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Porous Borders:

The Passport as an Access Metaphor in Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*

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Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768) includes among its scenes and vignettes a suite of chapters devoted to what would later, in the wake of the French Revolution, become a standard motif of British travel writing: the passport, seen both as an instrument of control and as a means of gaining access to otherwise restricted territories. When reconstructed without the jumbled chronology that characterizes Sterne's fiction, this episode relates how the whimsical narrator, Yorick, forgot to procure a valid travel document for himself prior to his precipitous departure for France, and how he eventually makes up for this neglect with the help of a well-connected count at Versailles. In purely narrative terms, it plays only a minor role in a book that, as indicated by the title, is more concerned with the emotional than the epic aspects of travel. Arguably, Yorick's passport predicament serves simply as a pretext for introducing another suite of sentimental scenes, beginning with that of the encaged starling, evocative of a confined existence as a prisoner, and concluding with the narrator's successful attempt to identify himself to the count by gesturing towards the gravedigger scene in *Hamlet*, which features the skull of his namesake, the late court jester. Yet, as I argue in this essay, the significance of the passport episode goes far beyond this facilitating function. On the one hand, it is crucial to the thematic order of the novel itself, poignantly articulating a dichotomy of restriction and transgression that also manifests itself in a range of less obvious forms. On the other hand, it enrolls Sterne's book in a broader trend within the history of the novel which uses the passport to highlight a clash, defining of modernity, between the movement control of governments and the mobility of individuals. If the former leads to a

better understanding of the metaphoric order that informs the plot of *A Sentimental Journey*, the latter enables a new form of historical contextualization of this novel based on the history of borders and passports.¹

In assessing this centrality of the passport episode, it is necessary first to consider the enunciatory status of the passport as a literary motif, particularly the fact that it appears to encompass metaphorical as well as literal/historical meanings. Stephen Greenblatt's influential manifesto for cultural mobility studies offers a handle on this problem. According to Greenblatt, the field of cultural studies was traditionally predicated on assumptions of settledness and rootedness. In order to counter this entrenched assumption of stability with an enhanced awareness of cultural mobility, Greenblatt insists that this mobility be treated non-metaphorically:

The physical, infrastructural, and institutional conditions of movement – the available routes; the maps; the vehicles; the relative speed; the controls and costs; the limits on what can be transported; the authorizations required; the inns, relay stations and transfer points; the travel facilitators – are all serious objects of analysis. Only when conditions directly related to literal movement are firmly grasped will it be possible fully to understand the metaphorical movements: between center

¹The passport episode has been scrutinized on a number of occasions in the critical literature, although in very different ways to what is proposed in the present essay. Leading Sterne-scholar Melvyn New argues that Yorick's "quest for his passports suggests [...] not so much a search for identity as for connection with another, for only in communion with the other does the self fully emerge" (1988, 1042) – a point that resonates somewhat with my discussion of the passport as a metaphor for access across intersubjective borders. Drawing on Michel Foucault, Judith Frank links the passport scene to the novel's nexus of "surveillance, discipline, and characterization" (1997, 80). Simon During reads the passport chapters in relation to the emergence of a "modern literary subjectivity," which he sees as defined by an "implicit political charge [...] bound to literature's relation to transportation and the metaphors of mobility without which the modern concept of literature is unthinkable" (2002/2003, 127). Most recently, Stephanie DeGooyer has proposed that Sterne refers to the passport as a "restrictive rather than imaginative mechanism," and that "the sentimentalism in Sterne's second novel is an imaginative strategy to evade the interpellating mechanisms of the state" (2015, 203). While often incisive on their own terms, these contributions tend to treat only cursorily the historical basis of the passport episode and refrain from analyzing fully how the passport motif forms part of a metaphorical system of borders, border crossings and passports across a range of textual levels.

and periphery; faith and scepticism; order and chaos; exteriority and interiority. (2009, 250)

Restricting oneself to mobility in the literal sense is no doubt sound advice, especially if one is interested, as Greenblatt is, in delineating a potentially vast new area of research. However, in the specific context of the interfacing between fictional literature and the passport system it is not always easy to separate out literal and metaphorical meanings. Any extended use of the passport motif in a literary text automatically renders this motif functional, for example in the sense of defining a fictional space, instigating a certain type of plot, or articulating key thematic ideas,² and such functionalization already takes us a step beyond literal mobility. Moreover, passports are always semantically overinvested and linked, as a concrete historical anchor, to higher-order questions of state security, individual freedom, mobility, and personal and national identity. At the highest level of generality, the passport signifies communication across borders, not just in the form of national borders, but also borders between social and interpersonal systems of all kinds, and it is important to note that such metaphorical use of the passport, as discussed in the concluding section of this paper, predates by almost two centuries the systematic and rigorous deployment of passports as an instrument of movement control. While it should always take historical control practices as its basis, the study of the passport motif in literature therefore cannot rule out semantic extensions as these are inherent in this motif itself. On the contrary, it must account holistically for the complex interplay between political control practices and literary representations that this motif enacts.

