CHAPTER SIX
REACTION AGAINST SENTIMENTAL COMEDY: SHERIDAN

Born on "John Bull's Other Island" like Goldsmith, Wilde, Shaw and Synge, Richard Brinsley Sheridan was endowed with the brilliant wit normally associated with the Irish genius. His grandfather was a great wit; his father Thomas Sheridan was a popular actor who performed with Garrick at Drury Lane in 1743; and his mother Frances wrote two successful plays, The Discovery (1763) and A Trip to Bath (1766). Richard inherited his grandfather's wit, his father's dramatic talent, and his mother's literary abilities. But he hardly made any attempt at dramatic composition until after his marriage to the charming Elizabeth Linley in 1773 when he felt he needed money badly. He wrote four remarkably successful plays during 1775-79, before taking to parliamentary and official life. In this chapter we are concerned with his two comedies, The Rivals and The School for Scandal, as the other two plays, The Duenna and The Critic, belong to different genres.

The prologue to the revised version of The Rivals shows that Sheridan found the sentimental comedy excessively serious, overweighted with ethical purpose and almost indistinguishable from tragedy. He opposed the "Sentimental Muse" because, like Goldsmith, he believed that the first business of comedy was to
amuse, not to preach or make us serious. In his dramatic burlesque, The Critic, he cast even more ridicule, after the manner of Buckingham's The Rehearsal, on the sentimental drama. Its prologue, written by Fitzpatrick, admits that comedy has in the past employed a "style too flippant for a well-bred Muse". But it is even more critical of the reformed, sentimental comedy:

Thalia, once so ill-behav'd and rude,  
Reform'd, is now become an arrant prude,  
Retailing nightly to the yawning pit  
The purest morals, undefil'd by wit!

Sheridan ridicules, in the opening scene the reliance of sentimental comedy on tears:

BANG. (Reading). "Bursts into tears and exit" -- What, is this a tragedy?

SNEER. No, that's a genteel comedy, not a translation -- only taken from the French; It is written in a style which they have lately tried to run down; the true sentimental, and nothing ridiculous in it from the beginning to the end.

As stated in chapter 3, Kelly expressed the sentimental playwrights' attitude to the stage by saying that it should be "a school of morality". In The Critic Sheridan turns this phrase ironically against sentimental drama when Sneer says in the opening scene, "I am quite of your opinion, Mrs. Dangle; the theatre, in proper hands, might certainly be made the school of morality; but now, I am sorry to say it, people seem to go there principally for their entertainment". Sheridan regarded the
preachy sentimental comedy as insipid and he heaped ridicule upon its prolific writer, Cumberland, in the character of Sir Fretful Plagiary. The latter reveals his own plagiaristic tendency when, speaking about the Drury Lane manager in the opening scene, he says to Sneer, "A dexterous plagiarist may do anything. Why, sir, for aught I know, he might take out some of the best things in my tragedy and put them into his own comedy".

Like Goldsmith, Sheridan attempted to rescue comedy from the uncomic solemnities and didactic intrusions of sentimental drama. His reaction against sentimental comedy is best seen in The Rivals and The School for Scandal. With their scenes laid at Bath and London in the atmosphere of affectation, elopements, intrigues and duelling, these gay and witty comedies reflect the contemporary society life, and have much in common with the Restoration comedy of manners. These are delightful plays because of their comic scenes, amusing characters and pleasing dialogue. The following analysis will show that there is much in them that is truly comic and anti-sentimental.

When Sheridan's first play, The Rivals, was first produced on 17 January 1775, it was a failure. The drama critic of The Town and Country Magazine raised several objections: "Few of the characters are new ... those of Faulkland and Miss Melville are the most 'outré' sentimental ones that ever appeared upon the stage: the acts are long, in many parts uninteresting, and of course tedious. But the most reprehensible part is in many low
quibbles and barbarous puns that disgrace the very name of comedy ...."\(^1\) Sheridan then cut the play to half its length, expurgating its weak puns and coarse innuendoes. In its revised form the comedy was performed on 28 January, eleven days after the original, and was a brilliant success. The writer for the *Morning Chronicle* (30 January 1775) wrote: \(^2\) "THE RIVALS will now stand its ground; and although we cannot pronounce it, with all its amendments, a comic *chef d'oeuvre*, it certainly encourages us to hope for a very capital play from the same writer at a future season; he therefore, from motives of candour and encouragement, is entitled to the patronage and favour of a generous public". In the preface Sheridan feels satisfaction at the success of the revised version. As the earliest text, now known as the Iarpent Manuscript, was not published until 1935, many of the early critics have relied on one or other of the revised texts. Though we are concerned here with the play in its revised form, we shall, in certain cases, go to the first version of the play to find out Sheridan's original intention. This should be desirable as there is some evidence to prove that the revised version was the outcome of Sheridan's compromise with critical opinion and that it did not satisfy his own taste completely. For example, Thomas Moore records Sheridan as saying


\(^2\)Cited by Price, p. 50.
in 1790, when he was preparing *The Rivals* for a new production at Drury Lane: "I have been nineteen years endeavouring to satisfy my own taste in this play, and have not yet succeeded." Sheridan has not, however, helped us to know what precisely would have satisfied his taste.

Dealing with the complexities of love, *The Rivals* has three love-stories, the pairs of lovers being Lydia Languish and Captain Absolute, Julia and Faulkland, and Malaprop and Sir Lucius. While the main interest centres on the Lydia-Absolute plot, these stories, each treated distinctly, are a constant source of variety of interest. The "rivals" of the title are, in fact, one person -- Captain Absolute (Jack) in the character of Ensign Beverley. This comic situation is effectively presented in the opening scene. We learn from a rapid conversation between two minor characters, Pag and Thomas, that the farmer's master, Captain Absolute, loves a lady of a very singular taste. She likes the Captain "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". Much of the laughter in this comedy arises

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4 *The Plays of Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, *The World's Classics* (1906; rpt. London, 1956), p. 8. All quotations from *The Rivals* (revised version) and *The School for Scandal* are from this edition. In case of two or more consecutive quotations from the same page of a play, the parenthetical page reference follows only the first quotation.
from this basic situation of the hero adopting his disguise to gratify the heroine's whim. As the spectator, unlike several characters of the play, knows Absolute's disguise, he often laughs in his superior state of enlightenment. Let us see how the play has many comic scenes which are in sharp contrast to the pathetic scenes of the sentimental comedy of the age.

In Act I, Scene ii, we learn that Mrs. Malaprop has kept her niece Lydia confined to her place ever since she heard of her whole connection with Beverley. The old lady, however, has herself fallen in love with a tall Irish baronet, Sir Lucius O'Trigger, corresponding with him under an assumed name. It is amusing to find this aging victim of love not taking any liberal view of her young niece's affair. "Since she has discovered her own frailty", says Lydia to Julia, "she is become more suspicious of mine" (12). When Lucy, Lydia's maid, announces Sir Anthony and the suspicious aunt, frantic efforts are made to push away a host of sentimental novels Lydia is so fond of, and to leave on display the more improving books. In her comic confusion Lydia thus instructs the maid: "Here, my dear Lucy, hide these books, quick, quick. Fling Peregrine Pickle under the toilet -- throw Roderick Random into the closet -- put The Innocent Adultery into The Whole Duty of Man -- thrust Lord Aimworth under the sofa -- cram Ovid behind the bolster -- there -- put The Man of Feeling into your pocket -- so, so, now lay Mrs. Chapone in sight, and
Obviously, Lydia's words are intended to provoke laughter. Again, dramatic irony is used in the scene to obtain a comic effect. The spectator knows that Absolute (Beverley) has already won Lydia's heart. He cannot, therefore, but laugh when his father, Sir Anthony, while arranging match for him, confidently declares to Mrs. Malaprop that his son "knows not a syllable of this yet" (19). There is similar humour in the fact that Mrs. Malaprop, innocent of the Absolute-Lydia affair, hopes that Sir Anthony will represent her niece to his son "as an object not altogether illegible". Her "illegible" for "ineligible" is only one of the many amusing instances of her aptitude for misapplying long words. Again, Mrs. Malaprop's growing fondness for Sir Lucius O'Trigger has already been betrayed to us by Lucy. The lady's following words to her, therefore, are laughter-provoking:

"... if ever you betray what you are intrusted with (unless it be other people's secrets to me) you forfeit my malevolence for ever; and your being a simpleton shall be no excuse for your locality" (20). Lucy, however, is by no means a "simpleton", and she knows it. It is amusing to see her, as the scene concludes, exulting over her power to further her interest by befouling those who think she can be easily deceived.

