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Author(s): Herbert R. Brown

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RICHARDSON AND STERNE IN THE MASSACHUSETTS MAGAZINE

HERBERT R. BROWN

IN the grave-yard of eighteenth-century American periodicals, the *Massachusetts Magazine* has an honorable epitaph. For eight years, from 1789 to 1796, it provided a varied fare of "knowledge and rational entertainment" for many families.¹ With the *New York Magazine* it shared the honor of being the longest-lived periodical of the century. In 1796, its editors could write with justification that it was "the only publication of its kind in the state . . ."² and that "they have continued this Magazine to its EIGHTH volume, which is a much longer period of existence, than any similar publication has ever arrived at."³ Although it lacked the elegance of the *Columbian* and was without the *American Museum's* distinguished contributors, the *Massachusetts Magazine* outlived them both, and in the variety of its offerings and the length of its life is, perhaps, the most representative periodical of the time.⁴

¹ That it was essentially a family magazine, may best be seen from a few samples of its monthly offerings: "Mode to Render Meat Tender by Electricity," II (1790), 356; "To Take Away Freckles," V (1793), 48; "Singular Methods of Distilling Brandy in Sweden," II (1790), 244; "Curious Observations on the Flea," V (1793), 150; "Method of Raising Calves Without Milk," III (1791), 86; "On Comets," II (1790), 284; "Head Dropsy in Children," I (1789), 301; "Filial Affection in a Bear," IV (1792), 414; "Secret for Insuring a Crop of Turnips," I (1789), 84.

² *Massachusetts Magazine*, VIII, No. 1 (1796), Preface.

³ *Ibid.*, No. 6.

⁴ Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines: 1741-1850* (New York, 1930), 111. ". . . it ranks in interest below only two eighteenth-century magazines — the *American Museum* and the *Columbian*. Its variety was great, and its life, for those times, was long."

In nothing is it so significant an index of public taste as in respect to certain of the conditions which shaped our early fiction. The first and last numbers coincide, almost exactly, with the publication of Mrs. Morton's *The Power of Sympathy* and Mrs. Foster's *The Coquette*. The influence of Richardson and Sterne (both in subject and in manner) which characterizes American fiction of the eighteenth century dominated its pages.

I

Richardson and Sterne, though seldom praised without reservations, escaped most of the censure which was heaped on the other novelists by the moralists contributing to American periodicals during the eighteenth century. Few critics were so unqualified in their approbation as a panegyrist in the *American Magazine* (1758) who compared Richardson's press to an altar from which "hallow'd incense" sweetened the atmosphere and whose "Virgin-Sheets no prostitution stains."⁵ Mrs. Murray recalled with satisfaction her grandfather who "... indulged, perhaps to excess, an invincible aversion to novels. . . . Yet the Holy Bible and Clarissa Harlowe, were the books in which he accustomed his daughters to read alternately . . ."⁶ "A late writer" is quoted approvingly by The Gleaner when he testified "that Clarissa Harlowe is the first human production now extant. He hesitates not to place it, for literary excellence, above the Iliad of Homer, or any other work, ancient or modern, the sacred oracles excepted."⁷

⁵ *American Magazine*, I, No. 6 (Philadelphia, 1758), 281.

⁶ Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner* (Boston, 1798), 64.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 65.

