is Nathan's parable to King David, who has taken Bathsheba, wife of Uriah

the Hittite, and has had Uriah killed by ordering that he be placed in the most exposed position in battle. David, who is as clever at parables as Herminius is at letters, misses the point, and Nathan has to point the finger. How many of Yorick's readers miss the point? The *sentiment*, the feeling, near the end of the episode, is clouded because the *sentiment*, the thought expressed in words, now casts its own shade. It is fully Christian, the pastor caring for the lamb as one of his family, but given Yorick's appreciation of Maria's feminine qualities ("of the first order of fine forms"), his paternal feeling, and the picture of her lying in his bosom, a touch of the predatory or paedophile remains in what he says (SJ 154). But the episode ends with Maria returning to herself and then disappearing in the marketplace at Moulines, no longer the pastoral or juvenile sentimental object. Something in the episode seems to have energized her, made her feel better, whether the sentimental exchange of floods of tears over a totemic handkerchief, or Yorick's gentle reminder that her heart is still warm, or the tune she plays on her pipe, or even, perhaps, that touch of the predatory. In this episode Maria is grieving for the recent death of her father, not deranged by the loss of her betrothed because of the intrigues of a malevolent curate, as in Tristram's episode. Yorick ministers to her grief. Grief is a shapeshifter and can take strange forms, as can the ministry.

The other clouded moment at this point is when a character representing an Anglican feels the need to assert that he is "positive" he has a soul because he *feels* that he has a soul:

I felt such undescribable 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. (SJ 151)

This may be carrying sentimentalism too far. We, especially the bishops, may feel that, as the evasive hyperbole of "undescribable emotions" renders them somewhat suspect—are they *unmentionable* emotions?—the parson doth protest too much. If Yorick can see the iron enter the captive's soul, why is he concerned about the existence of his

own? Also one has to remember that some of us will not have known that there was such stuff as materialist philosophy. Students of skeptical argument are taught very early to present both sides of a case, and taught the potential benefits of arguing against the cause that they wish to present for consideration.

It is also, as with Yorick's earlier encounter with the sideboards of the *précieuses*, a form of paradox, conditioned by the different resonances of the words *soul* and *âme*, in the context of the *philosophes'* fascination with the idea of the soul. In English the immaterial soul will, following the example of Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755), be indexed first with any other meaning given thereafter, as if the immaterial soul were the real deal and the others subordinate. A quotation from Isaac Watts under the second meaning, "Vital principle," acknowledges that there are "vegetative, sensitive, and rational souls," but then waves discussion aside by saying that "the word soul" serves "for all these principles" (Johnson n. p.). By contrast, the article "SENSIBILITÉ: SENTIMENT" in the *Encyclopédie* (*Encyclopédie* 15: 38-52) has fourteen pages on physical, medical, definitions of "Sensibilité," and then nine lines on the "disposition tendre et délicate de l'âme" (the soul's tender and delicate character) which is the moral definition. The medical section describes the sensitive soul as a "lumière ou une flamme vitale" (a light or a living flame), a language close to the spiritual, but then asserts that man is merely "l'animal qui doit posséder la *sensibilité* au plus haut degré [...] le chef-d'oeuvre des âmes sensibles ou animaux" (the animal which possesses sensibility to the highest degree [...] the masterpiece of sensitive or animal souls), such souls being allied to the mechanical movements of the muscles, spasms and irritability, animal tissue's inherent capacity to respond to stimuli (*Encyclopédie* 15: 52, 39, 46). The article on "Âme" in Tome 1 begins by saying that there have been many different opinions on the subject, and then engages in general discussion for sixteen pages before moving on to subordinate definitions. The *Encyclopédie* reflects and tolerates many languages, many ways of speaking; it does not exclude, and tolerance was what the *philosophes* hoped and strove for above all else: "Nous prêchons la *tolérance* pratique, et non point la

speculative" (our doctrine is practical toleration, not the speculative kind (*Encyclopédie* 16: 395)). Speaking to us in English, Yorick projects the first, innocent meaning of "soul" towards his English readers, but his discourse is complicated by those "undescribable emotions" from his calqued animal soul, his tender, delicate, and perhaps partly physical *âme*.

