Introduction

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This volume aims to present an authoritative and suggestive exploration of the sentimental novel in the eighteenth century. Sentimental novels reached the height of their vogue in the 1770s and 1780s and were still popular in the 1790s. Their origins may be traced to the so-called amatory fiction published in France and Britain in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century.[1] Samuel Richardson's spectacularly popular reworking of amatory fictional tropes, *Pamela: or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740), with its emphasis on feeling, sympathy and moral instruction, served as a catalyst for this literary movement. *Clarissa* (1747–8), Richardson's second novel, is often cited as the first fully sentimental novel in English. By century's end, sentimental novels were omnipresent in the British book market, some of them proclaiming themselves as such on their title-pages: for example, *Louisa. A Sentimental Novel* (1771); *Emma; or, the unfortunate attachment. A Sentimental Novel* (1773); *Harcourt; a sentimental novel* (1780); *Anna: A Sentimental Novel* (1782); and *Edward and Harriet, or the happy recovery; a sentimental novel* (1788).[2]

The Sentimental Novel in the Eighteenth Century

According to *The Sentimental Magazine* (March 1773), a sentimental story 'at the same Time that it forces the Tears of Sensibility from the Eye, shall inspire the Heart with the Love of Virtue'.[3] As David Hume and Adam Smith declared, sympathy with the sorrows of others defines our moral being. Thus, in his 'Eulogy of Richardson' (1762), Denis Diderot describes a friend 'of sensibility' reading the account of Clarissa's death: 'I watched him: soon I perceived tears dropping from his eyes; he paused, he sobbed; on a sudden he started up, hurried backward and forward, cried out like a man in agony.'[4] But, as Henry Mackenzie, author of *The Man of Feeling* (1771), one of the century's most celebrated sentimental novels, warned, such displays of sensibility called for sceptical review: 'In the enthusiasm of

sentiment there is much the same danger as in the enthusiasm of religion, of substituting certain impulses and feelings of what may be called a visionary kind, in the place of real practical duties'.[5] Reading sentimentally can become an end in itself, not a summons to moral action. In *Camilla* (1796), which Austen praises in *Northanger Abbey* (1818), Frances Burney cautions against 'wayward Sensibility – that delicate, but irregular power, which now impels to all that is most disinterested for others, now forgets all mankind, to watch the pulsations of its own fancies'.[6] Adam Smith, however, asserted that sympathy 'cannot, in any sense, be regarded as a selfish principle'.[7]

This double orientation of sensibility, towards our fellow human beings and away from them, from sociability to solipsism, troubled eighteenth-century thinkers. It also provided the deep structure of such sentimental novels as Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), in which Parson Yorick, its exquisitely sensitive protagonist, oscillates between fellow-feeling and self-love. The cohabitation of sensibility and irony in Sterne's works reveals – and attempts to repair – the fault lines threatening to fracture sentimental novels. We must also recall the Christian, communitarian emphasis of such sentimental novels as Henry Brooke's *The Fool of Quality* (1766) – abridged in 1781 by John Wesley, one of the founders of Methodism – and the role they played in the anti-slavery movement as well as the creation of philanthropic schemes.[8] As R. S. Crane argued long ago in 'Suggestions toward a Genealogy of the "Man of Feeling"', the origins of the sentimental movement may be traced to the humanitarian theology of such Latitudinarian divines as Joseph Glanvill (1636–80) and Isaac Barrow (1630–77), who stressed essential human goodness to counter Puritan claims of human depravity.[9] Latitudinarian doctrine became a significant strain of Anglicanism in the eighteenth century, influencing such novelists as Henry Fielding and Laurence Sterne. Jane Austen's father, a clergyman, was also heir to this tradition.

As James Raven has noted, 'the clear fashion-leader' in the British fiction market for the period 1770–99 'was the sentimental novel'.[10] Most of these novels, as Raven's figures show, were written by women. Sentimental novels were the product of what G. J. Barker-Benfield has called 'the culture of sensibility' emerging in eighteenth-century Britain.[11] Indeed, the adjective 'sentimental' became a pervasive cultural marker, prompting Lady Bradshaigh, Richardson's correspondent, to ask in November 1749 for his 'interpretation of it'; sadly, his answer to this specific query has not survived.[12] Sentiment was also a major feature of later Restoration drama and the Georgian stage, informing such plays as Thomas Otway's

The Orphan (1680), Thomas Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage* (1694), Nicholas Rowe's *The Fair Penitent* (1703), Colley Cibber's *The Careless Husband* (1704), with its famously affecting 'Steinkirk scene', and Sir Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722), in which, according to Henry Fielding's Parson Adams, 'there are some things almost solemn enough for a Sermon'.[13] Sermons, devotional manuals, hymns, poems, paintings, popular songs were all permeated with the sentimental ether.