²See Gulddal "Paper Trails" (2014).

In the case of the passport episode in *A Sentimental Journey*, a flexible approach of this kind is critical. This episode is clearly not making the political point, standard in most eighteenth-century literary engagements with the passport system, that movement control is beneficial as an instrument of political and social order. Nor does it make the opposite point, which would become prevalent in the wake of the French Revolution, that the passport system is the epitome of political tyranny and oppression. While the passport episode, as I aim to show, is in fact firmly rooted in historical fact, Sterne's interest in the passport system goes beyond representing the conditions of travel in contemporary France. Instead, it serves to establish a historically grounded yet ultimately metaphorical lens through which other, less tangible modes of restriction and transgression can be observed and understood. Following Hans Blumenberg, the passport can perhaps best be described as an "existential metaphor" that uses a specific historical reference point to characterize a general aspect of the human condition in a given period (1997).

These initial considerations prescribe the method of analysis in this essay. I first account for the historical embeddedness of Sterne's passport episode, showing how it offers insights into the workings of the passport system of the *ancien régime*. Secondly, I highlight how this episode establishes an abstract model that is then applied later in the novel in a range of scenes focusing on enclosed spaces and the conditions under which they can be accessed. Finally, by way of conclusion, I situate this figure historically as part of what might be called the literary history of the passport and as a manifestation of a certain logic of exclusion and access characteristic of modernity. The overall aim is to demonstrate how Sterne uses the nexus of borders, passports and international mobility as a metaphorical framework for understanding the complex interplay of access and access restrictions, operating at different levels and in a range of different forms, that define the modern world.

The Passport

The passport episode in *A Sentimental Journey* begins during Yorick's stay in Paris. One day, when returning to his hotel, Yorick learns that the "Lieutenant de Police" – historically, this would have been the famous Antoine de Sartine, who held the position from 1759 to 1774, but the phrase is used here as a metonym for his office – has enquired about him. He immediately understands the nature of this enquiry and provides a typical Shandean justification of why he has neglected to inform the reader:

The duce take it! said I – I know the reason. It is time the reader should know it, for in the order of things in which it happened, it was omitted; not that it was out of my head; but that had I told it then, it might have been forgot now – and now is the time I want it. (91)

The "reason" that Yorick refers to is the fact that he is travelling without a passport. In the first chapter of the book, the protagonist barely utters the opening words, "They order [...] this matter better in France" (3), before he sits in a carriage en route to Dover and Calais to investigate further. It is not until he observes the French Channel coast through his binoculars, having already crossed the border perceptually, that he realizes "that there was no getting there without a passport" (91). However, Yorick soon learns that the Count de ****, with whom he is vaguely acquainted, has hired a packet boat for himself and his retinue. Being French and of high rank the count is able to cross the channel without hindrance, and he agrees to let Yorick accompany him.

Although Sterne is clearly not concerned with accounting accurately for the contemporary French passport system and therefore provides almost no details, the background part of the passport episode nevertheless offers a miniature portrait of this system. At the most general

level, the passport episode highlights how the English Channel as an international border doubles as a border between different political cultures. While internal movement restrictions had existed in Britain in various forms since the Middle Ages, not least as a means of controlling the vagrant poor, and while civil and international war sometimes led to restrictions on international mobility, the British government at this time did not require passports from British subjects departing or foreigners arriving (Torpey 2000, 66-71; for a discussion of British antecedents, see Lloyd 2003, 31-60). A permanent and universally applied passport requirement was not put in place until the outbreak of the First World War, and eighteenth-century British philosophers tended to regard passport control as a violation of civil rights, widespread on the continent but incompatible with British liberties (cf. Paley 541-42). In France, on the other hand, the passport had long been an integral part of the police system of the absolutist state, and, following successive attempts in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a generalized legal requirement for all travelers entering or departing France was introduced in 1745 (Reale 1930, 8). This dividing line between British liberality and French authoritarianism – which, it should be noted, in practice was often somewhat blurred – offers a historical explanation, not only for Yorick's carelessness in neglecting to secure a passport, but also for his continued interest in the French passport system. As indicated by the opening sentence, cultural differences and comparisons are a central theme of this fictionalized travel book, and Yorick therefore repeatedly highlights the passport as a foreign custom. By doing so, he inaugurates a tradition in British travel writing, lasting at least until the mid-twentieth century, that sees British travelers react with dismay when undergoing passport control in France and on the continent in general (Fussell 1980, 24-31; for an early nineteenth-century example, see Carr 1803, 16-23).

