



## Dickens and the Sentimental Tradition

Fielding, Richardson, Sterne, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Lamb  
Valerie Purton

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### Description

**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.**

'If you thought Oscar Wilde's laughter at the death of Little Nell said it all about the sentimental Dickens, this radical revaluation of the complex tradition of literary and theatrical sentimentalism, culminating with distinctive power in Dickens's fiction, will make you think – and maybe weep – again. Scholarly criticism of rare courage and conviction.' —*Dr Rick Allen, Anglia Ruskin University*

'*Dickens and the Sentimental Tradition* is a challenging and deeply rewarding study of Dickens's reworking of the legacy of sentimentalism. Valerie Purton's revaluation of the most denigrated and least understood aspect of Dickens's writing should be essential reading not just for Dickens's admirers but for anyone who doubts his greatness.' —*Dr Paul V. W. Schlicke, University of Aberdeen*

'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 places them in the context of the tradition of Fielding, Richardson, Sterne, Goldsmith, Sheridan and Lamb. This study re-evaluates Dickens's presentation of emotion – first within the eighteenth-century tradition and then within the dissimilar nineteenth-century tradition – as part of a complex literary heritage that enables him to critique nineteenth-century society. The book sheds light on the construction of feelings and of the 'good heart', ideas which resonate with current critical debates about literary 'affect'. Sentimentalism, as the text demonstrates, is crucial to understanding fully the achievement of Dickens and his contemporaries.

**Readership:** This book will benefit academic specialists and students of eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature, Victorian studies and cultural studies.

### 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

### About the Author

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

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