Although a eulogist in the *Monthly Magazine* wrote, "I know no moderation in my love of Richardson . . . I worship him already as the sublimest teacher of rectitude, and most irresistible conductor in that road which leads to happiness here, and to Heaven hereafter;"⁸ most praise was qualified with better judgment. Mrs. Foster admitted that Richardson's "faults appear but specks, which serve as foils to display his beauties to better advantage."⁹ She found it necessary, however, to point out ". . . what dreadful effects might the specious manners of a Lovelace have on the inexperienced mind, were they not detected by a just exhibition of his vices."¹⁰ Dr. Enos Hitchcock tempered his admiration with caution in *Memoirs of the Bloomsgrave Family*, ". . . even this great master in the science of human nature, has laid open scenes, which it would have been safer to have kept concealed; and has excited sentiments, which it would have been more advantageous to early virtue not to have admitted."¹¹ The same objection is echoed by a writer in the *Monthly Magazine*, "Every reader's experience . . . will testify . . . that much converse with this author has heightened her superstitious reverence for titles, and riches and show; and . . . has induced her to lay more stress upon personal beauty and accomplishments than was proper."¹² The novels of Richardson were recommended above all others by the *New England Quarterly* to a father perplexed about his daughter's reading with

⁸ *Monthly Magazine*, III (Philadelphia, 1800), 163.

⁹ Hannah Webster Foster, *The Boarding School* (Boston, 1798), 161.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Enos Hitchcock, *Memoirs of the Bloomsgrave Family* (Boston, 1790), 87.

¹² *Monthly Magazine*, III, No. 5 (Philadelphia, 1800), 322.

the caution that "One novel in six months is sufficient."¹³ John Bennett excepted one novelist, Richardson, from his strictures on "novels and romances." "If, in short, I wished a girl to be everything that was *great*, I would have her continually study his *Clarissa*. If I was ambitious to make her everything that was *lovely*, she should spend *her days and nights* in contemplating his *Byron*."¹⁴ With the customary admonition that he should be read "with caution and under the direction of a guide,"¹⁵ most critics endorsed Dr. Hitchcock's estimate, "Among all writings which unite sentiment with character, and present images of life, Richardson's, perhaps, may be placed at the head of the list."¹⁶

Laurence Sterne, lacking in Richardson's concern for problems of conduct and conscience, presented a "nice point" for critics. As high priest of the cult of sensibility¹⁷ he received a homage which was nothing if not ecstatic. On the other hand, his "pleasant philandering with emotion" made him peculiarly susceptible to charges of gross laxity. "Few writers," lamented a critic in the *New England Quarterly*, "have done more injury to morals than Sterne. By blending sentiments of benevolence and delicacy with immorality and looseness, he induces some people to think that debauchery may be

¹³ *New England Quarterly*, No. III (Boston, 1802), 157.

¹⁴ John Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady on a Variety of Useful and Interesting Subjects* (Boston, 1798), 201.

¹⁵ Hitchcock, *The Blooms Grove Family*, 27.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁷ Dr. Tremaine McDowell's "Sensibility in the Eighteenth Century American Novel" is an excellent summary of the influence of sensibility in our early fiction. *Studies in Philology*, XXIV, 383-492. For the peculiar diction of sensibility in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, see *American Literature*, I, No. 3, 286-296.

innocent, and adultery meritorious.”¹⁸ Even the editor of *The Beauties of Sterne*, “selected for the Heart of Sensibility,” felt some apology necessary. “The chaste part of the world complain so loudly of the obscenity which taints the writings of Sterne, (and indeed with some reason), that those readers were not suffered to penetrate beyond the title page of his *Tristram Shandy*,” even “his *Sentimental Journey* . . . is not entirely free from the fault complained of.”¹⁹ Mrs. Foster’s taste was insulted by Sterne. “Wit, blended with indelicacy, never meets my approbation. While the fancy is allured, and the passions awakened, by this pathetic humorist, the foundations of virtue are insidiously undermined, and modest dignity insensibly betrayed.”²⁰ Jacob Duché presented the same indictment, “I admire those strokes as much as you do: But still I am not quite satisfied, that the feelings he describes are anything more than those we have in common with brute creation, at least that there is anything heavenly in them . . .”²¹ The same charges are brought by the Reverend Mr. Bennett, who “in private, lamented, that Sterne was a clergyman . . . He has opened wide the floodgates of indecency . . . he has conveyed *indelicate* ideas into the minds of young people, under the specious vehicle of sentiment, and has dignified *eventual* criminality with the false, insidious title of *involuntary* attachment.”²²

¹⁸ *New England Quarterly*, III (Boston, 1802), 84.

