

### 'The Rivals' as an anti-Sentimental comedy

Nettleton's remarks sum up Sheridan's dramatic qualities: "The dramatic work of Sheridan marks at once the height of the reaction against Sentimental drama and the most finished achievement of the English comedy of manners". The Faulkland - Julia episode in the play is often criticised for its overdose of sentimentality. Some critics point to the Bob Acres - O'Trigger episode as more significant. Thorndike remarks: "The main situation is farcical or at least theatrical - a young spark making love under an assumed name to the very girl designed for him by his irascible father."

Although 'The School for Scandal' is a maturer work, yet 'The Rivals' is a fine amalgam of the elements of farce, and comedy. It sets <sup>to</sup> the maudlin sentiments, vulgar, libertine excesses in the theatres as the drama was free from the stranglehold of Puritanic restrictions. The characters Faulkland, Lucius O'Trigger, Bob Acres and Mrs. Malaprop are overdrawn. Faulkland represents the 'humour' tradition of Ben Jonson who exposed to ridicule the inherent and inner weakness and vices of men and women. But Sheridan, in the tradition of Comedy of Manners, confines to the

foibles and vices of the men of the fashionable class.

The Faulkland-Julia relationship underscores the author's dig at the sentimental cult. Faulkland is chivalrous, brave in situation as he saved the life of a girl in a boat-disaster. But his egotistic love makes heavy demands. When Julia expresses her sincere gratitude in genuine appreciation of his qualities, he feels painfully that her love is an offspring of 'gratitude' and not love. When Julia is away he swoons to hear that she is quite happy because a true lover ought to be down and heavy hearted when her lover is away. But whenever he is told that she looks reduced having been from her, Faulkland visibly becomes nervous. Thus, the lack of equipoise in him leads him to queer mental states. Captain Absolute's remark that he is 'a confounded farrago of doubts, fears, hopes, wishes etc' is an objective analysis of his character. These land him to a confounding situation even in his love affair. He deludes Julia to show his courage and bravado that in a tangle that called for heroism he even killed a man. It was a half-truth because he had accepted to act as a second to Captain Absolute in the latter's duel with O'Trigger. But Julia, on learning the actual fact, violently reacts to his treacherous behaviour.



Julia is sincere enough and of sacrificing nature, but she feels hurt and even disgusted with the unreliable behaviour of her lover.

Even the relationship of Lydia and Ensign Beverley is fraught with anti-sentimental strokes. The very dual identity of Captain Absolute underscores an ironical portraiture. Miss Lydia vows to pledge her love to a young man of inferior rank and status. Absolute loves her and promptly disguises himself as Ensign Beverley and the lovers enjoy and court each other. The Captain more than once faces the risk of being caught by his father whom he is genuinely afraid. Miss Lydia's attitude and outlook is patronising and also sentimental, because she wishes to feed her sentiment of sympathy towards the underdogs. She knew that she could easily get a match of her own social rank. Mrs. Malaprop and Sir Anthony had both concurred in uniting them. But she pretended to be sworn to her idealism and the Captain mustled up his identity in the garb of Ensign Beverley. Sheridan here exposes the hollowness in such sham idealism through dramatic device. The hidden dramatic irony is evident in the fact that the man to whom she decided to saddle her fortune in life as an Ensign turned out to be no other than Captain Absolute.

and son of highly sophisticated parents.

The 'Manners' play of Congreve and the Restoration were out satirical of the veneer of culture and artificialities of an exclusive coterie of their highbrow society. But Sheridan and Goldsmith combined this manners-element with their exploration of the ~~genu~~ genuine feelings and passions of their characters. Faulkland is jealous and unselfconscious in his reactions, but his sincerity and integrity are above reproach. He can never swerve from his love like Captain Absolute who rather more on Crabt. Faulkland has "set the sum of happiness on this coast and not to succeed were to be stript of all."

'The Rivals' blends the sentimental and the comic tradition in reasonable proportions. Faulkland and Absolute are close friends, though with ~~two~~ contrasted ingredients in their make-up. Lydia Languish and Julia, on the other hand, show more balanced traits and more unswerving in their intentions. According to Balston, the temper of the age prevented Sheridan to revel much of the cost of the sentimentalists, because the <sup>domestic</sup> ~~domestic~~ Love audience was much given to it. But Sheridan, the mature intellect, could not forbear to laugh at such excesses of passion. "The result of



the ~~sea~~ divided aim," says the critic, "has been indolgent success. It jabs us now to suspect sometimes that Julia and Faulkner are being treated seriously, as it jarred contemporaries to suspect them laughed at."

The End

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