



Dickens and the Sentimental Tradition

Fielding, Richardson, Sterne, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Lamb

Valerie Purton

Pub Date: 01 October 2014

Binding: Paperback

Price: £25.00 / \$40.00

ISBN: 9781783083091

Extent: 218 pages

Size: 152 x 229 mm /
6 x 9 inches

BISAC CATEGORY: LITERARY CRITICISM / European / English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh

BISAC CODE: LIT004120

BIC CODE: DSK

RIGHTS

Exclusive: WORLD

A study of the ‘sentimental’ in Dickens’s novels, placing it in the context of the eighteenth-century tradition of Fielding, Richardson, Sterne, Goldsmith, Sheridan and Lamb.

*[A] challenging study of this vexed literary mode [...] [O]ne of the many strengths of this book is [Purton’s] detailed and discriminating discussion of the genealogy of Dickens’s sentimentalism in eighteenth-century literary practices.’ —Malcom Andrews, *The Dickensian**

*Purton draws upon an impressive array of eighteenth-century texts to explore how Dickens’ own definition of sentimentality was defined and informed by his readings and “mis-readings” of these works [...] and convincingly argues that while eighteenth-century sentimentalism was closely bound up with anarchic humour and earthly concerns, Dickens’ sentimentalism is an attempt to deny the physical in order to present all human experience in spiritual terms. [...] Purton rattles through Dickens’ work at a swift pace. Each selected example is illuminating [...] The clear and elegant prose and logical and perceptive analysis makes the book appealing and accessible to scholars and students alike.’ —Katherine Faulkner, *The History of Emotions Blog**

*In “Dickens and the Sentimental Tradition”, Valerie Purton persuasively demonstrates that we read too narrowly and do a disservice to Dickens and to our own reading experience when we dismiss sentimental scenes without employing our critical faculties. [...] Purton’s study offers a rich context for understanding the sentimental tradition and provides a wealth of intelligent, perceptive readings. [This is] an extremely intelligent and well-researched analysis of Dickens’s transformation of the sentimental tradition.’ —Natalie McKnight, *Dickens Quarterly**

‘Dickens and the Sentimental Tradition’ is a timely study of the ‘sentimental’ in Dickens’s novels, which re-evaluates his presentation of emotion as part of a complex literary tradition that enables him to critique nineteenth-century society.

Contents

Introduction; Chapter 1: Dickens and the Sentimentalist Tradition; Chapter 2: Sentimentalism and its Discontents in the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Fielding, Richardson and Sterne; Chapter 3: Sentimentalism and its Discontents in Eighteenth-Century Drama: Goldsmith and Sheridan; Chapter 4: Dickens and Nineteenth-Century Drama; Chapter 5: The Early Novels and ‘The Vicar of Wakefield’; Chapter 6: The Later Novels; Conclusion: The Afterlife of Sentimentalism

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Valerie Purton is Reader in Victorian Literature at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge.

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