In Act II, Scene i, the fun is at the expense of Faulkland's jealousy of his beloved, Julia. Extremely anxious about her well-
being after a brief spell of separation, Faulkland tells Captain Absolute that since his heart and soul are fixed immutably on Julia alone, he has urgent apprehensions about all things connected with her. On being reassured by Absolute that she is in perfect health, he remarks that nothing on earth can give him a moment's uneasiness. But actually he feels uneasy soon when Bob Acres, a comical country squire, reveals that Julia "has been as healthy as the German Spa" (26). In other words, as Absolute points out, Faulkland is now angry with his love for not having been sick. The jealous lover sees something unkind in her being well in his absence, in her "unfeeling health" (27). We laugh at his reaction to Acres' remarks which convey in carefully ascending order of significance his news of Julia. When Acres states that she has been "the belle and spirit of the company", the distressed lover calls it innate levity. He is reassured when Jack interprets her good spirits as happy disposition. The contrast between Faulkland's increasing dismay at what he calls her thoughtlessness and his being reassured by Jack, is quite amusing. When Acres speaks about her musical accomplishments, Faulkland is dismayed at the news ("not a thought of me"). He feels somewhat comforted when Absolute asks him if music is not the food of love. But it is becoming difficult even for him to allay Faulkland's apprehensions any longer. When Acres next refers to her merry singing, Faulkland wishes she had been "temperately healthy, and
somehow, plaintively gay" (28). And when Acres refers to her recent dancing, he angrily declares that she thrives in his absence. It is, however, when Acres refers to her lively country dancing that the jealous lover's fancy conjures up the vision of the whole atmosphere in which "each amorous spark darts through every link of the chain!" (30). These reactions of Faulkland to Acres' disclosures call forth spontaneous laughter.

For some time, thus, the spectator has been delighted at the sight of the jealous Faulkland starting up wildly at every new disclosure by Acres, and then sitting down at each new reassurance by Absolute. As Faulkland stamps out, Absolute ironically quotes Faulkland's statement before Acres' entry — "nothing on earth could give him a moment's uneasiness!" This is followed by an entertaining dialogue between Jack and Acres. At first they laugh at the expense of the jealous lover. Then Absolute tells Acres in a light vein that the latter's qualities "will do some mischief among the girls here". Acres laughs but then hastens to speak about his love, Lydia ("but you know I am not my own property, my dear Lydia has forestalled me"). We laugh because Acres would talk very differently if he knew, like us, the identity of Beverley. It is amusing to hear the braggart say to Absolute, "... then if I can find out this Ensign Beverley, odds triggers and flints! I'll make him know the difference o'it" (31). The next part of the scene shows Captain Absolute unwittingly scorning
the very girl with whom he is in love. Here again, in order to obtain a comic effect, Sheridan exploits the gap between what the spectator knows (that the girl Sir Anthony has chosen for his son is Lydia herself) and what father and son know. When Captain Absolute wants to know the girl he is wanted to marry, the bluff father replies, "What's that to you, Sir? Come, give me your promise to love, and to marry her directly" (34). This starts an amusing dialogue between the two:

Abs. Sure, sir, this is not very reasonable, to summon my affections for a lady I know nothing of!

Sir Anth. I am sure, sir, 'tis more unreasonable in you to object to a lady you know nothing of.

The second scene of Act II concludes on a comic note. Lucy knows that Sir Anthony has already proposed his son for Lydia. Not knowing that Captain Absolute and Beverley are the same person, she tells Pag that his master (Beverley) now has in Captain Absolute a worse rival than Acres. While Pag is naturally anxious to convey the happy news to his master, Lucy talks as if it is a shocking development for Beverley. It is quite amusing to hear her say to Pag, "And charge him (Beverley) not to think of quarrelling with young Absolute" (40). And again: "Be sure -- bid him keep up his spirits".

In Act III, Scene i, we find Beverley in a very farcical situation. As the young spark points out, his father is determined
to force him to marry the very girl he is plotting to run away with. In an earlier scene (II, i), not knowing that the girl his father wanted him to marry was Lydia herself, he had put the old man in a frenzy by refusing to promise to marry "some mass of ugliness" (34). But now he hastens to pretend to be converted and penitent, ready to sacrifice all his inclinations to satisfy his father. As the spectator knows better than Sir Anthony, he is amused when the latter is so much impressed as to remark, "Why now, you talk sense -- absolute sense -- I never heard anything more sensible in my life. Confound you! you shall be Jack again" (42). The remainder of the scene is vastly entertaining as Jack successfully pretends to be a total stranger to Miss Lydia Languish.

The third scene of Act III bubbles with laughter. This is due mainly to the interview between Captain Absolute and Mrs. Malaprop, exploiting the disguise most effectively. Not knowing that he it is who has been carrying an intrigue with her niece in the disguise of Beverley, she says, "You are not ignorant, captain, that this giddy girl has somehow contrived to fix her affections on a beggarly, strolling, eavesdropping ensign, whom none of us have seen, and nobody knows anything of" (50-51). She not only criticizes Beverley (Captain Absolute) to his face, but also makes him read out his own letter (which refers to her as "the old weather-beaten she-dragon") and agree with her
condemnation of its author. Indeed, he tries to please the resentful lady by calling the writer (i.e. himself) an impudent scoundrel, worthy "to be hanged and quartered" (51). Iydia whom her aunt wants to marry Captain Absolute is seen dreading his arrival. To her great joy, however, the "stranger" before her happens to be Beverley himself. His explanation for gaining access to her is amusing. Knowing that his new rival was to come here, he says, he managed to keep him away and has passed himself on Mrs. Malaprop for Absolute. In her anxiety to find out how the little hussy behaves, Mrs. Malaprop is seen listening secretly to private conversation between the lovers. The spectators are greatly amused by the spectacle of two women, both deceived, but deceived differently.

The first scene of Act IV is again a delightful one. Bob Acres in the preceding scene referred to Beverley as his rival in love and, after listening to Sir Lucius, suddenly felt inspired to challenge him (Beverley) directly (59). Still ignorant that this Beverley is no other than his friend Captain Absolute, he speaks to Absolute about his determination to fight this rival, and requests him to find him out and convey his challenge to him. "Well, give it to me", replies Absolute, "and trust me he gets it" (64). Thus the conversation between the two is amusing, as usual, because of the mistaken-identity situation. Also amusing is the contrast between Acres' brave postures in the preceding
scene and his present cowardice. He urges Absolute to build up his reputation as a fighter before his rival so that he may not show up for fear (65-66).

The second scene of Act IV, in which Sir Anthony and Mrs. Malaprop try to make Jack and Lydia confront each other, fills the stage with laughter. Mrs. Malaprop is disappointed that the Beverley-minded Lydia has no intention to speak to, or look at, Captain Absolute. As for Absolute himself, he would even have given his father the slip had he not been held by force. He knows that the moment Lydia sees or hears him, his pose would be exposed. In vain does he try to expostulate with his father to leave them together. We are amused by the old man being in no mood to stir at all. When Absolute is made to speak to Lydia, he does it softly. She naturally starts up at the sound of her Beverley's voice, saying, "Is this possible! my Beverley! — how can this be? — my Beverley?" (69). To our amusement, Sir Anthony is inclined at first to regard her as mad, but soon suspects his son of having played them a rogue's trick: "Are you my son or not? — answer for your mother, you dog, if you won't for me" (70). Absolute finally explains why he had to assume the name of Beverley. The immediate reaction of the romantic Lydia to his disclosure is one of comic disappointment. At the collapse of her romantic longings, she exclaims, "So! — there will be no elopement after all!" Truth now dawns even upon Mrs. Malaprop;
she realizes Jack's connection with the letter which called her the old weather-beaten she-dragon: "O mercy! -- was it you that reflected on my parts of speech?" (71).

Thus, The Rivals has numerous delightful scenes because of amusing situations and crisp dialogue, though it lacks the polished sparkle of The School for Scandal. The broad and farcical humour of this artificial comedy often springs from the absurd contrasts of situations in which the various characters are involved. This is particularly seen in the interviews between Acres and Captain Absolute, Lucy and Sir Lucius, Mrs. Malaprop and Captain Absolute, and Lydia and "Beverley". Sheridan shows great dexterity in using "mistaken identity" and "cross-purposes" to heighten the comic effect. The author of The Rivals deserves praise for the clever management of its complicated action, the brilliant vivacity of its dialogue, and an unusual sense of theatrical effectiveness.

As for characterization, Sheridan is not concerned with any deep or subtle analysis of character. Since his main aim is to provide entertainment by poking fun at the kind of society he has seen at Bath, certain types vividly suggested and cleverly exaggerated are enough to his purpose. In The Rivals, as also in The School for Scandal, he delineates character with broad strokes, suggesting farcical exaggeration. The very names of the characters such as Languish and Absolute suggest their kinship
with the "humour comedy". Indeed, The Rivals is much similar\(^5\) to Jonson's Every Man in His Humour, as both plays are compounds of humour characters. Sheridan's characters are, however, remarkably contrasted, varied and diverting. He gives new life to the stock stage characters like Sir Anthony (irascible father), Mrs. Malaprop (tough aunt) and Bob Acres (reluctant duellist). Freshly conceived, these familiar figures become such memorable realities that Sheridan can hardly be accused of plagiarism.

