Chapter -V

SHERIDAN’S CHALLENGE
TO THE `SENTIMENTAL MUSE':
THE RIVALS
After the unquestionable success of his *She Stoops to Conquer*, a very significant landmark in the history of English comedy and a classic, Goldsmith made an effort, his only effort, at after-piece writing. *The Grumbler* (1773), his last piece for the stage, was intended to be a benefit piece for John Quirk. The young comedian who had played the role of Tony Lumpkin and contributed thus for its success. This token gesture of gratitude, it is said, fails even as a farce and cannot be grouped with the other afterpiece comedies of the day. Had Goldsmith lived on he would have certainly written competent dramatic comedy again, but that was not to be. His last strictures against sentimental comedy are in "Retaliation", a poem he wrote shortly before he died. And the mantle of laughing comedy fell on the shoulders of young and precocious R.B. Sheridan, who too proved himself to be a dedicated opponent of sentimentalism. This and the next two chapters are concerned with his comedies. The focus will be on three of them only: *The Rivals*, *The School of Scandal* and *The Critic*. Although Goldsmith was older than Sheridan by twenty years, in terms of their careers in the theatre they were closely associated in time and quite close contemporaries. They made their mark in the theatre within a year or two of each other. Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* was first produced at Covent Garden on 15th March, 1773, and in the same theatre Sheridan's *The Rivals* was produced on 17th January, 1775. "One brilliant Irishman succeeded another as though taking over the torch from the compatriot who was obliged to leave the scene (Goldsmith died in the year of Sheridan's debut)." They were utterly distinct and distinctive as men as well as playwrights. Yet they had a great deal in common. Just to mention a few, they shared an unusual plenitude of talents. Goldsmith was a born dramatist although late in his career he found the medium most suited to his gifts for comic and satirical writing. In the case of Sheridan, his imaginative talent was entirely for drama. But the theatrical career of either dramatist was brief, not more than five
years in each case. Early death cut short Goldsmith's dramatic career. When Sheridan was expected to be a more prolific playwright in view of his successes, politics weaned him away from his playwriting career.

Had Goldsmith lived on, perhaps there would have been creative rivalry between these two Irish comic dramatists. Instead we find the younger man following closely enough in the footsteps of Goldsmith, particularly in his general attitude to comedy in the theatre. Both shared a distaste for sentimental comedy as it was written in their times, against which Goldsmith had campaigned in his prose works and claimed to have provided in his plays, and in his conception of laughing comedy a rival to the 'miserable hybrid'. The unqualified success of *She Stoops to Conquer* and the enthusiastic response it evoked, created a favourable climate for non-sentimental comedy for one like Sheridan with a spirited ironic comic genius to benefit from. It was natural for him to continue the campaign against sentimental comedy. Bevis has sketched the circumstances of Sheridan's entering the lists :

> With Goldsmith's death in 1774 the cause of laughing comedy was languishing: Foote and Garrick were tiring, Murphy was quiescent, and Colman was flirting with sentimental comedy. There was room for a new champion, and, to judge by the profits Foote and Goldsmith had realized from their attacks on sentiment, the defense of the older tradition needed not to be unrewarding. Given these circumstances and his penchant for the chivalrous adventure, it is not surprising that Sheridan stepped forward with a play (ie. *The Rivals*) that he subsequently described as another assault on sentimental comedy.²
Goldsmith's activities as dramatic critic and dramatist brought attention to issues that are inextricably associated with Sheridan's career. And Sheridan inherited the other dramatists' disputes about the nature of comedy. It has already been suggested in an earlier chapter that probably "the two men may have had specific targets, Richard Cumberland and Hugh Kelly, as well as more general ones, in their satirical assaults on sentimental comedy".  

