



Form of Sentimentalism in Sheridan's "The Rivals"

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ABSTRACT

The literary history, Sheridan belongs to the period which was designed as the age of Johnson which was also alternatively called the age of Transition. During the age of Johnson his throne as classical dictator of the age was already tottering to its fall as rebellion against his authority was rife in spite of his attempt to stamp it out. Sheridan occupies an important position in the history of English drama. He was certainly the most important dramatist of the eighteenth century, and some critics give him the second place after Shakespeare. Thus Balston has remarked in his introduction to *The Rival*, of the only three plays in the English Language besides those of Shakespeare, which have achieved permanent popularity, two, *The School for Scandal* and *The Rival* are by Sheridan the third *She Stoops to Conquer*, was by Oliver Goldsmith. However long the interval the name of Sheridan comes second to Shakespeare's on the role of English dramatists.

Keywords: *Sentimental comedy, humour, artificial comedy, achievements of comedy.*

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Brinsley Sheridan was an Irish playwright, librettist, and poet. The following entry presents recent criticism of Sheridan's works. Throughout his brief career as a playwright, Sheridan assisted recover the English Restoration comedy of manners, which portrays the amorous intrigues of wealthy society.

In his comic drama *The Rivals* Sheridan parodies manners using humor that was pointed but never cruel. Essentially an ironic play about character, *The Rivals* presents a number of ridiculous individuals and then proceeds to laughter their flaws and peculiarities. Among its range of characters, the play introduces the infamous figure of Mrs.

Malaprop, from whose amusingly in appropriate word usage the term "malapropism" was derived. Sheridan's libretto for the light opera *The Duenna* landscapes characters and incidents drawn from Roman New Comedy and ends with a double marriage happily realized despite the opposition of Don Jerome the play's heavy father symbol. Another of Sheridan's minor works, the nonsensical *St. Patrick's Day; or The Scheming Lieutenant* exists very much in the mode of *The Rivals* and endeavors to amuse audiences with its affable, if outrageous, characters. *The School for Scandal* is both the most popular of Sheridan's comedies and the most strongly evocative of the Restoration period. This attack on a conversation loving society demonstrates Sheridan's brilliant display of wit in its sharp indictment of manners that departs considerably from the gentle tone and approach of *The Rivals*. The story follows double plot as it portrays the manipulative Lady Sneerwell, the hypocritical Joseph Surface, the naïve trendsetter Lady Teazle, the testy Sir Peter Teasel, and the reformed libertine Charles Surface, among many other comic figures. Heavily influenced by the Duke of Buckingham's *The Rehearsal*, Sheridan's *The Critic; or, Tragedy Rehearsed* provides a satirical look at the theatrical world and caricature was a conceit of artists and critics.

Comedy in 18th Century:

A dramatic genre of the 18th century, representing plays in which middle-class heroes successfully overcome a series of moral trials. Such comedy meant at producing tears rather than laughter. Sentimental comedies reflected contemporary philosophical

conceptions of humans as integrally good but capable of being controlled a field through corrupt example.

The restoration comedy was extremely limited in scope. It catered to a world predominantly concerned with sex. It was artificial not natural because it was preoccupied with superficial manners rather than with the profound realities of life. But it was true to the spirit of mirth and amusement it was gay witty satirical highly amusing but it did not make the slightest attempt at honorable teaching. When the stalwarts of the Restoration Comedy such as Congreve Wycherley, Farquhar etc., they finished their works the comedy of manners degenerated. It became completely immoral. The hero became the young gallant who did not believe in moral principles. The heroine also became the witty young woman of fashion who was definitely not a great respecter of morals. All this could not last forever. A change in tone was inevitable. All this came by the force of public opinion, ultimately ushering in a new way of life with new standards of conduct giving rise to the sentimental comedy which abolished laughter from its legitimate place while tears filled the emptiness.

Sheridan's Dramatic Techniques In "The Rivals":

Sheridan's main object of writing plays was to provide entertainment to his audience. It was Ben Jonson who popularized the theory of humours. The ruling passion or preponderant of a person was presented in an exaggerated form in the play of Ben Jonson. To a certain extent Sheridan follows this practice in this play "*THE RIVAL*". That was why he lacks the high seriousness and the depth of Shakespeare with whom he stands no comparison. But to condemn as has often been done because he was trivial and superficial because he arouses on deep emotion and thought was to condemn all irresponsible amusement.

Sentimentalism drama was the eighteenth century emigrant laughter from its genuine place and introduced tears to fill the emptiness. The Sentimental drama simply celebrated in the additional of despair and upset situation in which offended purity was held up to draw forth the understanding tears of the audience. Forcing light on the fashion of such drama, A. Nicoll observes 'Comedy had departed from its original home. In the place of laughter tears in place of laughter tears in place of conspiracy dramatic and distressing condition in place of languages, gallants and entertaining damsels, tragic heroines and serious

lovers and honest servants. That was what they discover in the typical sentimental Drama of the late eighteenth century. They are in the world of drama, not of comedy; in the realm of emotion, not of the intellect.