Apart from highlighting political differences across the English Channel, this part of the passport episode also reflects several key aspects of the mid-eighteenth-century French

passport regime. The first relates to the poor administrative reliability of the passport as an instrument of control. During the French Revolution it became a commonplace to characterize the passport system, whether approvingly or disapprovingly, as the all-seeing eye of state power (Gulddal, “The Novel” 2015, 136-39; Torpey 2000, 21-56). However, while the Old Regime passport was certainly conceived as a means of projecting administrative power, its effectiveness in this regard bears little resemblance to that of the modern passport system – or indeed to the contemporary disciplinary institutions analyzed by Michel Foucault in *Surveiller et punir* (1975). On the contrary, the absolutist state was characterized by a fundamental discrepancy between its authoritarian aspirations as expressed, for example, in legal statutes and the administrative resources and competences available to enforce these statutes (Burger 2000, 11-13; Maczak 1995, 115-16). This discrepancy is particularly evident in the context of the passport system where seemingly inflexible requirements and associated heavy penalties tend to obscure a less rigid reality where undocumented travelers were often able to cross borders without incident, particularly if their dress, comportment and means of transportation visibly differentiated them from the main target group, the wandering poor. It is worth noting in this regard that Yorick’s passing reference to the ongoing war with France as the reason why he had to carry a passport – “it never entered my mind that we were at war with France” (91) – is not entirely accurate from the point of view of legal history. In fact, travelers entering France were legally obliged to carry a passport even in peace time, although this requirement was enforced more rigorously in times of war (Reale 1930, 8-9).

While the retrospective part of the passport episode focuses on the passport as an instrument of movement control, the remaining Parisian part highlights instead its use as a means of identification and its connection, not to border security, but to the policing of the interior. When learning about the Lieutenant de Police’s enquiry, Yorick rushes to Versailles to seek out the French foreign minister who, however, is not available. Instead, he turns to the Count

de B***** whom he already knows by reputation as an anglophile and Shakespeare enthusiast. This barest of connections suffices to give Yorick access to the count. In lieu of a letter of introduction (which, as Maczak notes, was sometimes the most important travel document (1995, 112)) Yorick picks up a copy of *Hamlet* that happens to be lying on the Count's desk, turns to the gravedigger scene in Act V where the protagonist, skull in hand, remembers Yorick the jester, and uses this link as a surreal means of identification: "*Me, Voici*" (112). On this basis the good-natured count issues him with an equally surreal passport that grants "Mr. Yorick, the king's jester" the right to free movement on French territory:

As the Passport was directed to all lieutenant governors, governors, and commandants of cities, generals of armies, justiciaries, and all officers of justice, to let Mr. Yorick, the king's jester, and his baggage, travel quietly along – I own the triumph of obtaining the Passport was not a little tarnish'd by the figure I cut in it (116).³

In an ironical redoubling of the passport metaphor Shakespeare's Yorick becomes Yorick's "passport" to a passport – a figure that in itself encapsulates the dual literal and metaphorical aspects of the passport motif.⁴

In this scene the whimsical style of narration once again tends to obscure what is in fact a surprisingly accurate representation of the French passport system. Yorick's passport itself

³As Arthur Cash has shown (1986, 116-29), the passport episode is biographically tied to Sterne's own experiences with the passport system during his visit to France 1762, towards the end of the Seven Year's War. While Yorick travels as part of the retinue of a French count, Sterne was able to cross the closed border by joining a British diplomatic mission led by George Pitt. After deciding to stay in Paris for an extended period, Sterne obtained an individual passport through the intercession of the Comte de Bissie. See also Battestin (1994,19).

⁴A further irony, also connected to the passport, is the fact that the authentication of Yorick's identity is achieved via a double imposture: the protagonist pretends to be someone he is not, and this someone, Hamlet's Yorick, is himself, as a court jester, associated with impersonation and assumed identities. By means of this complex ironical structure, Sterne undermines the identificatory function of the passport even before it is established.

closely reproduces the standard passport format of the mid-eighteenth century (cf. Sée 1907, 27), possibly copying the wording of Sterne's own travel document. Yet the scene also foregrounds several structural features. First, it offers an illustration of how passport control was not simply, or even primarily, exercised at external, international borders, but also took place internally at borders between fiscal and administrative regions or, as in Yorick's case, in hotels and inns which were part of the system as accommodation providers were required to inform the police of overnight guests. Secondly, the episode highlights the key weakness of the contemporary passport, namely its inability to establish a secure link between the person and the document supported by modern technologies of identification; the *signalement*, or personal description, only became a standard feature of passports during the French Revolution (Torpey 2000, 38). In this situation, as Sterne shows us by way of comic distortion, what truly mattered were personal contacts and introductions, both as a means of getting access to one of the many issuing authorities and as a means of establishing trust.