Sheridan had opportunities to see Goldsmith's play and seems to have been well acquainted with it as well as his views on the theatre. If Goldsmith had to struggle rather hard to enter the theatre, it seems to have welcomed Sheridan with open arms. Although he was an inexperienced young writer who had written verse only occasionally and collaborated with a friend of his, Halhed, on a juvenile piece of verse translation, Sheridan was asked by Thomas Harris the manager of Covent Garden for a play. And The Rivals opened at this theatre in January 1775. It had been written as well as rehearsed in haste, and could therefore command only a mixed reception. Taking advantage of the customary nine nights' grace allowed to a new play, Sheridan withdrew what was actually an apprentice piece and set about revising it at great speed but with remarkable coolness, judgement and effectiveness. It was not in his nature to accept defeat easily. Responding intelligently and with an acute theatrical sense to critics who had pointed out a number of lapses in the plot, language and characterisation in the play, Sheridan, working with intensity, cleaned and tightened up them all. He made cuts and removed what he called 'excrescences'; recast passages which had made the first-night audience restive. And among the characters he reinterpreted and transformed Sir Lucius O' Trigger into an Irish man of honour, "from an undignified obtuse fortune-hunter into a proud if impecunious Irish gentleman".  

He rendered Sir Anthony Absolute, a testy but not lascivious old man, more palatable and attractive than before and pruned Mrs. Malaprop's part of some of its more
ecentric verbal excrences. And when the revised version of *The Rivals* opened on 28 January, 1775, it "inaugurated its triumphant career"\(^5\), as well as Sheridan's dramatic career.

The revised version of *The Rivals* is a miracle as a first play and a triumph of comic invention. Dr. Johnson gave it very high praise. As one of Sheridan's best and a splendid laughing comedy it deserves detailed consideration. In this chapter, however, attention will be focused mainly on the anti-sentimental aspects of the play. It has already been noted that he followed Goldsmith in denigrating 'the goddess of the woeful countenance'. But he did it with less fire and fury than the other dramatist probably because others had already prepared the ground for him. Katherine Worth has remarked: "By the time Sheridan came on the scene sentimental comedy was no longer the threat it had seemed to Goldsmith ----largely as a result of what Goldsmith had done to counter it. Perhaps more as a jovial tribute to his predecessor than in burning zeal Sheridan picked up the old cudgels in his second prologue to *The Rivals* where he poured scorn on the Sentimental Muse".\(^6\) (emphasis added) Does it mean that in his attack on the sentimental genre he was not sufficiently earnest? A comparison of the first and second prologues will shed light on the matter.

Sheridan's first "Prologue" to *The Rivals*, spoken by "Mr.Woodward" (who played Captain Absolute) and "Mr.Quick" (who played Bob Acres) because it is in the form of a dialogue, says nothing at all about the nature of the play to be enacted. It merely makes an appeal to the audience, in humility, for its judgement and even attempts to humour it. The author makes no claims for himself or his work and humbly submits himself to the audience's judgement. As he puts it,

His faults can never hurt another's ease,  
His crime, at worst, a bad attempt to please :  
Thus, all respecting, he appeals to all,  
and by the general voice will stand or fall.
The second "prologue", written for the revised version is in a different spirit altogether. It was 'spoken on the tenth night', significantly by Mrs. Bulkley who played the role of Julia Melville. And Julia and her lover Faulkland are associated with sentimentalism in the play. One of the oft debated issues is the exact nature and function of the Julia-Faulkland "sentimental sub-plot" in the play. This prologue is wholly concerned with the opposition between the Muse of Comedy and 'The goddess of the woeful countenance-The sentimental Muse', and it recalls Goldsmith's setting up of opposition between 'Laughing comedy' and 'Weeping comedy' in his essay. "On the Theatre". No other issue is raised.