### THE APOSTROPHE TO SENSIBILITY

Yorick's querulous sense of his soul leads into his magnificent address to sensibility, the crux of the whole text. The apostrophe functions on several levels, mainly as part of a persuasive narrative context which includes Yorick's character and characteristic responses, but within this as a forceful appeal to a godhead, as something close to a demonstration of materialist philosophy, and as a purging. As with the first section of the story, several languages are in play. It is technically an apostrophe, a rhetorical address, but it is also a rhapsody which verges on Enthusiasm, the Nonconformist belief in direct access to the godhead. Yorick is transported.

He may have provided Maria with a form of therapy, but now he needs one himself, needs to "cast a shade" across his vision of her, to distance himself from "this gate of sorrow"—the memory of her situation—and to feel well once again (SJ 155). Strangely, he seems to be mourning her loss: the daughter has left her sentimental home. He is beside himself, grief-stricken and distraught, and his language reflects this. At the start his phrasing is too fast, the main metaphor, his favored figure from visual art, is skimped. There should be a phrase to explain "shade," about how Maria's sorrows *too fiercely glare*, but this is passed over. "This is thy divinity which stirs within me [...] that I feel some generous joys and generous cares beyond myself" (SJ 155). Within modulates to beyond. "Sensibility" is the "source inexhausted" and the "eternal fountain of our feelings," chaining its martyr down and lifting "him up to HEAVEN" (SJ 155). Sources and fountains lift up and chain down: HEAVEN becomes part of a process which is partly figurative, partly physical. Crucially, the "great SENSORIUM of the world" is both

personal, “Thee” and “Thou,” strongly suggestive of an intimate providential godhead, and impersonal, passive, and physical, “which vibrates” (SJ 155), the vibration as of nerves, “le mouvement fibrillaire” which the *philosophes* derived from post-Newtonian thinking (*Encyclopédie* 15: 39). The SENSORIUM vibrates “if a hair of our heads but falls upon the ground in the remotest desert of thy creation” (SJ 155). By definition there can be no people, and hence no hairs, in a desert, though there might be in a purely rhetorical or Biblical one (Luke 12:7, Matt. 10:30). Vibrations might be sentimental (think *good vibrations*), and they might also be supernatural and/or natural. “Thou giv’st a portion of it sometimes”—how big is a *portion* of sensibility? Why the vague “sometimes,” and how does this casual phrasing square with the hyperbole of superlatives, the remotest desert, “the roughest peasant,” “the bleakest mountains” (SJ 155)? The quixotic sentimental pilgrim battles the words of his language and the windmills of his mind. Maria, sentimental object though she may be or have been, must not be allowed to dictate to Yorick’s emotions, to place them beyond the bounds of description. An apostrophe to sensibility proves a purgative cure for the distressed sensibility, better than a starling, and has yielded a fine vibrating translation between spiritual, emotional, and physical worlds.

#### THE SUPPER: THE GRACE

All passion spent, the narrative reverts to connected discourse, mundane travel-narrative. The “thill-horse” pulling between the shafts loses two shoes, and Yorick is left to walk the road, but, having fought the good fight for a “cheerful and contented mind,” he does not care (SJ 159). Nor do we object to the transition from one mode to another. Many of us have been a little quizzical about Yorick’s apostrophe, because he himself can be skeptical about this aspect of his discourse. When the audience at the theatre, in “THE ROSE,” told the Abbé to hold up his hands, Yorick remarked that this “was as unintelligible to

me, as my apostrophe to the monk had been to him" (SJ 83). He paints a verbal picture of the effects of the Bastille for us, but is "interrupted in the hey-day of this soliloquy" (SJ 95). But as Yorick is clearly rapt for a reason here, we may excuse his vagaries of grammar and thought. We too have been cured of sensibility, so we need pity neither Yorick nor Maria. What we have been led through is the apogee, the culmination, and the dismissal of the sentimental mode. Yet our parallel cures are also "sentimental," mutually sympathetic.