While the characters of the sentimental comedy, being serious and moralizing, often arouse our sympathy, those of Sheridan are always lively and amusing, representing the fashionable contemporary society with which Sheridan was familiar, and revealing his wit and talent for epigram.

Lydia Languish is quite amusing in her romantic fripperies. True to her name, she languishes as she sits on the sofa with a book in her hand (10). A devourer of romances, some of her favourite books are The Reward of Constancy, The Mistakes of the Heart, The Delicate Distress, The Tears of Sensibility and The Sentimental Journey. The "charming sentimental hoyden",\(^6\) to use Hazlitt's phrase, cannot think of having a husband without

\(^5\)P. Fijn van Draat, "Sheridan's Rivals and Ben Jonson's Every Man in His Humour", Neophilologus, 18 (1932), 44-50, has even claimed Jonson's play as an actual source for Sheridan's.

\(^6\)Hazlitt, English Comic Writers, p. 240.
elopement. Discovering that the romantic Beverley is none other than the eligible Absolute, she quarrels with her lover for shattering her hopes of elopement and paving the way for a humdrum wedding. Later she says she will die with disappointment. In her view the lovers must meet with strong opposition from parents or guardians and they must enjoy the thrill of exchanging forbidden letters. She quarrels with Absolute simply because she is disappointed that they have never had a quarrel. "So, last Thursday", she tells Julia, "I wrote a letter to myself, to inform myself that Beverley was at that time paying his addresses to another woman. I signed it your friend unknown, showed it to Beverley, charged him with his falsehood, put myself in a violent passion, and vowed I'd never see him more" (13). She seems to be off her head due to her reading of the sentimental novels of the circulating library, and the several lovers her beauty has attracted.

Professor Price suggests that she is descended from George Colman's Polly in Polly Honeycomb, first performed in 1760 and revived on 10 February 1773. And Bernbaum notices Lydia's similarity to Steele's Biddy Tipkin in The Tender Husband. But it is better to refrain, while speaking of the descent of Lydia from these heroines, from claiming with too much assurance the indebtedness of Sheridan to the earlier writers. Sheridan does

7Price, Dramatic Works of Sheridan, I, 38.
not use passages or lines similar to Steele's or Colman's. Lydia is much more sophisticated than Biddy in her romanticism. Again, Sheridan satirizes, in the person of Lydia, the romantic novel nonsense which may be termed sentimental. But Biddy is not satirically conceived; she is never criticised for her sentimentalism by any character except her aunt who cannot be regarded as a spokesman for acceptable behaviour. Animated by the spirit of pure bookish romance, Lydia sees herself as a story-book heroine, and loves to be courted in the form prescribed by the romantic, sentimental literature. Her determination to marry an impoverished but romantic young officer springs from two dearly held modish sentiments -- that poverty is ennobling and that one must love without thinking of material gain. The absurdity of her sentiments or the nonsense of her fantasies is exposed by the elaborate deception that Jack Absolute is obliged to practise on her for holding her affection.

But although Jack Absolute obliges her by masquerading as a poor half-pay officer and by pursuing her despite "an old tough aunt in the way", he would not oblige her further by eloping with her as that will be adverse to his own interests. In this, he is hardly different from the fortune-hunter of the Restoration comedy.

Faulk. Why don't you persuade her to go off with you at once?

Abs. What, and lose two-thirds of her fortune? You forget that, my friend. No, no, I could have brought her to that long ago (23).
Unlike Lydia, he is capable of distinguishing romance from real life and achieving what he desires — marriage with Lydia without losing two-thirds of her fortune which she regards as burden on the wings of love. "Come, come", he says to the sullen girl, "we must lay aside some of our romance — a little wealth and comfort may be endured after all" (72).

Mrs. Malaprop is a delightful comic personage. Her name is taken from the French "mal a propos" or "out-of-place". It is her great characteristic to treat all she meets to "her select words so ingeniously misapplied, without being mispronounced"(15). Whenever she speaks, her incomparable blunders make her the cause of laughter in the audience. In Act I, Scene ii, she is critical of Lydia's infatuation for Beverley and wants the girl to "illiterate" (i.e. "obliterate") the fellow from her memory. When Lydia argues with her, she says, "Now don't attempt to extirpate ("exculpate") yourself from the matter; you know I have proof incontrovertible ("incontrovertible") of it" (16-17). Sir Anthony, thinking that Lydia's intractability can be traced to her reading, expresses himself against teaching girls to read: "Had I a thousand daughters, by Heaven! I'd as soon have them taught the black art as their alphabet!" (17). This prompts Mrs. Malaprop to remark, "Nay, nay, Sir Anthony, you are an absolute misanthropy ("misogynist")". She is indeed an expert in the most improper use of words. This is perhaps best seen when
she expresses her viewpoint on what a woman should know. Only
the latter half of the passage may be quoted:

Then, sir, she should have a supercilious knowledge in
accounts; and as she grew up, I would have her instructed
in geometry, that she might know something of the contagious
countries; -- but above all, Sir Anthony, she should be
mistr ess of orthodoxy, that she might not misspell, and
mispronounce words so shamefully as girls usually do; and
likewise that she might reprehend the true meaning of what
she is saying. This, Sir Anthony, is what I would have a
woman know; -- and I don't think there is a superstitious
article in it (18).

It is a big joke, indeed, that she of all persons should not like
a woman to misspell or mispronounce words. In her short scene
with Captain Absolute (III, iii), she tells him that it would be
a sufficient "accommodation" that he is Sir Anthony's son. She
believes him to be "the very pineapple of politeness". In this
scene, she is seen in possession of Beverley's last note to Lydia
in which he has contemptuously referred to the words she uses
while talking. Her humour being vanity, she thus delivers
herself: "There, sir, an attack upon my language! what do you
think of that? -- an aspersion upon my parts of speech! was ever
such a brute! Sure, if I reprehend anything in this world, it
is the use of my oracular tongue, and a nice derangement of
epitaphs!" (51). She often amuses us because of her unshakable
sense of personal worth.

Mrs. Malaprop is apologetic to Absolute for what she calls
India's shocking rudeness. She declares that no hope can be based on her because "she's as headstrong as an allegory on the banks of Nile" (55). She cannot understand what Lydia can really object to in Absolute. Praising him for the kind of language he uses, she exclaims, "His physiognomy so grammatical!" (66). She stresses the nobility of his presence, saying that on seeing him she was reminded of Hamlet's words (about the nobility of his father). But the way she misquotes and mispronounces the passage in Hamlet (III, iv), is one of the delights of this scene. There are many other amusing instances of the words "ingeniously misapplied" by her. For example, she says "malevolence" (20) for "benevolence", "locality" for "loquacity", "caparison" (66) for "comparison", "affluence" (67) for "influence", "analysed" (74) for "paralysed", and "antistrophe" (80) for "catastrophe".

Mrs. Malaprop is a familiar stage character, going back in a straight line through Fielding's Mrs. Slipslop in Joseph Andrews to Shakespeare's Dogberry in Much Ado About Nothing. Mrs. Tryfort in A Journey to Bath, an unfinished comedy of Sheridan's mother, is described as "the vainest poor creature, and the fondest of hard words, which without miscalling, she always takes care to misapply". But even if these characters evoked the idea of Mrs. Malaprop, she is freshly conceived by Sheridan and has become

8Sheridan's Plays now printed as he wrote them and his Mother's unpublished Comedy A Journey to Bath, ed. W.F. Rae (London, 1902), p. 273.
immortal. None of her precursors has been held up to ridicule exactly like her. Even more than Bob Acres, the queen of the dictionary looks ludicrous in the romantic fervour with which she writes letters under a pen name with disastrous consequences. Her rare expressions, which Sir Lucius often finds unintelligible, provide great comic moments.

Sir Anthony, the embodiment of parental tyranny, often amuses us by his choleric temper. His words to Mrs. Malaprop suggest that he cannot imagine or brook any objection from his son: "... Jack knows that the least demur puts me in a frenzy directly. My process was always very simple: in their younger days 'twas 'Jack, do this'; -- if he demurred, I knocked him down -- and if he grumbled at that, I always sent him out of the room" (19). In his bluster and absolutism, he can be viewed as Sheridan's rendering of a Jonsonian humour after the manner of Restoration dramatists. When Jack refuses to marry where he likes, he shouts at him, "Now d—n me! if ever I call you Jack again while I live!" (34). Jack has no business to have any option even in the matter of marriage. This is how he intimidates his protesting son: "Z—ds sirrah! the lady shall be as ugly as I choose: she shall have a hump on each shoulder; she shall be as crooked as the Crescent; her one eye shall roll like the bull's in Cox's Museum; she shall have a skin like a mummy, and the beard of a Jew -- she shall be all this, sirrah! -- yet I will
make you ogle her all day, and sit up all night to write sonnets on her beauty" (34-35).