It is to be noted that the anti-sentimental 'prologue' was written for the revised version of the play. Recalling the responses of the first audience to this play may help us to understand why Sheridan focuses attention on 'the sentimental Muse' and his critique of it in his second 'prologue'. There were admirers as well as critics among them, particularly of the characters. At least in three London newspapers, approbation of Faulkland and Julia was expressed. One of the contributors to The Town and Country Magazine (vii, 1775, p.43), who was critical of the play as a whole, said of Faulkland and Julia Melville that they 'are the most outré sentimental ones'. Another contributor to The Morning Chronicle (27 January, 1775) wrote:

Faulkland is a great proof of heart-felt delicacy; he is a beautiful exotic, and tho' not found in every garden, we cannot deny it may in some; the exquisite refinement in his disposition, opposed to the noble simplicity, tenderness, and candour of Julia’s, give rise to some of the most affecting sentimental scenes I ever remember to have met with. The general applause of the audience was proof enough of the merit of those scenes....
Even granting that Sheridan had an affectionate regard for sensibility, as it has been maintained by some, one could be certain that he did not surely intend to evoke the kind of response registered by the contributor to The Morning Chronicle. This factor may explain why he directed his second prologue against the sentimental Muse.

The "prologue" begins on a quiet note of confidence. The speaker, addressing the audience, says that like the 'worthy serjeant', who spoke the previous 'prologue', 'I'll try to merit your applause'. Next pointing to an actress who impersonates the 'figure of comedy', she asks the audience pointedly:

Look on her well—does she seem form'd to teach?
Should you expect to hear this lady preach?
Do solemn sentiments become that mouth?
Bid her be grave, those lips should rebel prove
To every theme that slanders mirth or love.

Her next question to the audience is: When the Muse of Comedy, 'adorn'd with every graceful art/To charm the fancy and yet reach the heart', is there ready to please them, should she be displaced by 'The goddess of the woeful countenance—/The sentimental Muse?' How does she look? 'The Pilgrim's Progress, and a sprig of rue' are her 'emblems'. She is 'too chaste to look like flesh and blood'. Should she be allowed to stand 'She'll snatch the dagger from her sister's hand' (i.e. from the Muse of Comedy),

'And having made her votaries weep a flood,
Good heaven! she'll end her comedies in blood'
Then pointing to the actress impersonating the figure of Tragedy, the speaker says that the cause of 'Fair virtue' and 'moral truth' are the proper sphere of the tragic muse, not of comedy. She invites the audience to join her in mocking the 'goddess of the woeful countenance'. Through this prologue, Sheridan explicitly rejects the Sentimental Muse. There could be little doubt that he is in earnest in spite of the speaker's stance of amusement, because the issue is very much alive for him. "The prologue is his contribution to the old but continuing debate about the nature of comedy."

The prologue is his contribution to the old but continuing debate about the nature of comedy. *The Rivals*, it is implied by the "prologue", demonstrates Sheridan's conception of comedy. And 'mirth' and 'love' "are to be the twin pillars of (his) comic credo". In *The School for Scandal*, he continues his attack on sentimentalism.

Both Goldsmith and Sheridan inherited the comic tradition that was very much alive in their times, and drew upon it consciously and unconsciously. Their originality lies in the way they reshaped or fashioned what they took over from others. Something in the nature of a standard plot had established itself in the comedies of the times. Two lovers, often two pairs of lovers, find themselves at the outset confronted by various impediments to marriage. The events which follow immediately only prolong their plight. However, in the end fortune favours them, the obstacles are cleared, and the loving pairs are happily united in marriage. Sheridan's *The Rivals*, as if answering to the above description, has two pairs of lovers, and two romantic plots. The main plot revolves round Lydia Languish and Jack Absolute, and the sub-plot tells of Julia Melville and Faulkland. What is of particular interest to the present study is that sentimentalism is ridiculed and excesses made fun of in both plots.