Cosmopolitanism and the Context-Dependency of Identity

When supplemented by the biographical details uncovered by Cash, this brief historical analysis might reasonably conclude the discussion of the passport episode, were it not for the fact that the passport also takes on a wider significance in Sterne's novel as an emblematic condensation of one of the book's most prominent, but not sufficiently understood, thematic strands. Specifically, the passport episode crystallizes an abstract model that centers on the idea of the border, seen in very general terms both as a beneficial security measure and an intolerable limitation, and the corresponding idea of crossing the border as either a dangerous transgression or an act of liberation. The passport functions as the mediator between these opposing understandings, enabling a type of cross-border travel that allows travelers to reap the benefits of communicating beyond their narrow circle of life while at the same time immunizing them

against potential threats. In other words, the passport is seen to render the border porous in the sense of permeable and protective at the same time – a notion that accords with one of the key functions of actual passports, which co-exists with their use in restricting and controlling mobility, namely to place the traveler as far as it goes under the protection of the issuing government even beyond its borders (Lloyd 2003, 236-60; see also Salter 2003, 2-6).

This abstract model – which, as will become apparent, is not confined to the context of actual borders and border crossings – is addressed in Yorick's Preface. Characteristically featuring as Chapter 7, this essayistic interlude outlines the narrator's philosophy of travel and opens with a reflection on borders:

[N]ature has set up by her own unquestionable authority certain boundaries and fences to circumscribe the discontent of man: she has effected her purpose in the quietest and easiest manner by laying him under almost insuperable obligations to work out his ease, and to sustain his sufferings at home [...]. 'Tis true we are endued with an imperfect power of spreading our happiness sometimes beyond her limits, but 'tis so ordered, that from the wants of languages, connections, and dependencies, and from the difference in education, customs and habits, we lie under so many impediments in communicating our sensations out of our own sphere, as often amount to a total impossibility.

(13)

This complex paragraph mixes theological and philosophical reasoning, building a serious argument while also gently mocking the pedantry of scholars. Referencing the Old Testament narrative of the Fall of Man, Yorick presents the human condition as one of scarcity and toil and casts settled life, and by extension societies and states, as a necessary response to

this situation. As implied by the language of boundedness – “borders and fences,” “insuperable obligations,” “limits,” “impediments,” “sphere” – human existence is seen as *limited* in the sense of taking place within narrow boundaries. These boundaries, which manifest in a range of different forms, are associated with comfort and security, yet are also seen to render communication with the outside world problematic. The boundary marks the point where pre-established understandings end and an extended form of Babylonian confusion begins, making it difficult to communicate one’s inner states – “sensations” – to other people.

The provincialism discussed here is immediately noticeable when crossing national borders, yet it also manifests itself in other, less conspicuous places and is ultimately seen as part of the human condition. This existential generalization of the idea of the border becomes apparent when considering the preface in relation to the location in which it is written. Yorick produces his belated introduction in an uncoupled carriage, a *désobligeant*, defined in a footnote as “A chaise, so called in France, from its holding but one person” (12). Yorick has shut himself up in the carriage and further isolates himself from the surroundings by closing the curtains. This situation, described explicitly as being “in tolerable harmony with my feelings” (12), suggests a radical expansion of the preface’s reflections on the limitations of human life. The limited spheres can be large as well as small; they can encompass a region or a nation, but might also circumscribe just a single individual living in self-imposed or existential isolation from other individuals. The limitations that Yorick describes therefore not only relate to territorial or cultural borders, but also to the boundary between the individual subject and its environment.

However, Yorick is emphatically a *traveler*, and as I will show in the following section, the book includes a number of prominent scenes that describe how it is possible to escape, if only punctually and temporarily, the limitations of one’s own sphere. It is an important point

that the inherent provincialism of human life is, or should be, counterbalanced by a cosmopolitanism understood as a will to experience the world beyond the borders. Accordingly, the loneliness in the parked carriage, which serves as a figuration of such spheres, is seen as negative, if not morally suspicious. This is made clear when Yorick is interrupted in his writing by two English travelers who are wondering about the suggestive movements of the carriage, described as “the see-saw of this *Desobligeant*” (13). His answer – “’Twas the agitation of writing a preface” (17) – reinforces rather than dissipates the ambiguity and highlights that the contentedness within a closed space has masturbatory undertones. Realizing this, Yorick indicates that he would have preferred to share his “agitation” with a – presumably female – partner: “I have never heard, said the other, [...] of a preface wrote in a *Desobligeant*. – It would have been better, said I, in a *Vis a Vis*” (17). The two carriage types are thus used as sexually invested metaphors for, respectively, isolation and sociability, and Yorick’s conclusion is that the latter is much to be preferred.