Once thwarted by his son, he is wrath personified. Pag presents a graphic picture of the angry man before his master:
"... he comes downstairs eight or ten steps at a time -- muttering, growling, and thumping the banisters all the way: I, and the cook's dog, stand bowing at the door — rap! he gives me a stroke on the head with his cane, bids me carry that to my master, then kicking the poor turnspit into the area, d -- ns us all for a puppy triumvirate!" (36). Sir Anthony's quick temper is appeased as readily as it is roused. Angry with Jack, he decides never to see him any more. Jack discovers that it is Lydia herself he is required to marry and he, therefore, pretends to submit wholly to his father's will. Sir Anthony soon declares, "Confound you! You shall be Jack again" (42).

Sir Anthony is gay at heart. He amuses us by his description of the eyes, cheeks and lips of Lydia after calling her "blooming, love-breathing seventeen" (43). He will shortly arrange an interview between Jack and Lydia. "Come along", he says to his son, "I'll never forgive you, if you don't come back stark mad with rapture and impatience — if you don't, egad, I'll marry the girl myself!" (44). When Lydia bursts into tears after quarrelling with Absolute, Sir Anthony at once concludes that his son has been too ardent in his love to her during the short time
the two have been together. Laughing heartily, he says, "Come, no excuses, Jack; why, your father, you rogue, was so before you: the blood of the Absolutes was always impatient" (74). When Mrs. Malaprop is finally rejected by Sir Lucius, Sir Anthony's characteristic advice to her is amusing: "Come, Mrs. Malaprop, don't be cast down -- you are in your bloom yet" (99). Sir Anthony is a rake grown old, but not too old to admire the beauty of a young girl like Lydia: "Nay, but, Jack, such eyes! such eyes! so innocently wild! so bashfully irresolute! Not a glance but speaks and kindles some thought of love! Then, Jack, her cheeks! her cheeks, Jack! so deeply blushing at the insinuations of her tell-tale eyes! Then, Jack, her lips! Oh, Jack, lips smiling at their own discretion; and if not smiling, more sweetly pouting; more lovely in sullenness!" (43).

In the first version of The Rivals, however, Sir Anthony has been presented with greater boldness. Here it is as if he has breezed in from one of the Restoration plays. He speaks to Mrs. Malaprop of the evils of the circulating library in language as lewd as that of the Restoration comedy: "Oh, our London nunneries are more obliged to them than to all the Recruiting Officers in the Kingdom, -- the vicious trash they send forth, not only disturbs the imagination of our girls, but sets their passions afloat -- and then, rely on it, Mrs. Malaprop, if they cannot find an Ooroondates they will take up with Thomas" (I, ii, Larpent.
Such language has caused a modern critic to observe that there is "a grossness, almost a goatishness" about Sheridan's first portrayal of Sir Anthony. The fact is that Sheridan revived the cheerful bawdiness of the Restoration comedy because he was convinced that while sentimentalism held sway, true, laughing comedy was impossible. But as the play was unsuccessful at its first opening at Covent Garden, he thought it necessary to expunge "low" quibbles, licentious speeches and direct sexual allusions.

In the revised version, Sir Anthony becomes, as Professor Purdy remarks, "a shadow of his Restoration self". This is shown by the disappearance of Sir Anthony's "London nunneries" speech (cited above), and of the more ribald of his comments on his son's behaviour to Lydia (IV, ii). For example, instead of "Why, you confounded young rogue, couldn't you wait for the parson, you must be in such a damn'd hurry?" we have "now I see it -- you have been too lively, Jack" (74). The lascivious Sir Anthony becomes in the revised version an impatient, irritable and blustering old man, though sometimes he speaks gaily.

Bob Acres provides much laughing matter in the play because of his vanity, boastfulness and cowardice. In Act III, Scene iv, we see him just dressed, assuming the airs of a beau. His

pretensions in costume and hair-style arouse our laughter in the context of several references which his man, David, makes to his earthy origin. "Aye, David", says the lively coxcomb, "there's nothing like polishing". He looks ridiculous in his clumsy attempts to acquire the style of a gentleman as a means to winning Lydia's affection. He is himself made to express contempt for the complexities of French dancing: "... mine are true-born English legs -- they don't understand their curst French lingo! -- their pas this, and pas that, and pas t'other! -- damn me! my feet don't like to be called Paws! No, 'tis certain I have most Antigallican toes!" (57).

Acres, having a rival in Beverley, is urged to fight him by Sir Lucius, an enthusiast for duelling. After making a couple of cowardly statements he suddenly finds himself anxious to vindicate his honour. Misled by the sentimental novels, Lydia would doubtless love a duel to be fought in her name. In Bob's ridiculous efforts to live up to her standards, the standards themselves are held up to ridicule. After listening to Sir Lucius, he says, "Your words are a grenadier's march to my heart! I believe courage must be catching! I certainly do feel a kind of valour rising as it were -- a kind of courage, as I may say. Odds flints, pans, and triggers! I'll challenge him directly" (59). In Act IV, Scene i, he pretentiously talks to David in terms of honour: "But my honour, David, my honour! I must be very careful of my honour"
(62). He asks him to think what it would be to disgrace his ancestors. When David continues arguing against duelling, he is contemptuously dismissed: "Get along, you cowardly, dastardly, croaking raven" (64).

Acres' essential cowardice, however, provokes laughter. He finds his valour vanishing about the time appointed for duel. Roused to a fever-pitch of dithering cowardice, he thus confesses: "Sir Lucius -- I doubt it is going -- yes -- my valour is certainly going! -- it is sneaking off! I feel it oozing out as it were at the palms of my hands!" (94). Fortunately for the coward, his rival Beverley turns out to be his friend Absolute. So he declines to fight. As soon as Lydia solicits the return of Absolute's affection, Acres resigns all claim to her: "Mind, I give up all my claim -- I make no pretensions to anything in the world -- and if I can't get a wife without fighting for her, by my valour! I'll live a bachelor" (98).

Bob Acres reminds us of Sir Andrew Aguecheek, the ridiculous foppish knight in Shakespeare's Twelfth Night. Draat argues that Sheridan drew the character of Acres from Jonson's Stephen and Bobadil in Every Man in His Humour. He, however, admits that instead of being a slavish imitation of these characters, Acres is the original work of genius. Indeed, the unwilling duellist is nowhere worked out so effectively as in The Rivals.

Sir Lucius O'Trigger amuses us as his love for Lydia involves him with Mrs. Malaprop. It is through Lucy, whom he calls his little ambassadress, that he gets amatory letters from "Delia" (Mrs. Malaprop). The clever Lucy knows that she would not be paid by him if he knew that his Delia was an old lady of about fifty. In blissful ignorance, he continues enjoying letters from the dear creature. In Act II, Scene ii, her love-letter, full of malapropisms, elicits an amusing comment from Sir Lucius: "Upon my conscience, Lucy, your lady is a great mistress of language. Faith, she's quite the queen of the dictionary!" (38). A little later, he says to Lucy, "Oh, tell her, I'll make her the best husband in the world, and Lady O'Trigger into the bargain!" (39). His disappointment is comical when he discovers (V, iii) the true nature of his love-affair. Lydia having accepted Absolute, Sir Lucius remarks, "And, to show you I am not ungrateful, Captain Absolute! since you have taken that lady from me, I'll give you my Delia into the bargain" (99). Sir Lucius also amuses us by his most scrupulous observance of gentlemanly conventions, his over-particularity about the etiquette of the duel. A small provocation is enough to provoke this fire-eating Irishman to choose swords and pistols. We enjoy seeing how at his instigation the cowardly Acres asks Captain Absolute to carry his challenge to Beverley. His final refusal to fight provokes Sir Lucius to remark: "Upon my conscience, Mr. Acres, your valour has oozed
away with a vengeance:” (96).

Thus, the portrayal of Sir Lucius shows Sheridan’s anti-sentimentalism even more clearly than that of the other characters in the play. As shown in Chapter 4 above, the sentimental playwright, Cumberland, endowed his Irishman O’Flaherty with a tender heart and made him profess noble sentiments. A similar idealization of the Irish character was noted in Hugh Kelly’s Connolly in The School for Wives. Sheridan resists the tide of sentimentalism by excluding any softening elements from his Irishman. But this has been done more unmistakably in the first version of the play where there is little method in Lucius’s madness and his bellicosity can be directed to any target. He is so coarse that he does not recognize the words of his own dictated challenge:

Sir Anthony. Gad’s life, Sir Lucius, then you have challeng’d yourself.