Though Sheridan said in his "preface" to *The Rivals* that he was by no means conversant with plays in general, either in reading or at the theatre, actually
he knew a great deal. The fact that he was writing in a high, ancient tradition of comedy was certainly clear to him and must have given him that sense of confidence that breathes even in his first play. "The predecessor whose spirit, indeed whose very words, (he) most frequently involves in The Rivals is William Shakespeare. Few plays can be more deep-dyed in Shakespearean colours than this one". One very conspicuous instance of Sheridan's debt to Shakespeare in this play is his ingenious adaptation of the impossible duel between the reluctant combatants in Twelfth Night. Bob Acres, abetted by Sir Lucius O' Trigger writing his challenge to Ensign Beverley (III.iv), reminds one of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, encouraged and assisted by Sir Toby, challenging Viola-Cesario (III.iv). Acres' panic in the final scene, after the challenge has been delivered to his adversary, is a mirror image of Viola-Cesario's.

Ranging from Restoration comedies of manners, Sheridan's debt has been traced to the playwrights of his own time. It would be unfair to regard him as a plagiarist. Like Goldsmith he seems to have picked up hints and impressions with lightning speed and made them his own, such being his creative energy. Specifically with regard to the resemblances between The Rivals and the comedies of Congreve and other seventeenth century playwrights, Loftis has pointed out that they are "of the generalized kind that derive from a shared tradition". Expressing the same idea more emphatically, Bevis says: "- - - - the full-scale comedy of manners was still a living form. Little or nothing in The Rivals necessitates an expedition into the seventeenth century; most of it echoes or transforms contemporary drama which he (i.e. Sheridan) could have seen on the London stage by 1775".

A contemporary of Sheridan's, says Morwood, noted that he had familiarised himself with 'the whole catalogue of forgotten farces', and that by the time he
came to write The Critic, he had clearly immersed himself in the burlesque tradition.\textsuperscript{14} He drew considerably on the comic idiom of his own time, and this influence of Georgian afterpiece comedy on him is particularly striking. This fact becomes obvious if The Rivals is examined closely in relation to its immediate dramatic milieu. The main plot of the play resembles Garrick's afterpiece short comedy Miss in Her Teens and the sub-plot has parallels in George Colman's two-act farce The Deuce Is in Him.\textsuperscript{15} Several of the characters were virtually stock figures at the time. Even Faulkland, the self-tormenting neurotic lover in the play, was a well-established type. It has been suggested that this character may owe something to Sir John Restless in Arthur Murphy's five-act comedy, All in the Wrong, the mainspring of which is the natural jealousy of Sir John and Lady Restless.\textsuperscript{16} Lydia Languish, who has had her head turned by excessive reading of popular romantic and sentimental fiction, is remarkably like Polly Honeycombe, the heroine of Colman's Polly Honeycombe, an after-piece and 'a dramatic novel in one act'. Whether Sheridan was consciously drawing on Colman or not, so much is certain that both drew on a shared satirical tradition as old as Cervantes's Don Quixote. "Several other English works of the eighteenth century including Steele's The Tender Husband of 1705 are expression" of it.\textsuperscript{17} Mrs Malaprop, known for her gift for ingeniously misapplying words without mispronouncing them, had many predecessors. Her theatrical lineage goes back to Shakespeare's Dogberry in Much Ado About Nothing. As Loftis puts it, "too many later characters, too many for it to be worth while naming them, share the fault."\textsuperscript{18} Most likely, Sheridan took the idea of the character of Mrs Malaprop from his mother's unfinished comedy, A Journey to Bath. All these and other borrowings of Sheridan's, conscious or otherwise, illustrate the continuity of the Georgian tradition of dramatic comedy.
The Rivals has a skilfully devised plot full of lively action. Though the action lasts only a few hours, there are many complications, most of which are in the main plot. The two plots, however, are specifically linked near the start of the play. The two plots, however, are specifically linked near the start of the play: self in the scene (1.2) in which Lydia Languish discusses marriage with her cousin Julia Melville. The play contains much good-humoured criticism of the fashionable highly wrought sensibilities. Written in the spirit of a burlesque, it sends up in a seemingly light-hearted way the romantic and sentimental excesses of its characters especially in matters of love. Moreover, it makes fun of sentimental attitudes not only in plays but in novels as well, probably because they present in greater detail than the plays the qualities of sentiment and pathos. Sheridan was aware that the number of those who read sentimental novels was very considerable. Michael Billington provides a convenient summary of what sentimental novels were about. They "were mostly concerned with true love, which, of course, never ran smooth. Young lovers were almost always depicted as in rebellion against the wishes of their parents or guardians; they almost always preferred poverty to riches; their love affairs, opposed to their parents, had to be conducted in secret with much exchanging of secret notes, poems or gifts, and often with one of the lovers resorting to the use of disguise in order to have a secret meeting; the happy end of true love was traditionally a romantic elopement". In The Rivals Sheridan treats most of these ideas of sentimental novels humorously. The fashionable resort of Bath provides a convenient setting for the drama.