Before Goldsmith and Sheridan appeared on the scene, there had been a decline of the spirit of true comedy of which the best advocate was Congreve. The comedy of Manners, so popular in the Restoration period, was now quickly disintegrating. It became much too abrasive, reproduction and transparently immoral. Its hero became the young gallant who was seemingly immoral and its heroine, a woman of fashion who had no sound moral philosophies to go through. Surely, such a state of things could not last long. Towards the beginning of the eighteenth century, revolt of feeling set in against this type of roughness and wickedness and a change in tone and moral viewpoint was soon apparent. Great social and economic changes also exaggerated the affluences of English comedy with the rise of the middle class. Matters soon came to a head with the publication of Jeremy Collier's 'short view of the profaneness and Wickedness of the English Stage' in 1698, which gave appearance to the middle-class protest against the grossness into which the Restoration Comedy of Manners had destroyed. By the middle of the eighteenth century the Sentimental Comedy had fully recognized itself on the English stage. Its characteristics became more clearly defined and the process of moral reformation was carried a step further when wit and humour were completely replaced by 'conscious moralization' and the comedy became professedly moral in its purpose and outlook. In the works of such writers as Hugh Kelly and Richard Cumberland there was little life of the true spirit of comedy. Naturally a reaction began to be visible in the domain of drama against growing sentimentalism.

This reaction against Sentimental Comedy gradually resulted in the revival of the Comedy of Manners in a new setting. The pioneers of this reaction were Goldsmith and Sheridan who declared an open revolt against the systematic attempts of advocates of the sentimental comedy to kill the comic muse. Goldsmith registered his protest in his essay 'on the Theatre' and then illustrated his views in a comedy, *The Good-natured Man*. But it was for Sheridan to project the protest with greater force in his three

plays, *The School for Scandal*, *The Rivals*, and *The Critic*.

The *Rivals* was an artificial Comedy of Manners. But it was totally devoid of sentimentalism. Of course, Sheridan has tried to satirize the heroine of sentimental comedy in the person of Lydia Languish who was ready to die with disappointment when the prettiest distress imaginable and the prospect of one of the most sentimental elopements seem about to fade into the common light of convention a ceremony. So in the main plot Sheridan attempts to carry out his challenge to perfection. But the sub-plot still contains some of the features of the Sentimental comedy. The Julia-Faulkland episode verges on Sentimentality. Julia, young parentless girl, possesses laudable qualities of head and heart. She loves Faulkland who was an incorrigible sentimentalist. He was obsessed with some fixed ideas about love, sex and marriage. He was full of doubts about the sincerity of his beloved. He nourishes a number of doubts about the singleness and loyalty of Julia. The result was that Julia has to pass many unhappy days and nights and was made to shed tears. Every time Faulkland meets Julia he finds occasion to quarrel with her and Julia has to leave him with tears when she was unable to bear the excesses of her lover. All this draws sympathy from the spectators for poor Julia. The play ends with a note of moral preaching. Julia's last speech to Faulkland: "when hears deserving happiness would unit their fortunes, Virtues would crown them an unfading garland of modest hurtles flowers; but ill-judging passion will force the gaudier rose into the wreath whose throne offends them, when its leaves are dropped".

The portrayal of Sir Lucius is also humorous. Sir Lucius is an Irishman, easily tricked by the maid-servant Lucy, who tells him that the love-letters which she brings for him have been sent by the seventeen-year old niece of Mrs. Malaprop. This wrong impress eventually leads him to challenge Captain Absolute to a contest and the manner in which Sir Lucius chooses up a disagreement with Captain Absolute is itself very funny? The portrayal of Lydia's "tough old aunt" is also satirical. We laugh at the contradiction in this elderly woman who puts restrictions on her niece, while herself falling in love with a tall Irish baronet and writing letters to him under the expected name of Delia. Beverley's description of

Mrs. Malaprop as an "old weather-beaten, she-dragon" is most comical.

One of the most outstanding features of "The Rivals" was humorous dialogue. The manner in which Sir Anthony snubs and scolds his son for disobeying his wishes, the manner in which Captain Complete deals with Mrs. Malaprop when he meets her first, and Sir Lucius manner of industry with Lands when he teaches Expanses in the rules of struggling is also witty. Humorous and ludicrous situations are also generally found in a comedy of manner. Captain Absolute's disguising himself as Ensign Beverley and then unmasking himself when finally he has to face Lydia in his true character are such situations. Then there are two more farcical situations. One is that in which Captain Absolute tricks his father into believing that his is going to make up his quarrel with Lydia when his is actually going to competition to conflict. The second is when David shouts to Sir Anthony to stop Unqualified because there is going to be fight, murder, and bloodshed and so on.

CONCLUSION:

Though Sheridan tried to attack sentimentality in his plays, yet he could not completely get rid of the prevailing force of sentimentality. In this regard Nettleton observes: "Consciously or not, he allowed the Julia- Faulkland under plot to retain in some measure the conventional phrasing of sentimental drama. Though Faulkland was a humour character in whom jealousy was carried to comic exaggeration some of his and Julia's speeches seem rather an unconscious echo of sentimental diction than raillery at its extravagance". In the warfare against sentimentality, goldsmith was an 'elder' though not a better soldier than Sheridan whose challenge to sentimental Muse was admittedly more deliberate than that of the former. This was evident from his prologues to all his principal plays.

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