

“THEY ORDER...THIS MATTER BETTER IN FRANCE”. YORICK THE PHILOSOPHER AND SENTIMENTAL TRAVELLER

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Key words: lyric and psychological prose, “imaginary journey”, ethical sentimentalism, natural religion, deism, materialism, philosophical novel.

The article highlights the existing tradition of understanding Laurence Sterne’s literary texts as philosophical. Author uses such research approaches as historical and literary, sociocultural and biographical.

The reception of *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* produced by the “English Rabelais” through the philosophical dominant in the poetics is a controversial theme that has its supporters and opponents. Occasionally some researchers totally negate philosophical direction of Sterne’s works, others – though do not deny his interest in the studies of contemporary philosophers, with many of whom Sterne had friendly relations (Hume, d’Holbach, D’Alembert, Diderot), nevertheless accuse the writer for inability to create a consistent system of philosophical ideas and become an original thinker (James Work). In course of time a number of literary critics convinced in inherency of philosophical themes for Sterne’s novels is widening (A. Hadfield, J. Hawley, Sh. Regan, P. Davies, Ch. Lupton). Experts declare that the attempts to distance Sterne’s texts from the intellectual climate of the century lead to the marginalization of his achievement and Sterne has become celebrated by “a coterie of enthusiasts” as “our most influential unread author” (Andrew Hadfield). On the contrary, Martin Battestin in his famous essays written in 1994 – “A Sentimental Journey”: Sterne’s “Work of Redemption” and “Sterne Among the Philosophes: Body and Soul in “A Sentimental Journey” – insists on the inseparability of Sterne’s novels from the leading philosophical tendencies of the epoch. The first of his papers, “A Sentimental Journey”: Sterne’s “Work of Redemption”, is the subject of the analytical commentary in the present article. Battestin argues that Sterne can be considered the first philosophical novelist in English who discerns Locke’s radically subjectivist implications and demonstrates in the form of his narrative the principles of association of ideas and “durational time”. In *A Sentimental Journey* Sterne debates the mechanistic doctrines of La Mettrie and his followers, d’Holbach, Diderot and discovers in the passion and sympathy a way of rejecting Hume’s skepticism.

Yorick’s figure in *A Sentimental Journey*, his ability to enjoy the moments of happiness, the restraint to the manifestation of the extremeness of passion transform the canon of travel writing and unnoticeably give it the form of personal journal and self-observation where the plunge into the description of everyday trifles predominates. Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* turns into the model of “the literature of sensibility” ensuring the author with the popularity within the wide range of reading public. The researchers view *A Sentimental Journey* as a variation of familiar features of Sterne’s style that correlates with the turn to the lyrical psychological form, the attention to the individual consciousness, the world of inner feelings and emotions. The text of the novel becomes refined, the author’s tone is frivolous and full of erotic hints. The narrator intrigues the reader with the insinuating intonation where the ironical, ambiguous and melancholic colors are mixed.

In *A Sentimental Journey* Yorick’s travel notes look like an “imaginary journey” where the factual topography becomes the cause for extensive emotional reflection of the hero who is not constraint with the social conventions and the outer world turns to be the “mirror of the soul” and is reflected in the endless stream of changeable opinions. According to Battestin, Sterne’s emphasis on the liberating function of human sexuality is important. Claiming a spiritual value for eroticism Sterne turns to be the precursor of D. H. Lawrence and the famous final chapters in *A Sentimental Journey*, “The Grace” and “The Case of Delicacy”, can be viewed as the paradigm of the novel’s leading theme – the human yearning for relationship, the quest for union and sociability. Battestin comes to a conclusion that in *A Sentimental Journey* Sterne found a way to diminish the disturbing solipsistic implications of the new philosophy that had defined “the small world of Shandy Hall in terms of hobby-horsical self-enclosure”. He proposed to find in human senses, imagination and physiology the means of transcending materialist doctrines and of affirming the possibility of communion.

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