Yorick’s paradoxical reflections on the limitations of human life and the benefits of social interaction are later developed into an equally self-contradictory philosophy of travel. The cosmopolitan creed that intercultural exchanges are inherently desirable because they extend our understanding is clearly one of the governing ideas of this book. Implied by the opening reference to the better order of things in France, this idea also informs the contrast Yorick draws between himself and “the learned SMELFUNGUS” (37), alias Tobias Smollett whose *Travels through France and Italy* (1766) was highly dismissive of continental culture. On several occasions it is articulated explicitly, for example by Yorick in his sermon-like celebration of social exchange (“– 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” [73]) and, with Yorick’s express approval (“’twas my own way of thinking”), by the French officer in the scene in Paris’s *Opera Comique*:

Every nation [...] have their refinements and *grossièrtes*, in which they take the lead, and lose it of one another by turns [...]. *Le POUR, et le CONTRE se trouvent en chaque nation*; there is 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 the *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. (83-84)

However, Yorick's preface contradicts this cosmopolitanism. Just as the preface emphasizes the inherent boundedness of human life, it also contends that there is no necessary connection between travelling and increased knowledge. The lead idea of the preface, namely that identity is context-dependent and tied to a circumscribed sphere, implies that it is difficult for the individual to maneuver effectively beyond the border. On the one hand, it is hard to *express* oneself in a way that makes sense to foreigners. On the other hand, it is hard to *understand* what these foreigners say, think and do. Yorick articulates this difficulty by means of a mercantile metaphor, stating that the "balance of sentimental commerce" is unfavorable to the traveler: what he has to offer is worth little, and what he needs must be bought at the asking price (13).⁵ The preface accordingly presents a surprisingly skeptical view of the benefits of travelling, relativizing the idea of learning through cross-border, cross-cultural exchange and

⁵It is important to note that the metaphor of the "balance of sentimental commerce," like the passport metaphor, uses international exchanges as a vehicle for investigating exchanges at the intersubjective level. For a detailed analysis, see Hussey (2011).

concluding with the recommendation that people would be well-advised to avoid foreign travel altogether:

Knowledge and improvements are to be got by sailing and posting for that purpose; but whether useful knowledge and real improvements, is all a lottery – and even where the adventurer is successful, the acquired stock must be used with caution and sobriety to turn to any profit, but as the chances run prodigiously the other way both as to the acquisition and application, I am of opinion, That a man would act as wisely, if he could prevail upon himself, to live contented without foreign knowledge or foreign improvements, especially if he lives in a country that has no absolute want of either [...]. (16)

It could be argued, if the aim were to smoothen out contradictions, that Yorick's preface is intended as a parody of provincialism and scholarly pedantry. However, his preoccupation with borders, thresholds and confinement throughout the novel strongly suggests that the clash between isolation and interaction – between a limited life and a life of social and cultural exchange – does in fact amount to a major fault line in the book. If the passport is evoked so insistently, not only occupying the material center of the book itself, but arguably also constituting its narrative core, it is due to the capacity of this document to mediate between the provincial and cosmopolitan poles of Yorick's philosophy of borders and travel. The passport enables travelers to cross borders and enter spheres beyond their own while also making identity portable, transferring it from a local sphere of personal contacts and networks onto an officially sanctioned document. Where the first function solves the problem of access, the second function reduces the dangers of travelling, immunizes the bearer against identity loss and ensures that the traveler can remain *somebody* even where known by nobody.

Negotiating Borders

The two preceding sections have highlighted the logic that underlies both the passport episode and Yorick's philosophy of travel as expounded in the preface. Revolving around an ambiguous concept of the border as an institution that both protects and restricts the identity of the traveler, this logic positions the passport as a mediator that enables safe travel and replaces the binaries of the territorial border (open/closed, inside/outside) with a state of semi-permeability. The next step is to analyze other manifestations of this general logic and thereby assess the extent to which the passport episode functions as a model establishing a set of concrete terms through which a range of other, less tangible phenomena can be understood.