In The Rivals Lydia, who has an over-developed romantic imagination, and Faulkland, who is obsessed by neurotic self-distrust and jealousy, are the immediate targets of Sheridan's critique of sentimental comedy. The first hint of Lydia's sentimentally romantic obsessions is given in the opening scene of the play itself. In the course of the conversation between the two servants, Thomas who
is servant of Sir Anthony Absolute and Fag, servant of Captain Absolute whose confidence he enjoys. Fag reveals that his master is 'in love with a lady of a very singular taste: a lady who likes him better as a half-pay ensign than if she knew he was son and heir to Sir Anthony Absolute, a baronet of three thousand a year'. This lady, Lydia Languish, is herself so rich that, in the comically exaggerated words of Fag, 'She has a lap-dog that eats out of gold—she feeds her parrot with small pearls—'. In the next scene (1.2), Lydia herself reveals what her reading interests are. The books either she has already read or is eager to read are *The Reward of Constancy, The Fatal Connexion, The Memoirs of Lady Woodford* (which seems to have been particularly in great demand as it is found to be 'soiled and dog’s-eared'). *The Mistakes of the Heart, The Delicate Distress, The Tears of Sensibility, The Sentimental Journey, The Man of Feeling*, etc. She has no use for *The Whole Duty of Man*. The words of the titles she prefers themselves indicate her obsessive interest in the "delicate" emotions.

Lydia Languish is both wilful and silly. She has fed her mind and imagination on all kinds of unrealistic ideas about love and marriage drawn from the novels she has been reading and is guided by them. True to her second name, she lies around in sentimental postures, imagining herself the heroine of a sentimental novel. All this becomes explicit in her conversation with Julia (Act. 1, Scene 2). While confiding some of her 'distress' to her cousin, she reveals that she has quarrelled with her 'poor Beverley' (who is no other than Captain Absolute disguised as an ensign although she does not know it), for no reason at all. Her explanation or justification is: '----- we had never had a quarrel, and somehow, I was afraid he would never give me an opportunity'. So she creates an opportunity for herself: 'I wrote a letter to myself, to inform myself that Beverley was at that time paying his addresses to another woman'. She shows this letter signed by 'your friend unknown', to Beverley and charges him with 'falsehood', puts herself
'in a violent passion' and vows that she would 'never see him more'. But actually she intends 'only to have teased him three days and a half'. As an heiress she would inherit a substantial fortune when she comes of age, when of course she would be free to marry according to her choice. Till then she has to be under the care of her aunt and legal guardian Mrs Malaprop, whom she has to obey in matters of matrimony if she does not want to forfeit her fortune. But in the true spirit of a romantic heroine, she shows her indifference to wealth and fortune. She is enamoured of the glamour of poverty and the impossibility of falling in love with anyone who has money. She proudly tells her cousin in the course of this conversation: '... You know I lose most of my fortune if I marry without my aunt's consent, till of age; and that is what I have determined to do, ever since I knew the penalty. Nor could I love the man who would wish to wait a day for the alternative'. Therefore she dreams of spending her days, defying all authority, in delicious poverty with Ensign Beverley with whom she has fallen madly in love. She does not realise that she intends to fit in her over with her idea of love and what a lover should be. In a sense Ensign Beverley is the creation of her romantic imagination.