¹⁹ *The Beauties of Sterne*, Tenth Edition (Philadelphia, 1789), 4.

²⁰ Foster, *The Boarding School*, 204.

²¹ Jacob Duché, *Observations on a Variety of Subjects* (Philadelphia, 1774), 208.

²² Bennett, *Letters to a Young Lady*, 205.

Against these charges, Sterne had many champions. An apologist in the *Literary Museum* replied in the approved style, "Haply the accusing angel might appear to deliver into heaven's chancery some charges against thee — but depend upon it, the angels of chastity, philanthropy, and pity, would not be far off . . . Oh! no — they would drop an Heavenly tear upon the recording page of thy faults — and blot them out forever."²³ Proteus, in *The Tablet*, in 1795, ranks Sterne with Cervantes in "the didactic lessons of reason and understanding" and in "wit and humor."²⁴ Joseph Dennie attributed the "easy and obvious style" of his sermons in *The Lay Preacher* to a union of "The familiarity of Franklin's manner, and the simplicity of Sterne's . . ."²⁵ Although Dennie shared the concern of the moralists that Sterne's influence often led to "false sensibility," he had little patience with those who rejected all his writings. Describing "the nakedness of literature at Cambridge," he testified "that some (of the College Principals) were of such dubious taste as to reject from the college library, the works of Sterne and Swift . . ."²⁶ The vogue of sensibility in our early fiction indicates Sterne's influence persisted in manner rather than in subject. Few readers, however, would have disagreed with Dennie that Sterne's philosophy was "worth a million of cold homilies, that every time we smile . . . it adds something to the fragment of life."²⁷

²³ *Literary Museum*, 1 (West Chester, Pennsylvania, 1797), 246.

²⁴ *The Tablet*, 1 (Boston, 1795), 25.

²⁵ Joseph Dennie, *The Lay Preacher* (Walpole, New Hampshire, 1796), 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 127-128.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

II

Of the English men of letters discussed in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, Samuel Richardson yields precedence only to Sterne. This Richardsonian vogue may perhaps best be seen in the appalling interest in themes of seduction and resultant misery which characterizes the fiction of the periodical. The author of a *Receipt to Make a Magazine* hardly exaggerated his melancholy formula in this respect:

Two tales prolong'd of maids deluded,
Two more begun, and one concluded.²⁸

Seventy-six of these sad narratives darken the pages of the *Massachusetts Magazine* — to which must be added almost as many more moral essays which have as their subject the melancholy effects of seduction! Richardson's Lovelace provided an intriguing model for the seducer. Lormon, the villain of *Rosetta*, is typical. He “. . . had read the beautiful novel of *Clarissa*, in which the perfidious lover after having in vain tried every art of seduction to ruin an amiable woman, prepares a liquor which at once lulls to sleep her strength and virtue . . . Such was the model Lormon chose for his imitation.”²⁹ His perfidy resulted from a misreading of Richardson, for “Lormon was delighted with the invention of Lovelace, without being moved by the virtue of *Clarissa*.”³⁰ This tendency to dwell on the pictures of vice rather than upon the moral derived from them is pointed out by a reviewer of *Memoirs of the Bloomsgrave Family*, who saw “that the writings of Richardson . . . are not wholly

²⁸ *Massachusetts Magazine*, VIII (Boston, 1796), 451.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 391-392.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 392.

