In *The Politics of Sensibility* (1996), Markman Ellis departs from the usual treatment of the sentimental novels of the later eighteenth century, by arguing that they participated in some major controversies and reform movements, including opposition to slavery, discussions of the morality involved in commercial and business practices, and the movement for the reformation of prostitutes.

See *Age of Sensibility* under *Periods of English Literature.* Refer to Herbert Ross Brown, *The Sentimental Novel in America* (1940); Arthur Sherbo, *English Sentimental Drama* (1957); R. P. Utter and G. B. Needham, *Pamela's Daughters* (1963); R. S. Crane, "Suggestions toward a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling,' " in *The Idea of the Humanities* (2 vols., 1967); Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (1986); John Dwyer, *Virtuous Discourse: Sensibility and Community in Late Eighteenth-Century Scotland* (1987); John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (1988); Claude Rawson, *Satire and Sentiment 1660–1830* (1994); Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility* (1996).

Sentimentalism is now a pejorative term applied to what is perceived to be an excess of emotion to an occasion, and especially to an overindulgence in the "tender" emotions of pathos and sympathy. Since what constitutes emotional excess or overindulgence is relative both to the judgment of the individual and to large-scale historical changes in culture and in literary fashion, what to the common reader of one age is a normal expression of humane feeling may seem sentimental to many later readers. The emotional responses of a lover that Shelley expresses and tries to evoke from the reader in his "Epipsychidion" (1821) seemed sentimental to the *New Critics* of the 1930s and later, who insisted on the need for an ironic counterpoise to intense feeling in poetry. Most readers now find both the *drama of sensibility* and the *novel of sensibility* of the eighteenth century ludicrously sentimental, and respond with jeers instead of tears to once celebrated episodes of pathos, such as many of the death scenes, especially those of children, in some Victorian novels and dramas. A staple in current anthologies of bad poetry are sentimental poems which were no doubt written, and by some people read, with deep and sincere feeling. A useful distinction between sentimental and nonsentimental is one which does not depend on the intensity or type of the feeling expressed or evoked, but labels as sentimental a work or passage in which the feeling is rendered in commonplaces and *clichés,* instead of being freshly verbalized and sharply realized in the details of the representation.

See *pathos,* and *sensibility, literature of,* and refer to I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism* (1929), chapter 6; Laurence Lerner, "A Note on Sentimentality," *The Truest Poetry* (1960); and the discussion of sentimentality by Monroe C. Beardsley, "Bad Poetry," in *The Possibility of Criticism* (1970).

Setting. The overall setting of a narrative or dramatic work is the general locale, historical time, and social circumstances in which its action occurs; the setting of a single episode or scene within such a work is the particular physical location in which it takes place. The overall setting of *Macbeth,* for example,

is medieval Scotland, and the setting for the particular scene in which Macbeth comes upon the witches is a blasted heath. The overall setting of James Joyce's *Ulysses* is Dublin on June 16, 1904, and its opening episode is set in the Martello Tower overlooking Dublin Bay. In works by writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Thomas Hardy, and William Faulkner, both the overall and individual settings are important elements in generating the *atmosphere* of their works. The Greek term **opsis** ("scene," or "spectacle") is now occasionally used to denote a particular visible or picturable setting in any work of literature, including a lyric poem.

When applied to a theatrical production, "setting" is synonymous with **décor**, which is a French term denoting both the scenery and the **properties**, or movable pieces of furniture, on the stage. The French **mise en scène** ("placing on stage") is sometimes used in English synonymously with "setting"; it is more useful, however, to apply the term more broadly, as the French do, to signify a director's overall conception, staging, and directing of a theatrical performance.

Seven Deadly Sins. In medieval and later Christian theology these sins were usually identified as Pride, Covetousness, Lust, Envy, Gluttony, Anger, and Sloth. They were called "deadly" because they were considered to put the soul of anyone manifesting them in peril of eternal perdition; such sins could be expiated only by absolute penitence. Among them, Pride was often considered primary, since it was believed to have motivated the original fall of Satan in heaven. **Sloth** was accounted a deadly sin because it signified not simply laziness, but a torpid and despondent spiritual condition that threatened to make a person despair of any chance of achieving divine Grace. Alternative names for sloth were **accidie**, "dejection," and "spiritual dryness"; it was a condition close to that which present-day psychiatrists diagnose as acute depression.

The seven deadly sins (or in an alternative term, **cardinal sins**) were defined and discussed at length by such major theologians as Gregory the Great and Thomas Aquinas, and served as the topic of countless sermons. They also played an important role in many works of medieval and Renaissance literature—sometimes in elaborately developed *personifications*—including William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (B, Passus 5), Geoffrey Chaucer's "Parson's Tale," William Dunbar's "The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Synnis," and Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (Book I, Canto 4). Refer to Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (1952).

The seven deadly sins were balanced by the **seven cardinal virtues.** Three of these, called the "theological virtues" because they were stressed in the New Testament, were Faith, Hope, and Charity (that is, Love)—see St. Paul's *I Corinthians* 13:13: "And now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three." The other four, the "natural virtues," were derived from the moral philosophy of the ancient Greeks: justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude.

Refer to Robert W. Ackerman, *Backgrounds to Medieval English Literature* (1966).