Whatever their cultural genealogy and affiliations, sentimental novels are best understood and studied as constituting a *literary* movement, as speaking a common language and style, as machines explicitly and self-consciously manufactured to feel with. Simply put, sentimental novels reflect, represent and appeal to sensibility. If the culture of sensibility encouraged men to shed tears like women, it rendered women potentially weaker because presumably more prone to falling prey to their overheated imaginations. Thus, the heroine of Elizabeth Sophia Tomlins's *The Victim of Fancy* (1787), deluded by her uncontrolled 'Werteromania', attributes her early death to her failure to 'regulate the passions'.[14] Failure to exercise self-control also afflicted men. Young Werther is destroyed by his excessive jealousy and sensibility, as is, for example, the Werther-like Delamere in Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle* (1788). But women had more at stake. As Mary Wollstonecraft argues in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), because women were denied access to formal education and political power, sensibility was particularly enervating for them, undermining their ability to act as free agents and rational creatures. In her review of *Emmeline* in *The Analytical Review* (July 1788), she warns against novels 'whose preposterous sentiments our young females imbibe with such avidity' and refuses to describe a scene 'of violent emotions and attitudes' because she fears that 'the description will catch the attention of many romantic girls, and carry their imaginations still further from nature and reason'.[15] In *The Heroine, or Adventures of a Fair Romance Reader* (1813) – 'a delightful burlesque, particularly on the Radcliffe style',[16] as Austen writes to her sister Cassandra – Eaton Stannard Barrett, claiming kinship with Sterne, makes light-hearted fun of his heroine's female quixotism. The following year, in Maria Edgeworth's *Patronage* (1814), Mrs Percy recalls Wollstonecraft's polemic against sentimental novels when she asserts that 'both in novels and in real life, young ladies generally like and encourage men of feeling, in contradistinction to men of principle, and too often men of gallantry in preference to men of correct morals'.[17] For female authors, as Melissa Sodeman has recently reminded us, sentimental novels, identified primarily with women by the closing decades of

the eighteenth century, were not so easily dismissed.[18] Austen's first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), early drafts of which were written in the 1790s, grapples with the mixed legacy of sentimental novels for women authors.

A survey of scholarship on the sentimental novel must begin with R. F. Brissenden's magisterial and still influential *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (1974). For Brissenden, 'the distinguishing feature of the sentimental novel is that it takes for its theme the impact of the world on sensibilities delicate enough to perceive the finest moral distinctions'.[19] But, as the eighteenth century wore on, Brissenden argues, the finely calibrated 'novel of sentiment' of Richardson and Sterne gave way to the increasingly mawkish, clichéd 'novel of sensibility' popular from the 1770s onward. This tale of decline holds some explanatory power – as the supply grew, quality suffered – but a consequence of Brissenden's approach is that many important and popular sentimental novels published in the last three decades of the century, most of them written by women, are left out of his narrative. Burney and Radcliffe are briefly noted but Edgeworth, Lee and Smith are not mentioned at all. Because feminist scholars have recovered – and continue to recover – once-forgotten or neglected novels by women novelists and given us a better sense of their social, political and literary significance, Brissenden's exclusionary account of sentimental novels no longer persuades.

Sentimental novels, and the culture of sensibility that produced them, have attracted much scholarly interest in the past few decades. Important studies have shed valuable light on various aspects and contexts of this complex subject, such as gender and politics,[20] language and style,[21] culture and society,[22] race and slavery,[23] ethics and religion,[24] sympathy,[25] emotion and affect,[26] empire,[27] French connections.[28] Todd [29] offers an excellent introduction to the topic (as well as a corrective to Brissenden) and Rawson[30] analyses how satire and sentiment play off against each other in the long eighteenth century. Finally, to close this brief survey, Chandler[31] has shown how the 'sentimental mode' informs not only literature beyond the eighteenth century, as in novels by Charles Dickens, but also films, thus illustrating that the culture of sensibility is still very much with us.