Lydia has set her heart on a romantic elopement and a runaway marriage, as she is opposed to a conventional marriage. Incidentally it is her fantastic dreams of a romantic marriage which create serious complications in the plot, although the obstacles to the course of her love are created by more than her childish fantasies. Her aunt Mrs Malaprop and other suitors Bob Acres, and Sir Lucius, create problems for her. Understandably she is annoyed by them. Her indignation at being 'made a mere Smithfield bargain' (V.1), a commodity to be bartered or bought and sold, is indeed justifiable. But there is something pettish about her contempt for conventional marriage because it does not have the glamour of a 'sentimental elopement'. When the identity of her Beverley is known she is bitterly resentful and feels cheated. She is shocked out of the dream he has
been indulging and nourishing, she bursts out to her cousin: '... is it not
provoking? When I thought we were coming to the prettiest distress imaginable,
to find myself made a mere Smithfield bargain at last! There, had I projected one
of the most sentimental elopements! - so becoming a disguise! - so amiable a
ladder of ropes! - Conscious moon - four horses - Scotch parson - with such
surprise to Mrs. Malaprop - and such paragraphs in the newspapers! Oh, I shall
die with disappointment!' (V.i).

How much Lydia has been steeped in sentimental fiction which has
determined her attitude to love is clear from the obvious relish with which she
recalls her assignations with Beverley on cold January nights:

'How often have I stole forth, in the coldest night in
January, and found him in the garden, stuck like a
dripping statue! There would he kneel to me in the snow,
and sneeze and cough so pathetically! he shivering with
cold and I with apprehensions! and while the freezing
blast numbed our joints, how warmly would he press me
to pity his flame, and glow with mutual ardour! Ah, Julia,
that was something like being in love'. (V.i).

The revelation of Beverley's identity gives her such a rude jolt emotionally and
makes her feel crushed under what she regards as the deceit practised on her that
in the flush of her temper she declares that she renounces him 'for ever'. Julia, to
whom she makes the confession, justly characterises her attitude to love and her
lover as 'caprice', and advises her not to inflict undeserved unhappiness to the
man who loves her "with sincerity" (V.i). It is the duel on her account, which of
course does not get fought but nevertheless threatens the life of her lover, and
makes her experience the shock of terror, that brings about a reconciliation
between her and Jack Absolute. She herself offers her hand to him and solicits 'the return of her affection' (V.2). It may be assumed that she has been educated out of her girlish dream of love for the hero of a book into love for a man of flesh and blood.

Interestingly there is an occasion early in the play, only one of its kind, when the eager sentimentalist Lydia momentarily forgets to be one, and sharply jests about Julia's troubled love affair. In their first conversation, in which they confide in each other, Lydia remarks that Julia too has been 'a slave to the caprice, the whim, the jealousy of this ungrateful Faulkland, who will ever delay assuming the right of husband'. When Julia speaks in defence of her lover, Lydia asks her, rather bluntly, had he not saved her life from drowning, would she have attached really to him? Julia admits that gratitude for being saved played part in their love affair. One would have expected this fact to appeal to the romantic Lydia. But, surprisingly, it does not. She only laughs and says: "Why a water-spaniel would have done as much. Well, I should never think of giving my heart to a man because he could swim!" (Act I, sc.2).