Sir Lucius. Challenged myself! — Hell and Fury, Sir, what do you mean? ’Sblood! I would resent an affront from myself, as soon as from another gentleman. And if my honour were concern’d in it, my right hand should measure swords with my left: (V, iii, Larpent MS).

He is as coarse as any Restoration character in his conversation with Lucy after she has told him that Jack Absolute has appeared as yet another rival for Lydia’s affection. “O sure”, says he, “I know that Captain Absolute, he wants to marry Miss Languish
too, does he? 0, if I find it so, I'll be bound I settle matters with him presently -- well, I can't think why the Lady's (sic) should be so fond of these officers! unless it be a touch of the Old Serpent in them, that makes the little creatures be caught like Vipers, with a bit of red cloth" (II, ii, Larpent MS). In the later version this speech disappears.

Sheridan must have been really disappointed at the harsh reaction of the play's first critics to his characterization of Sir Lucius. The Morning Chronicle of 18 January 1775, for example, remarked that "This representation of Sir Lucius is indeed an affront to the common sense of an audience, and is so far from giving the manners of our brave and worthy neighbours".11 And "A Briton" wrote in the Morning Post of 21 January 1775:

"... it is the first time I ever remember to have seen so villainous a portrait of an Irish Gentleman, permitted so openly to insult the country upon the boards of an English theatre".12

Determined to give no offence again to the influential critics, Sheridan felt obliged to submit Sir Lucius to a considerable change. In the revised version he is much less offensive and ridiculous than before. He has, to use Lucy's words, "too much pride and delicacy to sacrifice the feelings of

11 Cited by Price, Dramatic Works of Sheridan, I, 43.
12 Cited by Price, I, 47.
a gentleman to the necessities of his fortune" (21). It is not by entirely mercenary motives that he is prompted to pursue Lydia; he seems to have some genuine feeling for her. And, in the end, he is not made to pair off with Mrs. Malaprop as in the original version. But although Sir Incius's original function as an antidote to the sentimental creations of Kelly and Cumberland is somewhat lost in the revised version, he is still a far cry from O'Flaherty and Connolly, as he is quite funny and unsentimental.

The servants play significant parts in the play. Their reactions to the antics of their masters amuse us by exposing the absurdity of the fashionable follies and pretensions. David, the servant of Bob Acres, is amazed at his master's anxiety to acquire elegance. When Acres, just dressed, says that dress is certainly important, he is clever enough to tickle his vanity:

'Tis all in all, I think -- difference! why, an' you were to go now to Clod Hall I am certain the old lady wouldn't know you: Master Butler wouldn't believe his own eyes, and Mrs. Pickle would cry, "lard presarve me!" our dairymaid would come giggling to the door, and I warrant Dolly Tester, your honour's favourite, would blush like my waistcoat. Oons! I'll hold a gallon, there an't a dog in the house but would bark, and I question whether Phillis would wag a hair of her tail! (56-57).

Lydia's maid, Lucy, is expert at making capital of the folly and vanity of those who send her on errands. Mrs. Malaprop who uses Lucy to carry her love-letters to Sir Incius asks her to be
careful not to let her simplicity be imposed upon. She, however, laughs at Mrs. Malaprop's ignorance of her cleverness: "Let
girls in my station be as fond as they please of appearing expert,
and knowing in their trusts; commend me to a mask of silliness,
and a pair of sharp eyes for my own interest under it!" (20).
She also reduces Sir Lucius to the level of a dupe as she deceives
him into believing that "he was corresponding, not with the aunt,
but with the niece" (21).

It is, however, Jack's servant, Fag, who is most amusing
because of his brilliant talk and pretentious aping of his master.
In the opening scene, he regards it as a sign of incivility to
shake hands with gloves (7). He puzzles Thomas by stating that
he serves not Absolute but ensign Beverley. He says in reply to
Thomas, "Why then the cause of all this is -- Love -- Love,
Thomas, who ... has been a masquerader ever since the days of
Jupiter" (8). In response to another query, this brilliant talker
thus describes Lydia's fortune: "Z -- ds ! Thomas, she could pay
the national debt as easily as I could my washerwoman! -- she has
a lapdog that eats out of gold, -- she feeds her parrot with small
pears, -- and all her thread-papers are made of bank-notes!"
His attitude to the Bath routine and its provincial closing-time
is treated with satirical humour: "... 'tis a good lounge; in
the morning we go to the pump-room (though neither my master nor
I drink the waters); after breakfast we saunter on the Parades or
play a game at billiards; at night we dance; but damned the place, I'm tired of it; their regular hours stupefy me — not a fiddle nor a card after eleven!" (9). In Act II, Scene i, when Absolute calls him blockhead, and forbids him to say more than is necessary, he replies in his usual artificial style, "I beg pardon, sir — I beg pardon — but, with submission, a lie is nothing unless one supports it. Sir, whenever I draw on my invention for a good current lie, I always forge endorsements as well as the bill" (22). In the same scene, after having given a vivid picture of Sir Anthony's abnormal angry behaviour, Fag says to his master, "Upon my credit, sir, were I in your place, and found my father such very bad company, I should certainly drop his acquaintance" (36). In Act V, Scene i, both Lydia and Julia are anxious to know from Fag facts about Jack's involvement in a duel. But he strains their patience by his elegant circumlocutions (36-87). Fag is only partially loyal to his master. Not supposed to disclose his secrets, he hardly leaves anything about him unsaid while talking to Thomas in the opening scene of the play. Yet, he promptly denies having told Thomas even a syllable (22). Like David, Fag feels amused at the inexplicable whims of his superiors, Jack and Lydia: "Hark'ee, Thomas, my 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" (8).
The Rivals, then, is different from the lachrymose sentimental comedies of the eighteenth century not only because of its delightful situations but also its witty and amusing characters like those of Congreve, Wilde and Shaw. That Sheridan had more wit and satire in his approach to comedy than even Goldsmith is seen in Lydia's romantic fancies, Sir Anthony's choleric temper, Mrs. Malaprop's "derangement of epitaphs", Sir Lucius's farcical exaggeration, Acres' buffoonery, and Pag's pretensions. All this cannot but delight any audience.

The Rivals is doubtless gay and unsentimental, and it was intended to be so. We must, therefore, differ with those critics who insist on speaking of Sheridan's, as of Goldsmith's, surrender to the popular taste for sentimentalism. While they acknowledge the remarkable brilliance of the comic portions of The Rivals, they maintain that the Julia-Paulkland sub-plot makes the play open to charges of sentimentalism. Nettleton, who discusses the play at length, remarks in the context of the sub-plot:

"Like Goldsmith, Sheridan could not at once rid himself wholly of the contagion of the sentimentality which he attacked". Bernbaum points out that Sheridan thought it expedient to found the sub-plot on a sentimental basis. He quotes from the text several times to show that Julia, instead of protesting against

\[Drama\ of\ the\ Restoration,\ pp.\ 293-99.\]
Paulkland's hypersensitiveness and his sentimental attitude to life, admires him for his tenderness and reforms him by her gentleness. Many of the subsequent critics have commented in the same vein on Sheridan's presentation of the sentimental lovers. Professor Thorndike thinks that "the emotional refinements of Faulkland and Julia are quite in the style of the sentimental drama and equally dull", and Boas merely alludes to the "traditional high-flown diction" of the Julia-Faulkland plot. Professor Kaul observes that "the problem of sentimentality looms large within the play, in the shape of Julia and her lover, Faulkland". It is not difficult to see that much of this criticism is rather misleading.

To be sure, Paulkland is a sentimental character who is liked by Julia, the antithesis of the gay heroine. As already shown in connection with The Good-Natur'd Man, a play may have a few sentimental elements and yet be essentially gay and unsentimental. We cannot classify Sheridan with the sentimental playwrights merely because he also used one or more of their devices. What is important is not the presence of certain

14 The Drama of Sensibility, pp. 252-53.
15 English Comedy, p. 431.
16 Eighteenth-Century Drama, p. 349.
sentimental elements in *The Rivals*, but the real function of such elements. An anti-sentimental playwright may have to use, for the sake of satire, some parts of the sentimental pattern. In order to satirize the sentimental comedy, Sheridan, like Goldsmith, did make use of familiar theatrical types and situations. But we must see how he has used stock materials to achieve different tone. To be sure, the contemporary critics approved of the sentimental scenes between Julia and Faulkland (as in the first version) and found them favourably received by the audience. A critic writing in *The Town and Country Magazine* (13 January 1775) remarks that the characters of Faulkland and Julia are "the most outré sentimental ones that ever appeared upon the stage", and "One of the Pit", writing in *The Morning Chronicle* (27 January 1775), speaks approvingly of the play's most touching sentimental scenes as a result of "the exquisite refinement in his (Faulkland's) disposition, opposed to the noble simplicity, tenderness, and candour of Julia's". John Bernard writes that Faulkland and Julia were intended by Sheridan "to conciliate the sentimentalists" and that they were "most favourably received". These writers

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18. M. Gabriel and P. Mueschke, "Two Contemporary Sources of Sheridan's *The Rivals*", *PMLA*, 43 (1928), 237-50, argue that the play is compounded of stock characters and situations.


seem to feel that Sheridan intended the sentimental scenes between Julia and Faulkland to be taken seriously. But although Sheridan has not divulged his own intention, we can easily see that it was satirical and that he has deftly turned Faulkland, if not Julia, to comic effect.

