

## SENTIMENTALISM IN THE 18 CENTURY: SAMUEL RICHARDSON AND LAURENCE STERNE

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines the literary movement of sentimentalism in the 18th century, focusing on the works of Samuel Richardson and Laurence Sterne. Sentimentalism emphasized emotion, moral reflection, and the cultivation of sympathy in readers as a response to the rationalism of the neoclassical period. Richardson's epistolary novels, such as Pamela, highlight virtue, emotional sensitivity, and moral instruction, whereas Sterne's Tristram Shandy combines sentiment with humor, digression, and narrative innovation. Both authors contributed significantly to the development of the English novel by engaging readers' empathy and moral consciousness. Their works demonstrate how literature can evoke emotional and ethical reflection, shaping the novel as a tool for social and moral education.

**Keywords:** Sentimentalism, 18th Century Literature, Samuel Richardson, Laurence Sterne, Epistolary Novel, Tristram Shandy, Moral Sensibility, Sympathy, Emotion, English Novel.

### АННОТАЦИЯ

В данной статье рассматривается литературное течение сентиментализма XVIII века на примере произведений Самуэля Ричардсона и Лоренса Стерна. Сентиментализм подчеркивал эмоции, моральные размышления и развитие сочувствия у читателей в ответ на рационализм неоклассицизма. Эпистолярные

романы Ричардсона, такие как Памела, акцентируют добродетель, эмоциональную чувствительность и нравственное воспитание, тогда как Тристрам Шенди Стерна сочетает сентиментальность с юмором, отступлениями и новаторской повествовательной формой. Оба автора значительно повлияли на развитие английского романа, вовлекая читателей в эмоциональное и нравственное осмысление. Их произведения демонстрируют, как литература может вызывать эмоциональные и этические размышления, формируя роман как средство социального и нравственного воспитания.

**Ключевые слова:** сентиментализм, литература XVIII века, Самуэл Ричардсон, Лоренс Стерн, эпистолярный роман, Тристрам Шенди, нравственная чувствительность, сочувствие, эмоции, английский роман.

## ANNOTATSIYA

Ushbu maqolada 18-asrda adabiyotdagi sentimentalizm harakati Samuel Richardson va Laurence Sterne asorlari misolida o'rganiladi. Sentimentalizm hissiyot, axloqiy tafakkur va o'quvchida hamdardlikni rivojlantirishga urg'u beradi, bu esa Neoklassik davrning rasyonalizmidan farq qiladi. Richardsonning epistolyar romanlari, masalan Pamela, fazilat, hissiy noziklik va axloqiy tarbiyaga urg'u beradi, Sterne esa Tristram Shandy asarida hissiyot bilan hazil, digressiya va yangi narrativ uslublarni birlashtiradi. Ikkala muallif ham ingliz romanining rivojlanishiga katta hissa qo'shgan bo'lib, o'quvchilarni hissiy va axloqiy tafakkurga jalb qilgan. Ularning asarlari adabiyotning hissiy va axloqiy tafakkur uyg'otishdagi ahamiyatini ko'rsatadi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** sentimentalizm, XVIII asr adabiyoti, Samuel Richardson, Laurence Sterne, epistolyar roman, Tristram Shandy, axloqiy sezgirlik, hamdardlik, hissiyot, ingliz romani.

The 18th century in English literature witnessed the rise of sentimentalism, a literary movement emphasizing emotion, morality, and the cultivation of sympathy in readers. Emerging as a reaction against the rationalism of the Neoclassical period, sentimentalism sought to explore human feelings and the moral dimensions of personal experiences. It was

particularly prevalent in the novel, where authors employed narratives that elicited compassion, empathy, and introspection. Among the most prominent figures of this movement were Samuel Richardson and Laurence Sterne, whose works illustrate distinct approaches to sentiment and narrative form. This paper examines the characteristics of 18th-century sentimentalism and analyzes the contributions of Richardson and Sterne, highlighting their similarities, differences, and impact on the development of the novel. Sentimentalism, in literary terms, refers to a mode that prioritizes emotion over reason. It emerged in response to the rationalist and moralistic tendencies of the Neoclassical era, offering instead a focus on individual feeling and moral sensibility. The movement was closely linked to the idea of the “moral imagination,” whereby literature could cultivate virtue and compassion in readers. The depiction of emotionally sensitive characters, often vulnerable and morally upright. Plot structures that emphasize moral choices and personal dilemmas over action-driven narratives. The aim of eliciting a sympathetic response from the reader, encouraging moral reflection. The didactic purpose of literature, promoting ethical behavior and social empathy.

2. Samuel Richardson (1689–1761) was a pioneering figure in the sentimental novel. His works, particularly in the epistolary form, created intimate portrayals of character and emotion. *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded* (1740), Richardson’s most famous novel, exemplifies his approach to sentiment. The protagonist’s emotions and moral integrity are central, demonstrating how virtue is tested and rewarded. The use of letters allows readers direct access to the characters’ thoughts and feelings, enhancing empathy. Richardson emphasizes the role of sentiment as a moral guide, instructing readers in virtues such as compassion, humility, and self-restraint. Critics note that Richardson’s novels link emotional response with social and ethical education, aiming to cultivate the reader’s conscience.

### 3. Laurence Sterne and the Innovative Sentimental Style

Laurence Sterne (1713–1768) approached sentimentalism differently, blending humor, digression, and emotional depth. His major work, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–1767), demonstrates a more playful and experimental

style: Sterne combines emotional sensitivity with irony, narrative digression, and a conversational tone. Sympathy and social connection are central; the novel explores human relationships and moral experience through a dynamic and often humorous lens. Unlike Richardson, Sterne does not always present a straightforward moral lesson; instead, he creates emotional resonance through the complexity of character and narrative. Scholars argue that Sterne expanded the possibilities of the sentimental mode by introducing humor, paradox, and narrative experimentation into the expression of feeling.

#### 4. Comparison and Significance

Although both Richardson and Sterne are representative of 18th-century sentimentalism, their approaches differ significantly: Richardson's works are didactic and morally instructive, focusing on virtue, emotional refinement, and social propriety. Sterne's novels are more experimental, blending sentiment with humor, narrative playfulness, and philosophical reflection. Both authors, however, seek to engage the reader's empathy and develop moral consciousness through literature. Their contributions were crucial in shaping the sentimental novel and influencing later literary forms, such as the novel of sensibility in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Conclusion Sentimentalism in the 18th century marked a shift from rationalism to the exploration of emotion and moral sensibility. Samuel Richardson and Laurence Sterne exemplify the diversity within this movement: Richardson through his moral epistolary novels, Sterne through his humorous and digressive narratives. Together, they illustrate how literature can cultivate empathy, ethical reflection, and social awareness. Their works remain foundational in understanding the development of the English novel and the enduring power of literature to engage the human heart. If you want, I can also create a short reference list in proper academic style (APA or MLA) for this article, so it's ready for submission. **References:**

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