In Captain Jack Absolute, disguised as penniless Beverley, Lydia has a romantic enough lover, but one who can not share sentimental illusions or extravagances. He is warm-hearted but prudent where money is concerned, especially in marriage. He cannot share Lydia's romantic indifference to fortune. He would gladly welcome both happiness and fortune in marrying Lydia. Therefore he does not encourage her dream of an elopement which would deprive her of her fortune. He does not like to forego his own fortune either by disobeying his father. But it does not mean that he seeks Lydia for her money only. With a father like Sir
Anthony Absolute it would not have been difficult at all for him to marry fortune only. It is his love for Lydia that has brought him to Bath and made him assume the role of a poor ensign, concealing his identity, and it is his hope that he can bring her round to his way of thinking gradually. His plan is, as he tells Faulkland to 'prepare her gradually for the discovery (i.e., his identity) and make (himself) necessary to her before (he risks) it' (II.1) His love for her is genuine and strong enough to make him gratify temporarily her romantic inclinations and also wait for her in bitter cold on winter nights like a dripping statue to pray his addresses to her. He may talk patronisingly about her romantic excesses but she has such a hold on him that he has to toe her line and help her to indulge her fantasies. When he gets to know that Lydia and the girl his father has chosen for him are one and the same, we delight he helps her to sustain them, though all the while he enjoys the fun of it. In his interview with Lydia, who is yet to know that he is Captain Absolute, he whisperingly tells her the kind of life they would have after elopement, seemingly gloating over it:

Bring no portion to me but thy love --- what a life will we then live! Love shall be our idol and support! we will worship him with a monastic strictness; abjuring all worldly toys, --- Proud of calamity, we will enjoy the wreck of wealth, while the surrounding gloom of adversity shall make the flame of our pure love show doubly bright.

It is obvious that Captain Absolute here is deliberately parodying the language of the typical sentimental lover.

However Lydia's fantasies can be so trying that Captain Absolute cannot but feel exasperated. When his identity is revealed to Lydia, who declares that she
renounces him for ever as her dreams have fizzled out, he tells himself in an 'aside' apparently in despair: 'To what a purpose I have been plotting! a noble reward for all my schemes, upon my soul! ... a little gypsy! I did not think her romance could have made her so damned absurd either ----' (IV.3). Again towards the close of the play, a little before the duel (which of course never takes place), he tells his father, 'You know, sir, Lydia is romantic, devilish romantic, and very absurd of course ---' (V.2). His disappointment over Lydia's obstinate refusal is genuine.

In the play Jack is the playwright's agent of satire. Everyone, including his father and Lydia, provides him with opportunities of ironic amusement. But his is "not a coldly detached amusement." His teaching of Lydia, even when he scrutinises her ironically, is affectionate.

The attack against sentimental excesses in the main plot is unambiguous and straightforward. But the Julia-Faulkland plot has elicited different responses. As noted already, at least in three London newspapers between 18th and 27th January 1775, the critics expressed approbation of Faulkland and Julia, and they liked little else in the play. In the revised version of the play, there is heavier emphasis on this pair. Therefore it is contended that Sheridan in this plot intends to appease the sentimentalists, and it expresses his compromise with sentiment. As Bevis has pointed out, "Faulkland, in particular, does appear to oscillate between capricious humorist and sentimentalist, depending on which scene or speech or text is under the lens". However, as Bevis also points out, the "antisentimental prologue to the revised version was composed shortly after these alterations. If Sheridan intended to appease the sentimentalists or give rein to his own pathetic tendencies the second time around, this was a strange way of going about it."
Allardyce Nicoll justly sees in Faulkland 'the satire of sentimental torture'. Faulkland, with his annoying vacillations and self-torturing sensibility, is much too tortuous a character for light comedy. He is obsessed with the intensity of his emotions, and inflicts suffering on himself and Julia in his continual assessment of his feelings. He is an obsessive slave to fretfulness and whim who tests unjustly the loyalty and devotion of Julia, whom he loves and who loves him with a rare constancy. His vacillations become irrepressibly comic. For instance, having had no news from Julia, he is full of apprehensions about her health. So he tells Jack Absolute: 'I fear for her spirits - her health - her life! My absence may fret her' ---- O Jack! when delicate and feeling souls are separated, there is not a feature in the sky, not a movement of the elements, not an aspiration of the breeze, but hints some cause for a lover's apprehension!' (II.i). Just a little later when he is told by Bob Acres that Miss Melville is in perfect health and cheerful spirits, and was present at the last 'race ball', this man of misgivings and apprehensions explodes to the annoyance of Jack:

'I told you so! Oh! she thrives in my absence! - Dancing! But her whole feelings have been in opposition with mine:- I have been anxious, silent, pensive, sedentary- my days have been hours of care, my nights of watchfulness - she has been all health! spirit! laugh! song! dance! Oh! damned, damned levity!' (II.i).