We risk critical incoherence and imprecision, however, in extending a study of the sentimental novel beyond its specific manifestation in the eighteenth century and the opening decades of the nineteenth. This volume focuses on a moment in literary history when the protocols of

the emerging English novel were being established and contested. The sentimental novel played a crucial role in that process. Because of new digital tools, scholars with institutional access to such databases as ECCO and EEBO are able to explore a wide archive of original sources with relative ease and convenience. There are also new and exciting ways of doing things with literary texts nowadays, from object and thing theory to animal studies to speculative capitalism, which may be deployed in the study of the sentimental novel. But the literary critic or, in my case, editor of a volume of critical essays, must choose from many, sometimes competing interests and possibilities. Henry James's words on the choices artists must make also apply to critics and scholars: 'Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so.'[32] I hope that I have judiciously wielded my power of selection.

Although *The Sentimental Novel in the Eighteenth Century* focuses primarily on sentimental novels in the British Isles, the volume also looks at sentimental novels in France, Germany and North America. The chapters address general theoretical and practical issues, some focusing on topics, others on specific authors and works. They are arranged to tell a coherent, roughly chronological story, using Richardson and Sterne as anchoring points, and ending with Austen, not because she delivers the final death blow to the sentimental novel, but because she redefines and repurposes the sentimental novel as it moves forward into the nineteenth century and down to our own day. Without compromising overall coherence, I have not attempted to suppress differences of opinion or critical methodology. Generally speaking, the chapters approach their topics from historically inflected perspectives.

Summaries of Chapters

The volume opens with Gary Kelly's 'The Sentimental Novel and Politics'. As Kelly advances, the sentimental novel was fundamentally political. It offered its authors and readers a space for imagining, representing, promoting and contesting different versions of modernity. It was thus concerned with modernity's preoccupations with self-reflexive personal identity as well as relationships of intimacy, domesticity, conjugality, community and nation. Kelly's wide-ranging account combines various critical approaches, from integrational linguistics, effective semiotics, ethnomethodology and conceptual history to book history and social theories

of modernity, as well as social, cultural and political history. Kelly shows how producers and users of the sentimental novel adapted the novel form to the politics of modernity, generally and in specific moments of political crisis and conflict.

In 'Sensible Readers: Experiments in Feeling in Early Prose Fiction by Women', Ros Ballaster argues that, in the amatory fictions by women of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, close attention to the modulation of feeling in the protagonist sits alongside self-conscious reference to the anticipated response of the reader. Eliza Haywood, for example, defends the warmth of her amatory representations in her preface to *Lasselia* (1723) by declaring that otherwise the reader would not be 'sensible how far it touches him' and hence forewarned against the sway of passion. Both intradiegetic and extradiegetic narrators consistently seek to imagine and anticipate their effect in the mind of the reader. While the feeling character is most often represented as female, the receptive mind is most often ungendered. Reading is thus conceived as a virtual mechanics of affect. In these early prose fiction experiments, as Ballaster shows, we can see the novel anticipating its own future grip on the feelings of the reading public. The chapter addresses the importance of 'variety' of plot and feeling, on the part of both characters and readers, in amatory collections by (in chronological order) Delarivier Manley, Eliza Haywood, Elizabeth Rowe and Penelope Aubin. These collections provide their authors with the opportunity to explore the variety and variation of sentimental response.

Bonnie Latimer's 'Reading for the Sentiment: Richardson's Novels' challenges assessments of Richardson's sentimentalism as a largely affective mode. The chapter explores the nature of Richardsonian 'sentiment' and how it shapes the role of the reader. Examining 'sentiment' as a moral proposition and rhetorical unit, Latimer re-evaluates its role in Richardson's works, contending that sententiousness is a critically underplayed dimension of his fiction. In Richardson, 'sentiment' refers not only to displayed emotions which elicit responses from readers both intradiegetic and extradiegetic, but also to 'moral sentiments', pithy distillations of key moral tenets, abstracted from the original narratives. To read for the sentiment is to read both *for* and *beyond* the story, to become immersed in, but also to transcend, the fiction. This complex reading activity requires a reader who is not merely feeling, but also critical. The chapter places Richardson's use of moral sentiments in the context of popular compendia of moral sayings and enchiridions from the period, and concludes that a focus on the neglected quality of sententiousness allows us to appreciate

how Richardson's fiction in fact imagines a vital, active and morally effective form of reading, which Latimer calls purposeful reading.