The latter point is evidenced by the fact that a striking number of scenes in *A Sentimental Journey* focus on borders or barriers that circumscribe an enclosed space. Yorick's *désobligeant* is one example, and its solipsistic or even incarcerative associations are redoubled when the protagonist closes the window curtains, blocking out the disagreeable sight of a Franciscan monk whose request for an alms he has previously rejected (12). Similarly, the scene in the *Opéra Comique* takes place on the threshold of an opera box while a later scene set in a Milanese concert hall describes a brief moment of awkwardness when Yorick and the Marquise di F*** block each other's passage in a doorway (77). Further, a sequence of short chapters, three of which are titled "The Remise Door," is set in front of the locked door of a coach house and involves Yorick and an anonymous lady waiting, hand-in-hand and with plenty of sexual tension, for the innkeeper to return with the key (21).

The two chapters "The Captive" and "The Starling" offer additional examples of this preoccupation with spatial closure and are particularly important as their location within, and counterpunctual connection to, the passport sequence serves to generalize the passport motif beyond the literal context of international travel. In his Parisian hotel, immediately after being

advised by the owner of the police enquiry, Yorick hears a voice crying out “I can’t get out – I can’t get out” (95). The voice turns out to belong, not to a child, as first assumed, but an engaged starling. Up until this point Yorick has trivialized the danger of being thrown in the Bastille due to his lack of a passport, yet the encounter with the starling brings home to him the reality of the situation and inspires him to explore via the imagination the plight of a captive in a dungeon, specifically placing himself outside the cell looking in “through the twilight of his grated door to take his picture” (97). It is this fantasy that induces Yorick to go to Versailles to obtain a passport, and as such it fulfils a narrative function. However, the starling and the captive also have an *emblematic* function. While both scenes evidently revolve around a problem of confinement (getting out), they also call attention to an opposite problem of access (getting in). The bars and grates that separate inside and outside prevent the prisoner from escaping, yet also imply that access from the outside is only possible under specific conditions, represented here by Yorick’s imagination which enables him to enter into the minds of the prisoners and experience their affective states. Closely mirroring the passport episode itself and the associated travel philosophy, the two scenes thereby become emblems of the problem of borders and border crossings, further evidencing how this problem extends beyond the level of political space to the level of intersubjective understanding. This emblematicity is strongly underlined, and rendered literal, when, rounding off this segment, Yorick presents an engraving showing how he has made the starling the crest of his coat of arms (100).

In the light of these successive figurations of closure and access, *A Sentimental Journey* can be seen to be crucially concerned with the means of negotiating the borders that constitute the social world of the protagonist – including not only international borders, but also intersubjective borders and the associated barriers between genders and classes. As James Chandler notes, *A Sentimental Journey* effects a “conflation of levels [...] whereby it becomes impossible to distinguish travel in space from travel in feeling” (2015, 124). Drawing on the Cartesian

subject/object dichotomy, the book casts the human body as an ambiguous barrier that separates the mind from other minds, yet also enables this mind to express itself and hence communicate with the outside world. Yorick uses three main strategies to cross this border, each of which is functionally equivalent to the passport. The first strategy is conceptualized by Yorick himself as “Translation” and involves the interpretation of bodily gestures as expressions of otherwise inaccessible mental states, as, for example, when Yorick steps into the opera box and the French officer puts away his book and his glasses as a sign of goodwill towards the stranger (76). The second strategy consists in the physiognomical interpretation of facial features and is exemplified by the way in which the protagonist deduces the asceticism and true spiritual worth of the monk via detailed scrutiny of his face (7-8). Finally, the third strategy involves direct bodily contact between the two parties. The most striking use of this strategy occurs in Calais when Yorick and the anonymous lady hold hands while waiting for the remise door to be opened. In this scene, the *pulse* serves as a bodily communication channel, enabling the expression and interpretation of inner states: “The pulsations of the arteries along my fingers pressing across hers, told her what was passing within me: she looked down – a silence of some moments followed” (25). Seemingly made necessary by the linguistic impairment associated with foreign travel, these strategies have in common a privileging of feeling, the imagination and empathy as a way of overcoming the distance between strangers; this in turn suggests that the “sentimentality” of *A Sentimental Journey* refers not simply to the prevailing affective register of Yorick’s travels, but also to a mode of travelling across intersubjective borders.

The final scene of the book importantly re-establishes the metaphorical connection between territorial borders and intersubjective borders inflected by class and gender. En route to Italy, spending the night at an inn, Yorick offers to share his room with a late-arriving lady and her maid. Fortunately, the room has two separate beds and a third bed in an adjoining chamber. While these furnishings fail to allay the lady’s skepticism, they do allow talks to take place.

The two parties quickly agree to accommodate the maid in the cold and damp chamber, yet it requires lengthy negotiations before Yorick and the lady are able to enter a “treaty of peace” (163), that is, a formal contract regulating their short cohabitation and thereby reducing moral risks. This treaty includes articles determining who sleeps where, how to undress and what to wear, and it also stipulates that Yorick must remain silent, evening prayer excepted, once the light has been turned out.