exempt from censure.”³¹ A moralist in 1793 warned “females” about seducers with the personal charm of a Lovelace. “Is he accounted modest, sober and virtuous? Yet depend not on the truth of these pretenses.”³² *The History of Mira* derives its situations from both *Pamela* and *Clarissa*.³³ Melmoth emulates Mr. B—— by attempting a seduction in the guise of his victim’s female house-keeper. Like Lovelace, “His plan was the result of deep reflection and a thorough knowledge . . . of her own suspicious goodness.”³⁴ There is also a church scene which closely resembles the one in *Clarissa*.³⁵ Orlando, in the *History of Narcissa*, employs the blandishments of Lovelace to seduce his “unsuspecting fair.”³⁶ The plot of *Clarissa* is closely followed in *Innocent Simplicity Betrayed*, in which Louisa is destined by her family for “the son of a neighbor, rich in possessions, but rude in manners, for her husband.”³⁷ Sir Edward, the seducer, effects his design by suggesting elopement as the only escape from the intolerable boor, whose crudity resembles that of Roger Solmes in *Clarissa*. The seducer in *Lothario: or, the Accomplished Villain*, is sufficiently described by the sub-title. He, as so many of his smoothly insinuating brothers in perfidy, derives his blandishments from Lovelace and thus gives peculiar point to those critics of Richardson who felt that this sinner was made too attractive for safety.³⁸ The fate of *Matilda*,

³¹ *Massachusetts Magazine*, II (1790), 758.

³² *Ibid.*, V (1793), 204.

³³ *Ibid.*, II (1790), 546.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 466.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 465.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, IV (1792), 180.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, I (1789), 470.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 443.

“Alas! she gave her faith, and became the victim of seduction,”³⁹ is indeed the fate of so many of her sisters that one sympathizes with the reformer who cried, “. . . the contempt of the fair sex, levelled at one female seducer . . . would produce happier effects, than all the writings of Richardson . . .”⁴⁰

Contributors concerned themselves with some of the social and moral questions raised by Richardson's novels. *The Babblcr* inveighed against the foolishness of marrying to suit mercenary parents.⁴¹ The author of *The Selfish Peasant* closed his “moral tale” by insisting, “It would be well for the peace of society, and for the domestic felicity of individuals in general, if the control of parents over the inclination of their children in the grand article of marriage, was not carried to such a height of despotick rigour.”⁴² Another correspondent observed that “The ill-directed tenderness of parental affection, has often been productive of the most unhappy consequences . . .”⁴³ There is the same point in *The Nymph of the Grove — A Sentimental Historiette* in which the author concludes, “The attempt of a parent to control the propensities of a child in this point, is exceedingly wrong; it is frequently the means of their misery, and never of benefit.”⁴⁴ One of the problems suggested by *Pamela* was indignantly disposed of, “Do not reformed rakes make the best of husbands? I am sorry for the question, I am doubly sorry, whenever it is stated by a

³⁹ *Massachusetts Magazine*, VII (1795), 452.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I (1789), 381.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, II (1790), 89.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 299.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 485.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, IV (1792), 157.

virtuous woman.”⁴⁵ The author of *Harriot* was confident that “The maxim . . . that a reformed rake makes the best husband, is not founded on truth.”⁴⁶ The complacent morality of *Pamela* is to be found in *Perrin and Lucetta*, “Thus was honesty rewarded. Let those who desire the reward, practise the virtue.”⁴⁷ Richard Bumper, in *The Sentimental Libertine*, after marrying his victim, came to the curious conclusion, “I have been married a week, and am convinced that virtue is its own reward . . .”⁴⁸ *The Essayist* lamented the confusion between virtue and prudence, “Let us make it our constant aim to follow virtue, if not ‘for virtue’s sake’, at least on account of our own ease, convenience, and security.”⁴⁹

The epistolary form, as well as the subject matter of Richardson’s novels, was commonly used by contributors.⁵⁰ The friendship and correspondence between Emilia and Harriet is obviously based upon the very similar relationship between Clarissa and Miss Howe. They kept up “a correspondence that occupied most of the hours in which they were separated.”⁵¹ Their letters in *The Story of Emilia*, dealt principally with the familiar situation of parental opposition to a marriage and the melancholy effects of a subsequent elopement and desertion.⁵² In *Caroline to Lindor, An Epistolary Historiette*

⁴⁵ *Massachusetts Magazine*, II (1790), 617.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I (1789), 4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, IV (1792), 492.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, II (1790), 174.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, VI (1794), 542.