In 'The Virtuous in Distress: *David Simple, Amelia, Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph*', Barbara M. Benedict examines the moral ambiguity surrounding the heroes of Sarah Fielding's *The Adventures of David Simple* (1744), Henry Fielding's *Amelia* (1751) and Frances Sheridan's *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761). In these narratives, the sensitive and upright titular protagonists are not only entangled in complex intrigues perpetrated by fools and villains, but also betrayed by the their own naïveté, honesty, fidelity, and an excessive sensibility that leads them to misjudge other people. However, whereas Henry Fielding portrays a married heroine whose endurance of her profligate but sentimental husband appears as Christian humility in a wicked world, the two women writers reveal the comic absurdity of a high-flown virtue that persists in the face of experience. Nonetheless, all three novels employ a narrative irony that shows how idealistic sentimentalism entails an unwitting complicity in the vices of the mercenary, duplicitous and weak-willed, and how these virtuous heroes and heroines contribute to their own distress.

Gillian Dow's 'Sentiment from Abroad: French Novels after 1748' examines cross-Channel sentimental exchange in the fiction of the latter half of the long eighteenth century. Depicted as torn between appropriate Christian reading and the reading of *Clarissa*, Laclos's sentimental heroine in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782), Madame de Tourvel – at a critical moment in her own seduction narrative – accurately embodies the extraordinary vogue for Richardson's novels in France. France experienced an extended period of Anglomania in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Decades after their first appearance in print, both Pamela and Clarissa remained living heroines for the French reader. Richardson himself elicited 'éloges' from writers as diverse as Denis Diderot and Stéphanie-Félicité de Genlis, and was widely emulated in French fiction. But where it might be tempting to view the French sentimental novels that found a market and readership in Britain after 1748 as inspired, largely, by Richardsonian fiction (notably *Clarissa*), cultural exchange is more complex. Dow's chapter examines the French sentimental novel after the publication of Richardson's *Pamela*, focusing not only on Rousseau's influential *Julie* (1761) but on a range of sentimental fictions, including the now largely neglected novels published in the 1750s by Marie-Jeanne Riccoboni, in the 1780s by Isabelle de Montolieu, and in the early 1800s by Sophie Cottin and Benjamin Constant. Adopting a cross-Channel approach, Dow complicates arguments that examining national

traditions is the best way to interrogate the literature of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

'I laugh 'till I cry', Laurence Sterne wrote to David Garrick from Paris in April 1762, 'and in the same tender moments, *cry 'till I laugh*'.[33] In a similar vein, Sterne promised a prospective female reader of *A Sentimental Journey* that any scene she wept over would hold strict proportion with the mirth it had provoked in him while writing it – 'or I'll give up the Business of sentimental writing'.[34] As Jonathan Lamb demonstrates in 'Sterne's Sentimental Empiricism', this emotional ambidexterity might not be altogether true because the comedy of *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) and the pathos of *A Sentimental Journey* are substantially at odds. The reason lies in Sterne's retreat from the materialist-empiricist account of sensation and cognition that organized his first novel, and the more attenuated refinement of sensibility that seems to be the aim of the second. The early encounter between Yorick and a nameless lady in Calais provides the important prologue to this theme. Left standing in front of a blank locked door, holding the hand of a lady he does not know, he has no resources (he believes) but inner ones, so he makes an awkward allusion to the unscheduled intimacy of the scene. Since it was one that was at least mutually tolerable, if not mildly exciting, the lady asks, 'Who but an English philosopher would have sent notices of it to the brain to reverse the judgment?'[35] This tendency to translate the sensations of a situation into ideas persists throughout Yorick's travels, hindering if not blocking the reciprocal action of impressions and ideas that David Hume, for instance, regards as crucial to the counter-translation of ideas into impressions. Lamb's chapter moves to resolve why this should be and why Yorick appears incapable of learning from his experience, relying instead on ideas which, like balloons, rise into rarefied and non-situational spheres of thought.

As Maureen Harkin illustrates in 'Virtue Not Rewarded: *The Man of Feeling* and *The Sorrows of Young Werther*', Mackenzie and Goethe hold the distinction of creating the two most self-destructive male protagonists in the history of sentimental fiction. Werther (1774) is the most famous eighteenth-century literary character driven to suicide by thwarted love and an inability to tolerate the hypocrisies of bourgeois society. However, in Mackenzie's slightly earlier *The Man of Feeling* (1771), Harley shares many of the same features: an exquisite sensibility, disappointment in love and a profound inability to negotiate successfully the hierarchies, duplicities and scheming of modern social life. Though Harley is baffled, rather than embattled like Werther, both characters recoil from the compromises

demanded of them. Their deaths – violent suicide, mysterious decline – might be seen as offering a form of inchoate political critique of their societies, despite both novels' habitual representations of emotions that do not affect behaviour and critiques that result in no action. Harkin's chapter tracks the nature and force of their resistance, a resistance that is complicated by the way in which both Werther and Harley often undermine their positions with their own words and actions – a fact which produces a peculiar and strikingly similar atmosphere of futility and squandered energies in both texts.