The wit of this final episode lies in the metaphorical representation of Yorick and the lady as sovereign states who are first at war, then negotiate and finally make peace. The happy conclusion, however, requires that a clear border is drawn between them. At the lady’s insistence, this matter is addressed by the treaty’s first clause. Her bed already has a curtain of “flimsy transparent cotton,” yet this curtain cannot be fully closed, and the agreement therefore stipulates that the maid must close it after her using “corking pins, or needle and thread, in such a manner as shall be deemed a sufficient barrier on the side of Monsieur” (163). Yet, tentative probings of this border are initiated as soon as the last candle has been extinguished. The “peace negotiations” were already characterized by a latent sexual energy that the treaty was meant to contain. In the dark containment becomes impossible. “O my God!” Yorick exclaims ambiguously after a while, allegedly in frustration over not being able to fall asleep (164). The lady who is also lying sleepless immediately accuses him of violating the treaty. Yorick answers even more ambiguously that it was only “an ejaculation” (164) and further contends that this ejaculation is allowed under the treaty’s clause about evening prayer. However, while this answer does not satisfy the lady, she nevertheless decides to weaken the barrier between them, and the exchange ends with Yorick hearing the pins that were meant to close this barrier fall to the ground. He then reaches out his hand, but instead of the lady he finds her maid (or, as is strongly insinuated, her backside) who has been summoned by the commotion.

This scene, and above all the transparent cotton veil that is expressly installed as a “barrier” between the two beds, is a final, striking manifestation of Yorick’s ideal of indisputable and clearly demarcated borders that are also transparent and permeable, thereby allowing tentative transgressions. Accordingly, the book’s concluding chapter offers yet another figuration of the porous border, which, however, is particularly important insofar as it exposes to full view the metaphorical connection that the book draws between territorial and intersubjective borders: while this connection was only implicit in the passport episode itself, suggested by the inserted chapters on the starling and the prisoner, the bedroom episode makes it explicit that the book’s preoccupation with borders and passports concerns interpersonal exchange as well as international travel. By investing this dichotomy of restriction and access with libidinous energy, the final scene highlights both the risks and potential rewards involved in venturing beyond the established borders of identity.

Conclusion

The issues surrounding the passport motif in *A Sentimental Journey* are never articulated in a philosophical register but only represented metaphorically and strung together associatively. Yet, an analysis of this motif and its various extensions makes it possible to discern an underlying system of thought comprising three interlinked ideas: the link between identity and a restricted sphere of action, the manifestations of which range from the human body as the border of subjectivity to the borders between genders, social classes, cultures and nations; the associated notion that travelling, because it involves crossing these borders, is a precarious activity that might lead to a loss of identity similar to that experienced by Yorick in Paris; and the positioning of the passport as a compensatory mechanism that allows borders to be crossed without fully undermining their integrity.

The passport scene inscribes Sterne's novel in a literary tradition of engaging with passports and movement control that spans from sixteenth-century utopian novels to the migrant literature of the twenty-first century. As I have suggested in a previous essay (Gulddal, "The Novel," 2015), a major paradigm shift within this literary history of passports occurs as a result of the French Revolution. Prior to this event, authors – Henry Fielding is a prominent British example – were generally supportive of the idea of increased passport control, seeing it, not only as a useful instrument of power, but also as a means of policing the novel as a genre traditionally predicated on nomadic mobility. After the Revolution, and throughout the nineteenth century, literary authors tended instead to cast the passport system as the epitome of tyranny, insisting that free mobility was an inalienable human and civil right – one might think here of Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1839) and Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859). It could be argued that Sterne stands with a foot in each camp insofar as his travel philosophy places equal emphasis on freedom and security. In reality, however, Sterne does not appear at all interested in the political aspects of the passport; the passport episode describes, directly or indirectly, the mechanics of the contemporary French passport system in some detail, yet refrains from evaluating its political utility and effects in terms of state security or individual freedom of movement.