⁵⁰ The popularity of the epistolary form may be seen in almost every issue: I, 422; II, 271; III, 664; IV, 23; V, 80, 204, 457-468, 585-591; VII, 227, 467; VIII, 40, 157.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, III (1791), 144.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 209-210.

there is an explanation, "It is not common, for the two sexes to correspond with each other, on the subject you have chosen. It is rather the province of ours alone."⁵³ The same theme fills the letters between Margarette and Mary, whose correspondence follows closely the model of Clarissa's letters to Miss Howe. "Yet the epistolary correspondence with which I have for such a length of time . . . been indulged, hath given me the habit of expressing myself to you, in this way with utmost freedom."⁵⁴ There is, of course, the inevitable seducer, one Courtland, who, like Lovelace, was out to delude "some woman whose expectations were tolerable."⁵⁵ In *Amelia to Adelaide*, the usual formula was repeated. The editor was careful to add that the "Letters are the genuine correspondence of two female friends."⁵⁶ Amelia, however, is a close copy of Miss Howe in *Clarissa*, while the stock device of parental disapproval suggests imitation of Richardson rather than "nature."

Although always open to the charge of being "licentious" and "luxurious," Richardson was, on the whole, welcomed as the shining exception among the major English novelists. *The Gleaner* believed "his writings abound with the purest morals . . ."⁵⁷ Another critic had highest praise for "the incomparable pen of that inimitable writer"⁵⁸ and found in *Sir Charles Grandison* that "Richardson exhibits the character, proper to a brother, in the most vivid and glowing hues . . ."⁵⁹ The strong

⁵³ *Massachusetts Magazine*, IV (1792), 153.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 475-476.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, II (1790), 604.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, IV (1792), 477.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, VI (1794), 469.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

bias for domestic tragedies, seductions, and sentimental woes, is perhaps mostly derived from Richardson. It is in domestic scenes of sentiment that his influence is strongest. In these episodes, so numerous in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, the authors looked to the creator of *Clarissa* and *Pamela* as their master. In contemplating the scene of joy following the alleviation of poverty in *Delights of Benevolence*, the author might well exclaim, "The eloquence of a Rousseau, the pen of a Richardson, could only do it justice."⁶⁰

III

The sons and daughters of sensibility were numerous in the last decade of the eighteenth century, and in America they made the *Massachusetts Magazine* their favorite shrine. To Laurence Sterne, their high priest, they paid homage in every issue. Many contributors resembled the *General Observer*, who wrote, "My spirits were not enflamed, but softened, subtilized, and sublimated. In short, I felt myself all over Sternified."⁶¹ A letter purporting to come from Ignatius Sancho, an African, indicates the breadth of Sterne's appeal: ". . . but surely—half the wit—half the good sense—of the present age—were interred in Sterne's grave, his broad philanthropy—like the soul cheering rays of the blessed sun, invested his happy spirit."⁶² No author, sacred or profane, is mentioned so frequently and worshipped so fervently as Sterne. J. S. Pratt's *Eulogium* voiced the ecstasy so common in tributes to the creator of *Uncle Toby*, ". . . the tear drenched handkerchief . . .

⁶⁰ *Massachusetts Magazine*, VII (1794), 231.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, VI (1794), 231.