Although its contribution was barely recognized two decades ago, the sentimental novel is now understood to have played a prominent role in turning public opinion against the slave trade in the 1770s and 1780s. Recent studies by Ellis, Carey, Festa, Boulukos, Swaminathan and Ahern[36] have confirmed that sentimental novels frequently focused attention on the suffering of enslaved Africans, sometimes merely drawing a tear, but often encouraging an 'active sensibility' that prompted political engagement in the abolitionist movement. Drawing on these six major studies, and revisiting several of the texts they discuss, including novels by Laurence Sterne, Henry Mackenzie and Sarah Scott, Brycchan Carey's 'Slavery and the Novel of Sentiment' reasserts the importance of the novel of sensibility to the debate over the slave trade, as well as demonstrating its shifting and unreliable nature as a political tool. The chapter starts off by examining the role of the sentimental novel in the pre-abolitionist debate about the amelioration of slavery and concludes with an extended reading of 'Shandean anti-slavery writing' in Sterne, Ignatius Sancho, Susanna Rowson and the anonymous *Memoirs and Opinions of Mr Blenfield* (1790). The last of these contains a portrait of Shirna Cambo, an African man of sensibility loosely modelled on Ignatius Sancho, who 'for every decent merriment had a smile, for every sorrow had a tear'. The chapter concludes that Cambo represents both a type of the sentimental hero and a central trope of British literary abolitionism.

Hannah Doherty Hudson's 'Sentiment and the Gothic: Failures of Emotion in the Novels of Mrs Radcliffe and the Minerva Press' asks whether the gothic novel is sentimental. Hudson reads Ann Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) alongside six gothic novels published by the Minerva Press in the first half of the 1790s. She argues that early gothic novels share many traits with their sentimental predecessors, but ultimately display a fundamental distrust of sentiment. Even though such novels as Anna Maria Mackenzie's *Danish Massacre* (1791), Eliza Parsons's *Castle of Wolfenbach* (1793) or Richard Warner's *Netley Abbey* (1795) feature

sensitive, tearful protagonists who praise benevolence and practise forgiveness, their inexorable gothic plots cynically refigure and undermine older sentimental models, casting the useful and admirable functions of sentiment into doubt.

As Joseph F. Bartolomeo shows in 'The Sentimental Novel in America: *The History of Emily Montague, Charlotte Temple, The Power of Sympathy, The Coquette*', eighteenth-century sentimental novels set in America are directed at different audiences and offer divergent representations of the nature and significance of sensibility. *The History of Emily Montague* (1769) and *Charlotte Temple* (1791), originally published in England, emphasize sentimental longing to return home. The former novel confines sensibility almost exclusively to British characters, while the latter magnifies the isolation of the heroine by exiling her in a foreign land. The novels directed explicitly to American readers offer complex and often contradictory messages about the importance of feeling, its relationship to reason, and its connection to communities of class and gender. *The Power of Sympathy* (1789) undercuts its stated moral purpose by representing sympathy as both dangerous and admirable, and renders an equivocal verdict on the levelling of class distinctions enabled by sympathy. The title character of *The Coquette* (1797) is admonished to prefer reason over fancy, but this advice is compromised by emotional male suitors and unsympathetic female mentors.

In the early nineteenth century, two grand dames of the eighteenth-century novel published belated works that were widely dismissed as old-fashioned and passé. In 'Novel Anachronisms: Sophia Lee's *The Life of a Lover* and Frances Burney's *The Wanderer*', Melissa Sodeman argues that these two novels may be read as works of temporal and aesthetic rupture that testify to the declining status of sentimental fiction in the early nineteenth century. However, when read together, they speak to a shared effort to hold on to sentimental fiction for its ability to incorporate what more sedate literary forms tended to leave out – not only the gendered forms of experience Burney called 'female difficulties', but the ugly feelings those difficulties inevitably induced. Self-consciously aware of their startling violations of literary chronology, Lee and Burney's final works push back against the decline of sentimental fiction even as they suggest what might be gained by hazarding anachronism in our own literary histories.

The volume closes with my chapter on Jane Austen's complex relation to the sentimental novel. Austen both critiqued and embraced the sentimental novel. Like Henry Fielding, who began his novelistic career by parodying *Pamela* in *Shamela* (1741), Austen started hers by satirizing sentimental