While Cibber, Steele, Moore, Whitehead, Mrs. Griffith, Cumberland, and Mrs. Cowley intend their sentimental characters to be admired for their essential goodness and benevolence, Sheridan, like Goldsmith, intends his to be ridiculed. His presentation of Faulkland reveals his amused impatience with the traditional sentimental hero. In Act II, Scene i, Faulkland's notion that some shower of rain, some rude blast of wind, the heat of the noon or the evening dews could endanger his Julia's life, looks absurd by reference to everyday experience. He tells Jack that he will be exceedingly happy if he is convinced that Julia is well. When he learns that she has already arrived in Bath, he feels reassured to the extent of saying, "... nothing on earth can give me a moment's uneasiness". But soon there is a considerable fun at the expense of his apprehensions of the dangers of every situation; he becomes increasingly ridiculous in his mounting unease and dismay at Acres' description of Julia's behaviour in the country -- her high spirits, gay singing and country dancing. He sees male libertinism lurking behind innocent pleasures ("each amorous spark darts through every link of the
chain`). Here he is clearly a satirical portrait of the Rake's antithesis. As he stamps out in protest against her "unfeeling health", Jack ironically quotes "nothing on earth could give him a moment's uneasiness!" (30). His absurd jealousy stands out in sharp relief against the attitude of Jack Absolute and Bob Acres. Lydia finds it hard to understand how Julia can continue to be "a slave to the caprice, the whim, the jealousy of this ungrateful Paulkland" (14). Julia's tortuous defence of his personality fails to convince her. Indeed, she cannot help suspecting that Julia loves him only out of gratitude for his once having saved her life. "But tell me candidly, Julia," says she, "had he never saved your life, do you think you should have been attached to him as you are?" (15).

Like Honeywood, Paulkland curses his own stupidity. In his absurdly sentimental speech (III, ii), he exclaims, "I am ever ungenerously fretful and madly capricious!" (45). He is unhappy to learn that Julia has not been evidently unhappy during his short absence. He complains of her high spirits while in Devonshire: "For such is my temper, Julia, that I should regard every mirthful moment in your absence as a treason to constancy: the mutual tear that steals down the cheek of parting lovers is a compact that no smile shall live there till they meet again" (46). Such sentimental utterances, however, have a satirical or comic intent as they make him only a wet blanket. His childish
need to be reassured that Julia sang without mirth, that she thought of Faulkland while dancing, increases his comic potential. His disgusting temper and fretful disposition cause even generous and forgiving Julia to remark, "Oh! you torture me to the heart! I cannot bear it" (47). As she makes her tearful exit, he curses himself for his gnawing doubts: "'Sdeath! what a brute am I to use her thus!" (48).

In Act IV, Scene iii, when Faulkland admits to Jack Absolute that he has treated Julia cruelly, he replies, "By heavens! Faulkland, you don't deserve her" (78). Just then Faulkland receives Julia's letter which says that she is ready to be reconciled to him despite his provocative remarks. But the sullen lover is still far from being happy. "You never hear anything", says Jack, "that would make another man bless himself, but you immediately d—n it with a but" (79). But Faulkland sees some kind of indelicacy in Julia's haste to forgive him: "Women should never sue for reconciliation: that should always come from us". Jack has no patience with the vile suspicions of this incorrigible fool. He leaves, saying, "... but a captious sceptic in love, a slave to fretfulness and whim — who has no difficulties but of his own creating — is a subject more fit for ridicule than compassion!" This is a highly significant observation. Whereas the heroes of sentimental comedies arouse our compassion in their distress, the distressed Faulkland is
"a subject more fit for ridicule than compassion". Hazlitt rightly finds Faulkland "determined on disappointment, and enamoured with suspicion". His misery, however, is shown as nothing more than a monstrous self-indulgence; it is a perversion of that sensitivity to others' feelings which was the outstanding quality of the sentimental heroes of Steele and Cumberland.

In order to test Julia's affection for him, Faulkland speaks to her (Act V, Scene i) of his imaginary misfortune and is soon convinced of her total devotion to him: "Julia, I have proved you to the quick! and with this useless device I throw away all my doubts" (62). But she rightly resents this shabby deceit and trifling with her sincerity. She leaves in anger after remarking how his temper has so far prevented "the performance of their solemn engagement". The fool again curses his stupidity which has nearly deprived him for ever of his love: "She's gone! -- for ever! ... O fool! -- dolt! -- barbarian!" (83). He must thank his stars as Julia forgives him in the end and accepts him in marriage.

In Faulkland, Sheridan has doubtless made the sentimental lover a figure of fun. Not that he is the first to suggest the absurdities of sentimentalism like this. In an interesting

21 English Comic Writers, p. 240.
article Bloch shows how attempts to satirize the sentimental lover had been made before Faulkland appeared on the stage.\textsuperscript{22} Not many of them, however, possess Sheridan's ability to treat a sentimentalist like Faulkland in a spirit of genuine comedy. Faulkland's "humour" rouses much more laughter than sympathy. In a letter to *Times Literary Supplement* (10 January 1929), Nigel Playfair, a champion of Sheridan and the Restoration playwrights, wrote: "In my production of a year or two ago Faulkland, as played by Mr. Claude Rains, uncut, not only was acclaimed by practically every critic as the outstanding feature of the performance, but his scenes drew from the audience such laughter as honestly I have seldom heard in the theatre". It may safely be said that Faulkland is meant for a skit.

Julia, however, is hardly laughable. Cast in the sentimental mould, she is almost as colourless as Indiana, Fidelia, Harriot Evans, and Louisa Dudley. But she is certainly not intended to be as admirable as these heroines of sentimental comedies. Her belief that her lover is "too noble to be jealous" (14) is absurd. So are her excuses for loving him: "Unused to the fopperies of love, he is negligent of the little duties expected from a lover". She seems to resent his baseless suspicions about her behaviour in the country: "Can the idle

reports of a silly boor (Acres) weigh in your breast against my tried affection?" (46). She does not, however, take long to rely on Faulkland's own reflections to reproach him for being unkind to her. This causes Faulkland to remark that there is "something indelicate" (79) in her haste to forgive him. When she learns of Faulkland's "misfortune", her soul is oppressed with sorrow. She assures him that she would be his "tenderest comforter" in his sorrows. All this, however, looks funny because the audience knows that his misfortune is only imaginary. It is, therefore, difficult to agree with Professor Kaul when he says, "Julia ... is presented without question as the epitome of goodness, patience, sense, sensibility, and all the other desirable feminine virtues. The heroine of weighty maxims and moral lectures, she is the play's unequivocal tribute to the sentimental formula ...". In fact, we are hardly expected to admire Julia in her role as an apologist for Faulkland or to sympathise with her in her martyred acceptance of his ill-treatment.

It is, however, true that Julia is not clearly ridiculed as occupying a stock place in the sentimental pattern; she is much less a figure of fun than Faulkland. Murphy in his All in the Wrong presents in Belinda and Beverley the same kind of

Kaul, Action of English Comedy, p. 141.
sentimental lovers as Julia and Faulkland, but he ridicules the excesses of sentimentality more convincingly by plunging Beverley into ridiculous embarrassments and by endowing Belinda with gaiety. Sheridan could have achieved greater success in exposing the absurdities of sentimentalism by making both Julia and Faulkland clearly ridiculous, mock-sentimental lovers. It may be added that in the original version Sheridan showed even greater ambiguity in depicting them. Indeed, their parts were regarded by some critics as serious rather than funny. Without suspecting any parody, the writer for the Morning Chronicle appreciated the "graver" scenes between Julia and Faulkland. Such an estimate must have caused Sheridan some wry amusement. The additions made by him in the revised version show his anxiety to correct the impression that the play has grave scenes and that Julia and Faulkland are meant to be taken at their face value.