Instead of aligning with contemporary literary perspectives on movement control, *A Sentimental Journey* taps into a longstanding literary tradition of employing the passport as a metaphor. Importantly, this tradition predates the systematic use of passports as an instrument of movement control. The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s entry "Passport" offers a rich historical material, showing how this metaphor was used from the late sixteenth century to indicate the means of gaining "entry into some society, state, or sphere of action" – that is, how the logic of passports and territorial borders was projected onto a range of less tangible forms of move-

ment control with a view to understanding them better. An early example is due to Philip Sidney who in *An Apology for Poetry* (written c.1579, published 1595) states that “Neyther Philosopher nor Historiographer, coulde [...] haue entred into the gates of populer iudgements, if they had not taken a great pasport of Poetry.” Over the following 250 years, the prevalence and descriptive scope of this metaphor increases dramatically, evidently in parallel with the increased political importance of the passport. The concept of the passport is used metaphorically for letters of introduction (“Looke on his Letter Madam, here’s my Passport,” Shakespeare, 1601); the access to other people’s esteem (“His pass-port is his innocence and grace,” Dryden, 1700); entry into heaven, by far the most common use (“They are heirs-general to all the money of the laity, for which, in return, they give them formal passports, signed and sealed for heaven,” Montagu, 1717); access to social advancement (“In England personal distinction is the only passport to the society of the great,” Disraeli, 1826); access to fame (“If you are rich enough to afford it, [...] there is no passport to fame like eccentricity,” Lytton, 1827); access to the intimate sphere of the family (“Give me free passport hereafter to come and go as I list,” Lytton, 1831); or a book’s access to literary recognition (“The approbation of the reviewers served as a passport for the poem to America,” Southey, 1837).

Importantly, now going beyond the examples provided by the OED, the passport metaphor appears to be particularly prevalent in Sterne’s immediate historical surroundings, that is, in the genre of the novel around the mid-eighteenth-century. Samuel Richardson recycles the metaphor’s religious use when the eponymous protagonist in *Clarissa* (1747-48) refers to her mother’s forgiveness as a “passport to heaven” (1180). In Sarah Fielding’s *David Simple* (1744), the focus is displaced from a religious to a social context when social climbers are claimed to use playing cards as “the easiest Passport into that Company where their whole Happiness is center’d” (81), while being dressed as a “Gentlewomen” in certain social contexts is said to be “Pass-port enough for being seen and spoken to” (166). Henry Fielding, who would

later, as a London magistrate, publish a proposal for a British passport system (Gulddal, “Henry Fielding’s Proposals,” 2014), uses the passport metaphor in *Joseph Andrews* (1742) when describing certain subscription tickets used by authors to finance future literary projects as nothing more than “a passport to beg with, a certificate that the owner wants five shillings” (224). Finally, it is particularly important to note that Sterne himself lets Yorick say of his French servant La Fleur that “there was a passport in his very looks” (59).

The passport episode in Sterne’s book functions as an expanded and narrativized version of this literary passport metaphor, which only much later, in the second half of the twentieth century, would be reduced to a commercial cliché. As an instance of figurative rather than discursive reasoning, it involves considerable slippage between levels and modalities, and it would be unreasonable to expect full conceptual clarity. Yet, this episode evidently centers on Yorick’s attempts to gain entry into various enclosed spaces, ranging from a state territory, which is the literal meaning, to polite society at Versailles and the confidence of Count de B****, which are cast as accessible only on producing a passport-analogue. The extensions of the passport episode add further border-crossings to this list, above all those between genders and bodies, whether in the form of frequent allusions to sexual penetration or sympathetic traffic on the threshold between the body and the mind. Taking a step beyond the standard versions of this literary *topos*, Sterne’s passport metaphor also highlights how the passport makes identity portable, thereby creating the characteristic figure of the porous border which can be crossed without loss of the protections it offers. In this sense, the passport, as an access metaphor, is both a condition and a result of Sterne and Yorick’s shared commitment to what Thomas Keymer calls “the mobile self” (2009, 83).

Sterne’s idiosyncratic deployment of the passport motif is ultimately a commentary, not on the politics of movement control itself, but on a new politics of restriction and access

characteristic of modernity. This politics can be seen as an effect of the structural transformation of society from a stratificatory to a functional mode of system differentiation. As theorized by Niklas Luhmann (1989, 154-65), the functional differentiation of modern societies results in a multitude of new systemic borders that redefine individuality from a matter of being included in a single social stratum to a matter of being *excluded* from, or denied access to, specific functional subsystems. Rendering social inclusion an object of desire, this situation foregrounds the conditions of access, which in turn makes the passport a plausible metaphor for that which facilitates the crossing of systemic borders. Yet, the borders described by Sterne are not just those circumscribing social systems; they also include a level above in the form of territorial borders and a level below in the form of bodies as borders between subjects. While the emphasis on borders, thresholds and barriers resonate strongly with Luhmann's description of a society made up of functionally defined subsystems, Sterne's account is therefore both more general and more concrete and represents modernity as defined across multiple levels by border control and regimes of conditional access. The figure of the passport articulates an ideal of porous, semi-permeable borders that protect the integrity of a bounded interior while at the same time facilitating cross-border explorations.

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