Yorick's reward for cheering himself up is his ability to march happily into the peasant family's supper and accept their hospitality, in "THE SUPPER" and then "THE GRACE" (SJ 157, 159). The meal is of bread, wine which, as if by "magic," remains present to Yorick's palate as he writes, and lentil soup: "'twas a feast of love" (SJ 158). Yorick has been sensing the spiritual in the physical since his encounter with Father Lorenzo, so it is natural to read this as "a simple domestic manifestation of the Lord's Supper" (Brissenden 239) and the bread and wine as a manifestation of a sacrament, though the lentil soup may muddy the waters a little. The love-feast or *agape* meal was a communal celebration used by the early Christian churches, but the only eighteenth-century English sect to use the practice was the Methodist, following John Wesley's contacts with the Moravian Brethren in America. The form that Yorick uses, *feast of love*, occurs in the final line of Charles Wesley's 1740 poem "The Love-Feast." It is quite reasonable to foreground the eucharist at this point, but eighteenth-century Anglican bishops would more likely be thinking *these Methodists get everywhere!* Methodists did not use the eucharist because they had few ordained priests, and so celebrated (and still do) with bread and water. Yorick has translated the water of the feast of love into wine.

But we have forgotten our French readers, who may be Catholic or pagan or unbelievers. What would they all hear in "supper"? In French, holy communion, the eucharist, and the Last Supper are all *La Cène*. Supper translates as *soupe*: the French verb *souper* is *to dine*, or *to sup*. So where an English reader may hear *the bread and wine*, a French reader hears *the lentil soup*. *Soupe* and *potage* are partly interchangeable terms.

Just as for the peasant family and Yorick, it is a shared, communal meal for readers. Some of us get the bread and wine, and some get the soup. We have also forgotten the socialist/*philosophe* reader, who has been admiring Yorick's approving description of the pre-Walden economy of this little *paysage*, which is wholly independent of that of the *ancien régime*. Some *philosophe* readers might also hear an echo of the title of a chapter of Voltaire's *Zadig* (1748), "LE SOUPER" or "The supper party," in which Zadig is able to persuade guests who hold a wide variety of different religious beliefs that they all worship the same power (Voltaire 166).

After "THE SUPPER" comes "THE GRACE," the family dance as a thanks for the meal, and "Grace" is a central Christian concept (New 69). It is also one scholarly name for that section, which appropriates it for a Christian reading. But a Buddhist or indeed a materialist will find as much pleasure as a Christian in a meal, and give thanks for it. "What a vast power there is in a repast! Joy revives in a disconsolate heart" (La Mettrie 11). A grace is a thanks: *grace à* is French for *thanks to*. Not that that translation of "THE GRACE" is given *mal à propos*, it is close to something that an English reader in 1768 would have sensed. To Yorick it is a grace to the meal, to the grandfather it is a thanks to heaven. But it is a reading, a translation, which is achieved by responding in a particular way to nuances in individual words and small phrases, a grace and a ewe lamb and a supper and the hairs of one's head. Other readings are available. Perhaps the grace is the gracefulness of the dance, or perhaps it is Thalia, who, when she is not being one of the Muses or a goddess, is one of the three Graces, attendants of Aphrodite, who dance in a circle. She represents festivity and abundance of food. In Frénais's translation, "THE GRACE" is translated to "les graces," though *dire les graces* is to say grace (Frénais 2: 207). So perhaps the "Religion" is pagan as well as Christian, female as well as male, like the dancers: *Religion* is personified as female (SJ 159). It depends whether we are hearing English, or English tinged with French or Greek, or all three, or not very much. Our doctrine is practical toleration: readers will hear what they like, or what they must.

## THE CASE OF DELICACY

How might one solve the much-explored riddle of which part of the Piedmontese lady's maid Yorick caught hold of, at the end: "when I stretched out my hand, I caught hold of the Fille de Chambre's END OF VOL. II" (SJ 165)? Technically the sentence is complete as it stands, though minus the stop, so he caught hold of her hand. Carry the sentence across to the END, and he grasped some part of her nether regions. The END is also the end of the story, the end of Yorick, and the end of Sterne, who died a few days after publication. It is perhaps also an *enigma*, that ultimate expression of semantic and conceptual uncertainty, as well as a riddle.