The new prologue, to be spoken by Mrs. Bulkley, seems to be carefully written to achieve this purpose. Dressed for the part of Julia, Mrs. Bulkley points to the figure of Comedy depicted at one side of the stage:

Look on this form — where humour, quaint and sly,
Dimples the cheek, and points the beaming eye;
Where gay invention seems to boast its wiles
In amorous hint, and half-triumphant smiles;
While her light mask or covers satire's strokes,
All hides the conscious blush her wit provokes.

Such a witty, satirical and laughing comedy is vividly
distinguished from Tragedy to which Mrs. Bulkley points in the concluding lines:

For here their fav'rite stands, whose brow -- severe
And sad -- claims youth's respect, and pity's tear;
Who -- when oppressed by foes her worth creates --
Can point a poignard at the guilt she hates.

If the sentimental Julia were meant to be taken seriously, she
would not hint at the presence of "satirical strokes" in true
comedy and present it as the antithesis of tragedy. Nor would
she poke fun at the excesses of sentimental comedy:

Must we displace her (true comedy)? And instead advance
The goddess of the woeful countenance --
The sentimental Muse! -- Her emblems view,
The Pilgrim's Progress, and a sprig of rue:
View her -- too chaste to look like flesh and blood --
Primly portrayed on emblematic wood!

The Julia-Paulkland scenes of the revised version contain several
additions which Professor Purdy dismisses as mere "flowers of
rhetoric" with little dramatic significance. The fact, however,
is that such additions were tossed in to exaggerate the
sentimental characteristics of the lovers so that the audiences
could regard them as laughable.

Nettleton, while recognizing Sheridan's defiance of "the
goddess of the woeful countenance -- the sentimental Muse",
remarks that Julia's closing speech shows that "Sheridan is not
untouched by the sentimentalism against which he was mainly in
revolt". Nicoll finds in the last scene of the play "a form of sentimentalism which is no longer burlesque, and which clashes rather hopelessly with the rest of the play".

These comments, I think, miss the point. To be sure, Julia's lengthy statement which concludes the play is unreservedly moralizing and in the traditional diction of sentimental drama:

Then let us study to preserve it so: and while Hope pictures to us a flattering scene of future bliss, let us deny its pencil those colours which are too bright to be lasting. 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! (101).

We have also seen that the typical sentimental comedy of the age ends on a moralizing note. But we must not take the sententious ending of Sheridan's play at its face value. It is necessary to set it against the prologue in which Mrs. Bulkley, Julia's portrayer, pointing to Comedy, remarks:

Look on her well -- does she seem formed to teach? Should you expect to hear this lady -- preach? Is grey experience suited to her youth? Do solemn sentiments become that mouth? Bid her be grave, those lips should rebel prove To every theme that slanders mirth or love.

25 Late Eighteenth Century Drama, p. 160.
This reflects Sheridan's own painful awareness of the displacement of the Muse of Comedy by preachy, grave, sentimental comedy. It is, therefore, only fair to conclude that Sheridan was only being ironical in supplying his play with a traditionally dull, moralizing and sentimental ending.

John Bernard felt sure about The Rivals being a definite attempt to overthrow the prevailing taste for sentimental comedy, and "to follow up the blow which Goldsmith had given in She Stoops to Conquer." Although it would be wrong to suggest that Sheridan's play proved to be an effective antidote to sentimental comedy, it is hard to understand those critics who not only refer to the sentimentalism of The Rivals, but make too much of it. Witty, satirical and gay, it is essentially an unsentimental comedy. But, of course, it could have been more anti-sentimental.

Determined to give no further offence to his audience, Sheridan modified the characters of Sir Lucius and Sir Anthony of the early version, and removed the so-called "low" elements from it. The Restoration elements of the play were thus weakened by the removal of the cheerful ribaldries of the original version.

Secondly, the play would have been more anti-sentimental, if Sheridan had presented Julia as an unmistakably mock-sentimental heroine, and not as the passive victim of Faulkland's causeless jealousy and gloomy caprice. While Sheridan has satirized

excessive sensibility in Faulkland, he has not clearly ridiculed Julia's vapid sentimentality.

It is, however, The School for Scandal that marks the acme of Sheridan's comic achievement and remains to this day one of the most popular comedies. First produced on 8 May 1777, the play was a roaring success. Though much of its initial success was caused by the brilliant acting of the Drury Lane Company, this by no means detracts from its great merits. Many critics rightly call it one of the two finest plays of the eighteenth century, the other being She Stoops to Conquer. Thomas Moore, while writing his Memoirs of the Life of the Rt. Hon. Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1825) had free access to many of the dramatist's manuscripts. From these he shows how the play in its present form grew out of what were first drafted as two separate plays -- one about the scandal-mongers, the other about the Teazles. Sheridan blended the two plays into one with great care. In fact, The School for Scandal has three plots -- that of the slanderers, that of the Teazles, and that of the Surface brothers. But the several strands are woven together so dexterously that the play is marked by the quality of tidy completeness.

The School for Scandal is reminiscent of the witty and satirical Restoration comedy of manners. Sheridan had intimate

acquaintance with the circles of fashion at Bath and in London. At these places the cult of wit and irony was sharpened into a disparaging hostility to the Puritanism of the middle class. In The School for Scandal he has directed the most amusing comedy against slander-mongering, bringing into play his supreme talent for wit and mockery. His satire also plays on pretentious servants, self-styled poets, contemporary journalism, and money-lenders' jargon. The serious moralization, even barefaced preaching, of the sentimental comedy are replaced by true wit and humour. With its scenes placed amidst an atmosphere of gaiety, the play is marked by a lively light-heartedness that is inimical to false sentiment and hypocritical display of emotion. It abounds with sparkling wit throughout.

The scandal scenes afford us great entertainment. In the opening scene of the play we are amused at the activities of the slanderers who gather in the fashionable town-house of their leader Lady Sneerwell, a well-to-do widow, but unscrupulous and malicious. Her agent, Snake, acknowledges in an amusing manner the contribution of Mrs. Clackit as a member of the scandal-club:

"To my knowledge she has been the cause of six matches being broken off, and three sons disinherited; of four forced elopements, and as many close confinements; nine separate maintenances, and two divorces" (213). It is amusing to find them conceiving scandal as an art and discussing it in the terms which are
normally employed by connoisseurs of painting. For example, when lady Sneerwell says that Mrs. Clackit is talented but her manner lacks refinement, Snake remarks: "'Tis very true. -- She generally designs well, has a free tongue and a bold invention; but her colouring is too dark, and her outlines often extravagant. She wants that delicacy of tint, and mellowness of sneer, which distinguishes your ladyship's scandal" (214).

Having been a victim of slander, lady Sneerwell now finds pleasure in spreading scandals about others to injure their reputations. She reveals to Snake her love for Charles Surface and her plan to oust her rival Maria by assisting Joseph Surface in blackening Charles's character and thus winning Maria for himself. But the members of her "school for scandal", except Joseph, have no clear motive in spreading scandals; it just pleases them to deliver discreditable reports of the behaviour of their acquaintances. Their scandalous and witty remarks are quite amusing. Mrs. Candour, for example, injures reputations with a marvellous rapidity -- referring to rumours about Charles's extravagance, the differences between Sir Peter and Lady Teazle, Miss Cadabout's elopement with Sir Filigree Flirt, Miss Prim's unsuccessful bid to go away with her dancing master, Mrs. Festino's affair with Colonel Cassino, Mr. and Mrs. Honeymoon settling down to the usual humdrum life, Lord Buffalo's discovery of his lady at a house of ill-fame (215-20), and so on. But she
scandalizes people with a nice affectation of fairness and honesty of motive. For example, after doing this mischief, she remarks: "But, Lord, do you think I would report these things? No, no! tale-bearers, as I said before, are just as bad as the tale-makers" (221). She enjoys spreading scandals but pretends that she "cannot bear to hear people attacked behind their backs".

We feel likewise amused when Crabtree, a silly old gentleman, sings the fulsome praises of his nephew, Sir Benjamin Backbite, an affected rattlebrain. A poetaster, Backbite produces only third-rate satires and lampoons, but that does not deter his uncle from singing his glory: "I back him at a rebus or a charade against the best rhymer in the kingdom" (222). When Backbite says that his best work is some love elegies which will be made public only when Maria reciprocates his love for her, the admiring uncle exhorts the lady not to miss this opportunity of being rendered immortal. "'Pore Heaven, ma'am", says he, "they'll immortalize you! You will be handed down to posterity, like Petrarch's Laura, or Waller's Sacharissa". The scandal-club is now in full session during which Crabtree, Backbite, Mrs. Candour and Lady Sneerwell vie with one another in tarnishing reputations. The dialogue throughout sparkles with the felicity of phrase. This is best seen in malicious comments on Charles Surface's imprudent and profligate way of life. For example, Backbite
ironically observes that though Charles has lost all his friends, none is so popular among the Jews, the traditional money-lenders. Crabtree at once adds that the Jewish money-lenders simply cannot afford to lose such a fine source of profit as Charles: "If the Old Jewry was a ward, I believe Charles would be an alderman: — no man more popular there, 'Touc Gad! I hear he pays as many annuities as the Irish tontine; and that whenever he is sick, they have prayers for the recovery of his health in all the synagogues" (225). It is now the nephew's turn to poke more fun at Charles's extravagance: "They tell me, when he entertains his friends he will sit down to dinner with a dozen of his own securities; have a score of tradesmen waiting in the antechamber, and an officer behind every guest's chair". Such a sparkling dialogue constitutes the chief pleasure of The School for Scandal, distinguishing it from the sentimental comedies full of serious, moralizing speeches.