In his cooler moments of course, Faulkland regrets that he has been 'ungenerously fretful, and madly capricious'. But even this remorse is only momentary - 'Yet I must be satisfied that she has not been so very happy in my absence' (III.2). But in her presence he cannot but torture her and himself. The worst of his tests of Julia's devotion to him is when he startles her by pretending that his life is in danger because of 'an untoward accident' which drew him into a
quarrel'. Julia's reaction is that of one whose love is unqualified - 'My heart has long known no other guardian - I now entrust my person to your honour - we will fly together' (V.i). She is no romantic in the sense Lydia is. She knows her mind, and compared with Faulkland's obsessive neurotic musings, she appears to be all sense. Therefore it comes as an unpleasant surprise that she falls into the jargon of sentimental lovers, when she assures Faulkland that she would be 'the partner of his sorrows' as well as 'the tenderest comforter': 'Then on the bosom of your wedded Julia, you may ill your keen regret to slumbering, while virtuous love, with a cherub's hand, shall smoothe the brow of upbraiding thought, and pluck the thorn of compunction.' (V.i). However, she elicits our sympathy, but not Faulkland, even when he seems to regret his conduct. 'How shall I plead to be forgiven this last unworthy effect of my restless, unsatisfied disposition?' (V.1). As Loftis points out, Faulkland "possesses neither the benevolence of Goldsmith's Honeywood and young Marlow, both of whom are also victims of insufficient self-esteem, nor the assertiveness of Jack Absolute". It is difficult for us of the present day to sympathise with Faulkland as some of Sheridan's contemporaries did or could.

That Julia is willing to forgive and accept Faulkland may not come as a surprise, given her nature. Sir Anthony Absolute, who is in a mood to see the young lovers happy, attributes all of Faulkland's faults to 'the delicacy and warmth of his affection' for Julia. That an unsentimental and blunt man like him should find Faulkland to be a man of delicate feeling comes as a surprise. Perhaps it has to be attributed to the mood of the moment. But Jack Absolute assesses his friend more correctly. Early in the play, he calls him, 'the most teasing, captious, incorrigible lover' (II.i). Then again he tells Faulkland, 'you have been confoundedly
stupid indeed' (II.i). Much later in the play when he raises doubts about the sincerity of Julia's forgiveness - '--- don't you think there is something forward, something indolent, in this haste to forgive?' - Jack tells him bluntly: 'a captious sceptic in love, a slave to fretfulness and whim, who has no difficulties but of his own making, is a subject more fit for ridicule than compassion!' (IV.3). Faulkland is indeed a caricature of a man of feeling and sensitivity. Julia is saved from being wholly sentimental because she has sense enough to see through his lapses. As she tells Lydia early in the play, 'I do not love even his faults' (I.2). She is intended to be a critic of sentimental delicacy. Therefore probably she is allowed to speak the last words in the play, although it is somewhat disconcerting to find her speak, the language of a sentimental heroine:

When hearts deserving happiness would unite their fortunes, Virtue would crown them with an unfading garland of modest hurtless flowers; but ill-judging, Passion will force the gaudier rose into the wreath, whose thorn offends them when its leaves are dropped. (V.3).

It is such a passage as this that gives room to suspect that Sheridan is compromising with sentiment. But the play taken as a whole is certainly antisenstimental. And "the story and characters of Julia and Faulkland --- have an inherent tendency to satirize or undercut the hyper-sentimentalist"25.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


8. Ibid., p.47.


12. Loftis, p.49.


17. Lefts. p.49.

18. Ibid., p.50; See also Bevis, pp.219-22.


22. Ibid., p.219.


24. Loftis, p.53.