⁶² *Ibid.*, III (1791), 611.

should be dedicated — not to the virgin, but to thee.”⁶³ The author of the *Echo* testified, “I join with Sterne, as I do indeed in most sentiments, that ‘I am never so well convinced I have a soul, as when I am engaged in melancholy adventures.’”⁶⁴ Dr. Eustace spoke for many readers when he wrote, “It cannot be wondered at, that I should conceive an esteem for a person, whom nature has most indulgently enabled to frisk and curvet with ease, through all the intricacies of sentiment.”⁶⁵ “Sterne, who was all feeling,”⁶⁶ afforded a model for contributors who vied with each other in imitating his style.⁶⁷ The editors announced on numerous occasions that they welcomed imitations of Sterne. To the author of *Imitation of Tristram Shandy* they urged he “. . . be so polite as to forward another chapter . . . it will probably have a place.”⁶⁸ Sterne was worked into the setting of *The Shrubbery*. In a garden “Dedicated to Sensibility”⁶⁹ there was placed “a marble urn, in which grew a sensitive plant, a beautiful emblem of the divinity of the place . . . On the urn were these words from Sterne, ‘Eternal Foundation of our Feelings! ’tis here I trace thee.’”⁷⁰ The engraver joined with the writer in *Maria of Moulines* (with a handsome engraving) “from Tristram Shandy.”⁷¹ The periodical always had space for Stern-

⁶³ *Massachusetts Magazine*, 168.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, VII (1795), 388.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, II (1790), 238.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, VI (1794), 230.

⁶⁷ For Sternesque pieces see: I, 22; II, 471, 522; III, 270, 277, 242, 420, 437, 537, 661, 742; IV, 417; V, 212, 227; VI, 433; VII, 19; VIII, 312, 339, 451.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, V (1793), 386.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, II (1790), 154.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, V (1793), 451-452.

esque correspondence and continued the series of letters between Maria and Eliza through several numbers.⁷² *The Dreamer* was at first perturbed by what he thought was a disagreement between Sterne and Solomon on the question whether it was "... better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of joy."⁷³ Upon further reflection, however, the writer concluded happily, "... indeed Solomon and Laurence were both in the right."⁷⁴ *The Modern Friend* lamented the failure of mankind to live up to Sterne's sensibility, "Blush, human nature, for few such are thy children! ... 'How unlike the peasant' said I, 'how unlike the picture drawn by Yorick's lively fancy. Unlike indeed.'" ⁷⁵ There was praise for William Dunlap's *The Father; or, American Shandyism* reprinted in the *Massachusetts Magazine* in 1789, "In it sentiment, wit and comick humor, are most happily blended; nor is that due proportion of the pathetick, which interests the finer feelings of the human heart, omitted."⁷⁶ Shandean letters and rhapsodies were common. In *Godolfin*, Volmar is described as "a Corporal Trim, a mere child of nature."⁷⁷

Readers of the *Massachusetts Magazine* were, of course, interested in the famous Eliza, whose charms worked so strongly on the York prebendary. The editors wrote, "we feel under obligations to our kind correspondent, who has announced to us his intention of furnishing for our next number, 'Some account of the

⁷² *Massachusetts Magazine*, I (1789), 422.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, II (1790), 170.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 472.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, I (1789), 620.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, III (1791), 242.

Lady, whom the author of *Tristram Shandy* so tenderly respected' . . ."⁷⁸ *Original Letters from Mrs. Draper to Mr. Sterne* were featured in the monthly numbers from February to May, 1789. The editors promised that "The lovers of sentiment will be gratified with the whole of this delicate correspondence as fast as the nature of our publication will permit."⁷⁹ An apologist defended the famous affair between Bramin and Bramine as "the closest union that purity could possibly admit of . . ."⁸⁰ The same writer praised Sterne for "a soul fraught and fortified with the justest sentiments of religion and virtue."⁸¹ The editors anticipated more "unpublished letters" with the hope that they "will be truly entertaining to the sentimental mind."⁸² Abbé Raynal, another ecclesiastic who fell before Eliza's charms, was quoted in his *Eulogium on Eliza* in an apostrophe to Sterne, "I wept over thee with Eliza; thou wouldst weep over her with me; and had it been the will of Heaven, that you both survived me, your tears would have fallen together on my grave."⁸³