"THE CASE OF DELICACY" echoes an earlier section, "THE CASE OF CONSCIENCE. PARIS," where Yorick is reprimanded by the *maître d'hôtel* for entertaining a young woman in his room for two hours (SJ 127). At the start of the chapter this gentleman was "the master of the hotel" (SJ 127), but a few paragraphs later he has been demoted—*maître d'hôtel* means in French more or less what it means in English, a head waiter. The foot of the bed gives "the appearance of an evidence" (SJ 127), so the case appears to have a forensic, external quality. If she had had a band-box with something to sell you, says the master of the hotel, then that would have been different. "O' my conscience, said I, she had one; but I never look'd into it" (SJ 127). Yorick swears by his conscience, which tells him right from wrong. The hotelier proceeds to translate Yorick's conscience, in a joke which doubtless gives him some pleasure. "I could recommend one to you who would use you *en conscience*" (SJ 127-28): that is to say, conscientiously. Whether or not the woman was conscientious about her business would depend on the opinion of the person for whom she worked. Yorick's oath is not comprehensible in French, because *conscience* is more a psychological than a moral category and indicates primarily *consciousness*: Frénais has to omit Yorick's line. The case becomes the case of *conscience*, the word, at first the wide-eyed innocent party but then the seedy accomplice. Yorick may not appreciate the dubious beauty of the hotelier's joke, but by this point he

knows very well that the “master of the hotel will share the profit with her” (SJ 128), and knows the other possible business in hand. He buys a pair of lace ruffles, and, having eased his conscience with respect to this second lady, can produce a gratifying little translation of his own, that “I have only paid as many a poor soul has *paid* before me for an act he *could* not do, or think of” (SJ 128). To some readers this is an admission of impotence. This is certainly an interpretation left dangling, but Yorick is also saying, with a twinge of humor in his final three words, that he has paid, been brought to account, for the errors in his management of the first episode, his relatively virtuous but rumpling entertainment of a young woman who did not work for the hotel. This young woman, who was sentimentally affected by Yorick’s initial ascription of innocence at the start of Volume II, leaves the story with her innocence relatively intact, despite her band-box. Yorick’s sheepish little quibble on *paid*, which is so delicate as to often go unnoticed, is reminiscent of the “elusive, deniable” (Pollack 85) quality of John Gay’s sub-punning language in his poems and *The Beggar’s Opera*, and is a sign of the post-Scriblerian quality of Sterne’s text. This is the limit of Yorick’s conscious verbal play. In a slightly rhapsodic address to the “great governor of nature” he will mention “movements which rise” from his feelings, and which belong to him “as a man” and result in “issues” (SJ 124), but here he is protected by a principle akin to that of *no pun where none intended*. Authorial intention is another question.

“THE CASE OF DELICACY” is less clear than the earlier chapter, though it starts from a similar moral or sentimental keyword. But with a riddle (Tristram tells us we live among mysteries and riddles in vol. 4, ch. 17, and the eighteenth century loved riddles) we would expect a clue. Perhaps it is hidden, like the best clues, in full sight, next to something else. What about THE CASE? Again this suggests a courtroom of moral sensibility, but another meaning of *case* is the body: the body is the case for the soul. By extension, the word may stand for the sexual organs of man or woman, and unless the *fille de chambre* has something queer under her skirt, these will be female sexual organs.<sup>6</sup> In this reading we might borrow the three stars of the “Marquesina di F\*\*\*” and

