

Book report on  
laurence Sterne's "a  
sentimental journey"  
essay sample



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## **Book report on Laurence Sterne's "A Sentimental Journey" Essay Sample**

-In what ways can "A Sentimental Journey" be seen as a sentimental novel or a dramatization of the importance of sensibility?

Laurence Sterne's travel-book, which is called "A Sentimental Journey", was written in 1765 and in this book the author describes his travels through France and Italy from a different point of view. His style is different from the other travel-books of that time. He mostly describes his feelings and emotions. As it can be derived from the title of the book, Sterne's journey is a sentimental one, in which he can express his feelings and emotions. He does not give importance to places, monuments, statues and etc. "When he visits a place that offers nothing to his sensibility, he will say nothing of it." (Sterne, xvii) instead of telling the physical descriptions or physical beauties, he prefers to describe feelings, so that sometimes you cannot decide whether is it a fiction or a fact. The book mostly tells us about the attraction between men and women.

"The main theme of the book is the connection between sexual attraction and the finer feelings in man and woman..." The connection between sexual attraction and finer feeling between men and women are important in the book. This connection is the combination of sentiment "with a sophisticated eroticism." (Sterne, xx) The protagonist and the narrator of the book, Mr. Yorick follows his senses through his journey. According to its dictionary meaning sentiment means that "it is the expression of an attitude or opinion or "the display of emotional feelings" (Oxford Pocket Dictionary, 375) Mr.

Yorick is displaying his emotional feelings and his journey is a sentimental one, in which he expresses his feelings and emotions, but majority of his feelings are sexual towards women.

Mr. Yorick sees himself as both a traveller and a merchant who makes sentimental commerce. The reason of travelling is important. There should be a serious reason to travel; therefore he makes some distinctions between travellers. The most important reason is to gain knowledge and to learn new things by travelling, but while sailing the traveller man should be wise in order to be successful. " 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-" (Sterne, 12) so that as a wise man and as a sentimental traveller he wants to learn different things and emotions, feelings; as he says " As an English man does not travel to see English men." (Sterne, 13), he does not travel to see the same things.

Therefore, he is a sentimental traveller and he should be sentimental but at the same time sensibility should also be important for him; because he should be able to feel and respond. As the dictionary meaning, sensibility is " The ability to feel and receive delicate impressions." (Oxford Pocket Dictionary, 118) Sensibility and sentimentalism are both required for him. Laurence Sterne, tells about some incidents, events, memories which makes us think this book can be considered as a sentimental novel. On the other hand; some questions came into our minds; like ' what is the difference between sensibility and sentimentalism?' and ' can we consider this book as a sentimental novel or a dramatization of the importance of sensibility?'.

As it was mentioned before; Yorick's aim is not to write a standard travel narrative. Through his journey he hopes to gain kind of knowledge and improvement but these are not related with facts, like buildings, and customs. His travels are " sentimental travels" and he seeks feelings not facts. His decision to travel is not a planned one. He suddenly decides to go to France as the result of a casual conversation with his servant. His servant asks him that " You have been in France?" (Sterne, 3) His answer is, no, so Yorick departs immediately for Calais. He wants to comment on the social habits of the French people but he should be the authority of first hand experience. Also he can have the advantage of finding himself in harmony with the world. Yorick begins his journey as a sentimental traveller, and sometimes he tries to draw moral lessons from his experiences, but we can realize that he needs to be more sensible.

Sensibility is a concept which is separate from but related to sentimentalism. Sentiment can be defined as " a moral reflection, a rational opinion usually about the rights and wrongs of human conduct" or " a thought often an elevated one, influenced by emotion". (Todd, 5) Sensibility; in contrast, is " emotional and physical susceptibility" refined and tender emotion, " an innate sensitiveness...revealing itself in a variety of spontaneous activities such as crying, swooning and kneeling" (Todd, 7). The difference between them is very important; sentiment is more related with reason and a rational process, whereas, sensibility is the physical feeling of emotion. Sensibility is more associated with the body and sentiment is more related with mind.

For instance; Yorick stops in a glove-shop to ask for a direction but when he sees the beautiful girl in the shop he does not listen to the direction. She

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tells him the direction for three times but the girl is more important for him. He loses his conscience. Therefore, he becomes irrational. At this point Yorick becomes more sensible and cannot think of anything except the shop-girl, but most of the time Yorick is capable of making rationalizations. He does not want to accompany Madame de L to Brussels because he has a duty. He has given a promise to Eliza Draper. It is an obligation for him; so he is sentimental. He is in love with Eliza; to whom he has sworn eternal fidelity.

On the other hand, sometimes Yorick's actions are ambiguous. For instance, his encounter with the fille de chambre. He meets her in a book-shop. Yorick puts a coin in the young girl's purse and tells her that it is a symbol of his advice. His advice is that if she will be as good as she is pretty, heaven will fill her purse. This act of him, or this sentiment of him is ambiguous. Later on, he tempts to kiss her. In a way, Sterne tries to make a satire on sentimentalism but these adventures, which involve experiences full of sensations, intellectualise the character, Yorick. This travel is a criticism of sentimentalism. Moreover, in Moulins Yorick sits beside Maria who is crying; because of her father's recent death. He starts to wipe her tears and feels a kind of sympathy for her. He also, at that moment finds Maria physically attractive. He thinks that if he could forget Eliza he could stay with Maria forever, holding her in his arms "as a daughter". (Sterne, 116) This is the climax of the sensibility, his feelings and emotions.

Moreover, we can say that sensibility is a language, which can be understood by everyone. It is a universal language. In Yorick's case it is a bridge

between French and English. It needs no translators; because you do not  
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need no explanation or translation or interpretation, while holding another's hand or to look into another's eyes. When Yorick is in the glove-shop he can easily understand the shop-girl's emotions from her eyes. They are in a kind of conversation with acts and gestures. " There are certain combined looks of simple subtlety- where whim and sense, and seriousness and nonsense, are so blended, that all languages of Babel set loose together, could not express them." (Sterne, 55)

As a conclusion, the journal is addressed to Eliza Draper. Yorick (Sterne) and Eliza carried on a sentimental affair. It represents the passions of a lonely author, but the book is not restricted to romantic love. For instance, the old man's love for his donkey. When his donkey dies he becomes very sad and Stern makes some exaggerations at this point so that we can say it becomes a dramatization of the importance of sensibility, even we can say that he loves his donkey. The old man says that " I fear the weight of myself and my afflictions together have been too much for him-they have shortened the poor creatures days and I fear I have them to answer for." (Sterne, 41) Thus, sensibility in " A Sentimental Journey" is a parody, which combines the idealized, the carnal, the intellectual and the physical. Lauren Stern gives us a moral lesson through the presentation of " the parodic nature of sensibility". (Todd, 8)