The ecstatic tone of the tributes to Sterne invited parody by the more callous. There is much fun poked at affected sensibility in a *Lamentation over an Unfortunate Animalcule*. "Belinda was always remarkably fond of pathetic novels, tragedies and elegies. Sterne's sentimental beauties were her peculiar favorites. She had indeed contracted so great a tenderness of sensibility from

⁷⁸ *Massachusetts Magazine*, 1 (1789), 2.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, 160.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 638.

such reading . . . she actually fell in a fit on a gentleman's treading on her favorite cat's tail as he eagerly stooped to save her child from falling into the fire."⁸⁴ The ultra-refined must have winced at *The Tour of Sympathy* in which a traveller of sensibility is so tender of constitution that "a fly's wing might overturn it."⁸⁵ The author of the *Sentimental Horse* was no lover of Sterne. The horse "stopped suddenly, hung his head, and presented an attitude so moving, and so pregnant with silent reproach, that Balaam's ass, with all his loquacity, would have suffered by the comparison."⁸⁶ In *The Domestick Tornado* by "Yorick Junior" there is a parody of Sterne in which a household tiff ensues over a debate on the comparative merits of silver and paste buckles.⁸⁷ Seduction and sensibility, twin beauties so admired by readers, were sadly ridiculed in *Maria* when the heroine lost her virtue and a pail of milk—simultaneously!⁸⁸ The same maid "pressed the robin to her bosom—she looked up to heaven, then laid her head upon the earth—and expired."⁸⁹ Sensibility too exquisite was burlesqued in numerous poems with tell-tale titles such as: *On the Death of a College Canary*,⁹⁰ and *Elegiac Lines occasioned by the Premature Death of a Dove, alias Pigeon*.⁹¹

More serious than the burlesques of the exaggerated diction were the charges by moralists that Sterne induced his readers "in swallowing the nectar, to swallow what is

⁸⁴ *Massachusetts Magazine*, III (1791), 447.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, VIII (1796), 313.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 312-313.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, III (1791), 230.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, VIII (1796), 625.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, III (1791), 421.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, VII (1796), 574.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, VIII (1796), 181.

enflaming and poisonous.”⁹² A moralist who praised Sterne as one of “acute sensibility” and possessing “. . . a talent, beyond any other writer, of entering into the heart and touching its finest feelings,”⁹³ felt it necessary to add, “. . . let me ask the fondest admirers of Sterne, who are persons of education and taste, whether they can recommend the history of Tristram Shandy as a proper book for youth? Whether a virtuous father can put it into the hands of his children?”⁹⁴ *The General Observer* concluded, “As Sterne, by indulging his darling sensibility, was sometimes himself led astray . . . so he has done more by his example and descriptions, than any man besides, to seduce others into trouble and disgrace, by their sentimental pursuits.”⁹⁵ Despite these qualified praises and warnings which the “licentious” elements in Sterne called forth, his detractors were always a minority. The general attitude is, perhaps, best summed up by an admirer, “. . . but scarce any writer has more admirers, or a greater number of humble imitators, than Sterne. And not to admire him . . . would stigmatize one as destitute of sentiment, genius or benevolence.”⁹⁶

The popularity of Richardson and Sterne in the *Massachusetts Magazine*, perhaps the most representative periodical of eighteenth-century America, during the period in which our native fiction developed, is paralleled almost exactly by their influence on the fiction itself. The strong bias for tales of seduction, the vogue of sentiment and sensibility, the appeals to “female readers,” the

⁹² *Massachusetts Magazine*, II (1790), 329.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 330.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, VI (1794), 131.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, II (1790), 329.

didacticism — all are registered on its pages. In this respect the varied fare of “knowledge and rational entertainment” it offered its readers from 1789 to 1796 is richly significant to those who would know the impulses and tastes from which our early fiction developed.