say that Yorick's final gesture is to catch the *fille de chambre* by her tender and delicate C\*\*\* (SJ 77). We now have a range of latent readings in which Yorick comes into contact with either the girl's hand, or her END, or her C\*\*\*. The possibilities, though, are not endless. He probably did not jog her elbow, and he has missed her soul entirely: "THE CASE OF DELICACY" is, to almost all appearances, relentlessly naturalistic, the delicate case being the problem of how a single man and a single woman are to share one bedroom. The sentimental keyword, delicacy, has been translated from the sentimental (or moral or religious or genteel) lexicon towards the physical, as with words like creed, conscience, movements, case, soul, sensorium, sensibility, vibrations, revealed: as sentimental behavior may turn into words written on material objects, a map, or the paper and ink from which we read the sentimental journey, or fear into a starling. This translational movement towards the physical is as endemic in the text as is the transformational mode in which objects yearn towards becoming something else: for example the "Delicious essence!" (SJ 143) of flattery quite properly becomes a "Parfum délicieux!" in Frénais's French (Frénais 2: 170). And as Spanish readers will know, the Marquesina is not a minor Italian aristocrat. She is a bus shelter, or, less anachronistically, a *marquee*. These readers presumably keep quiet, not wanting to do more than smile at Sterne's little *faux pas* and the credulous English, while Italian readers seem to assume that the word is an exotic English variant of *Marchesa*. In Frénais's translation the lady is translated to a Marquise, Italy is not mentioned, and Yorick is heading back to Rennes at the end. Sterne only set the scene in Milan in order to make use of his pleasant *objet trouvé*. Yorick comments on the pleasure "which arose out of that translation" (SJ 78), his sentimental decoding of the lady's body language, but he is less adept at another kind of translation. We are all *lost in translation*: Frénais indicates that he too is lost, in his preliminary *Avertissement*, when he observes that he could not translate Yorick's word "sentimental" into French "par aucune expression qui pût y répondre" (Frénais 1: v-vi; [by any equivalent expression]) but has decided to let it stand for lack of any alternative.

So the fuzziness of the final section mirrors that of the first: the Fragment (of text or life) must begin and end as fragments. But literary fragments in this period are not *mere* fragments, because hidden behind them is John 6:12, Christ's words after the feeding of the five thousand: "Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost." In the KJV, all four gospels use the word at this point. Gathered fragments imply a retaining of something valuable and a hidden superabundance or wholeness, and this implication is carried in a hidden language. The topics at the end of the narrative mirror those at the start, the relationships between the three enigmatically-woven worlds of humanity, linguistic, spiritual, and physical: the word, the belief, and the sideboard. Only through the divine comedy and secular wit of *translation* can these be fully explored.

Independent Researcher

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For fuzzy language, which is an approach to semantics recently derived from fuzzy mathematics, fuzzy logic, and fuzzy concepts, see for instance Yang. Pedagogical websites will routinely warn students against the use of *fuzzy language*, but such problems seem to be integral to the concept.

<sup>2</sup>Sideboards are still retailed under the names *credenza* and *credence cabinet*: servants would visibly eat food placed on the sideboard, in order that the aristocratic diners could *believe* they were not about to be poisoned.

<sup>3</sup>Quotations from *Clélie* and their translations are taken from Peters 110. Elsewhere, translations are my own.

<sup>4</sup>At the top lie the *Terres Inconnues*, lands unknown to innocent females. The most favored *ami* may sail directly downstream from *Nouvelle Amitié* to *Tendre sur Inclination*. Sailing upstream is not advised. *Tendre sur Estime*, to the right, sounds uninteresting, and most of the strenuous villages lie to the left, on the way to *Tendre sur Reconnaissance*. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Carte\\_du\\_tendre\\_300dpi.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Carte_du_tendre_300dpi.jpg)

<sup>5</sup>This manifestation of the plucked rose is a debased version of an item in Marian iconography. In English, to "pluck a rose" is a female euphemism for retiring to the necessary house, and may also indicate menstruation. It seems that the bidet was, in the 1760s, only in general use in Parisian brothels. The head, which gives the lady somewhere to rest the sponges, and her posture, allow the name. [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Boilly\\_La\\_Toilette\\_intime\\_ou\\_la\\_Rose\\_effeuillee.jpg](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Boilly_La_Toilette_intime_ou_la_Rose_effeuillee.jpg)

<sup>6</sup>Gordon Williams provides some twenty examples of writers negotiating with this sense of the word, in the period that includes the “Shandean time” (Williams 1: 211-13).

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