The second scene of Act II is an equally delightful scandal scene. The prominent members of the "school for scandal" have gathered at Lady Sneerwell's. We are amused by the quality of the verses composed extempore by Backbite on the ponies of Lady Curricle, and recited by him with pretended reluctance. His inseparable uncle's enthusiastic praise for the composition ("done in the smack of a whip, and on horseback too") provokes laughter. So does Joseph's ironical exclamation of tribute to the author:
"A very Phoebus, mounted — indeed, Sir Benjamin" (234). Before long the slanderers take up their acquaintances, poking fun at their appearance and reputation. Though outrageous remarks are made with a view to ruining reputations, the conversation affords continuous amusement. Mrs. Candour's "defences" of her friends only destroy their characters. Her apparent praise of Miss Vermillion's fresh and natural colour causes Lady Teazle to remark that it is so only when the paint is on, that "it goes off at night, and comes again in the morning" (235). Backbite fittingly concludes the discussion, saying, "True ma'am, it not only comes and goes, but, what's more -- egad, her maid can fetch and carry it!" From Miss Vermillion who owes her beauty to paint kept handy in boxes, the slanderers pass on to her sister, Mrs. Evergreen, a fifty-three year old beauty. Lady Sneerwell herself acknowledges the lady's ingenuity in fighting with paint against the ravages of advancing age. There is even more to laugh at the description of the next victim, the widow Ochre. Backbite suggests that she cannot conceal her age as she paints her face badly. In fact, her make-up ends so obviously near the neck that "she looks like a mended statue, in which the connoisseur sees at once that the head's modern, though the trunk's antique" (236).

Next, in reply to Mrs. Candour, Backbite remarks that Miss Simper possesses very pretty teeth. This elicits an amusing comment from young Lady Teazle, another expert at ruining
reputations: "Yes, and on that account, when she is neither speaking nor laughing (which very seldom happens), she never absolutely shuts her mouth, but leaves it always on ajar", and then mimics her by showing her teeth. Sir Peter's entrance into this censorious crowd in no way checks the gallant flow of scandal. In fact, his own wife goes on to give an amusing picture of a fat lady's desperate efforts to reduce her ample figure. The fat dowager, says Lady Teazle, eats acids and small whey and resorts to tight-lacing. In the hottest weather she can be seen "on a little squat pony, with her hair plaited up behind like a drummer's, and puffing round the Ring on a full trot" (237). No less amusing is the caricature of Mrs. Candour's cousin, Ogle. Her pretensions to be critical of others' beauty are ridiculed, as the special features of "all the different countries of the globe" (238) join in her own countenance to produce a pretty mess. Backbite and Crabtree credit her with an Irish front, Scotch hair, a Dutch nose, Austrian lips, a Spaniard's complexion, and the teeth of a Chinese. Crabtree wittily declares that her face resembles "a congress at the close of a general war -- wherein all the members, even to her eyes, appear to have a different interest, and her nose and chin are the only parties likely to join issue". In vain does Sir Peter voice his disapproval of scandal. After he hastens away and others repair to the next room, Joseph and Maria are left alone. Maria is sad on account of the malicious society
of Lady Sneerwell's guests. After voicing hypocritically sympathetic sentiment, Joseph goes on his knees, asking for her affection and favour. It is amusing to find them surprised in this situation by Lady Teazle, and Joseph telling lies to justify this "very tender mode of reasoning" (241).

The slanderers disappear after Act II, Scene ii until Act V, Scene ii, the intervening part being devoted to the Teazles, the Surface brothers and their uncle. These are, however, related to the subject of scandal. For example, the platonic relationship of Lady Teazle with Joseph Surface and the latter's hypocrisy are inspired by the fashionable and shallow society which has no faith in solid virtues. Charles's behaviour, as observed by his uncle masquerading as Mr. Premium to him, is scandalous in certain respects. Sir Peter Teazle, the guardian of the brothers, is a victim of the malicious gossip of "the school for scandal". Indeed, the domestic discord of the Teazles is due partly to the insidious part played by the slanderers. It is, therefore, difficult to agree with Moore who regards most of the slanderers as "excrescences, through which none of the life-blood of the plot circulates". In the same way, Mrs. Oliphant is unconvincing when she says that the scandal scenes are easily "detachable from the main plot". In fact, Sheridan's plot-construction is

praiseworthy because of the manner in which the scandal element is made to give that unity of atmosphere which welds other elements of the play together artistically.

In Act V, Scene ii, the slanderers again make their amusing appearance. The news of Sir Peter's discovery of his wife in Joseph's library has set them agog. They come literally clamouring to Sir Peter's, eager to enjoy juicy morsels of scandal. It is quite an entertaining scene because the simple facts of the screen are reflected into a variety of colours as they pass through the glass of their imagination. The screen scene (IV, iii) has, after all, only shown that Charles is innocent in his relations with Lady Teazle, that Joseph is no better than a despicable hypocrite, and that an enlightened Sir Peter is likely to be reconciled to his repentant wife. But the slanderers give different fanciful versions of these events, each insisting that his or her account is most accurate. Mrs. Candour declares that Charles, not Joseph, is the villain, while Backbite asserts that the reverse is the case. He even speaks of Sir Peter's wound in the duel of honour following the exposure of Lady Teazle's disloyalty. He has a vivid picture of their fighting with swords. Crabtree confuses the story further by giving a most fanciful account. In his version pistols, not swords, were used, and Charles, not Joseph, is the gallant. His blatant disregard for truth and his splendid flair for imaginative detail are quite
amusing. In order to sound convincing he garnishes his account of the imaginary fight between Charles and Sir Peter with the most minute details. Charles's shot, he says, found its target, while Sir Peter's "struck against a little bronze Shakespeare that stood over the fire-place, grazed out of the window at a right angle, and wounded the postman, who was just coming to the door with a double letter from Northamptonshire" (298). As the slanderers describe Sir Peter as lying seriously wounded by Charles, Sir Oliver is seen coming out. They make anxious enquiries about the patient's condition, certain that he is the physician called in at the emergency. With his characteristic humour Sir Oliver directs them to ask the victim himself, since Sir Peter is seen coming towards them. Undaunted by their exposure as liars they offer hypocritical sympathy to Sir Peter for his young wife's infidelity. According to Mrs. Candour, for example, he is very much to be pitied (300). The furious Sir Peter hounds them all out of his house. But even as they take their leave, they continue to utter insincerely sympathetic sentiments to our amusement.

A good deal of the comedy of this play, then, is derived from the scandal-mongers -- their ridicule of various characters, their unconcern for the truth, and their capacity for exaggeration. Sheridan's own romance, elopement, marriage and his involvement in two duels had caused great excitement in the scandal clubs of Bath.
All this has much to do with the graphic account he gives of the chief follies of fashionable society as also the malicious ridicule to which people are subjected by the scandal-mongers. The subjects of scandal are female complexion, love and marriage, separation and divorce, elopements and duels, extravagance and bankruptcy, and the tools employed by the slanderers are forgery, gossip, lies, insinuations, satires and lampoons. Sheridan shows how the reputations are rapidly killed by concocted stories, fanciful accounts and malign suggestions. The brilliance of these scenes has caused Sheridan to be accused of obscuring his targets. Rodway, for example, speaks of ambiguity in Sheridan's attitude to the scandal-mongers. "They are", says he, "strongly condemned yet greatly relished, a whole scene being lovingly devoted to their epigrammatic dissections; so that the pleasure of righteous indignation at scandal is combined with that of indulging in it".  

This seems going rather far. The scandal scenes are hardly used to implant righteous indignation in the audience. Nor do we really have the pleasure of indulging in scandal. What seems to be expected of us is amused contempt. The slanderers afford us entertainment through sheer brilliance of their satire and sarcasm. But we are also made to realize the absurdity of the proportions which the simple facts assume in the atmosphere of the scandalous

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gossip. The scandal-mongering is by no means presented as an acceptable part of social intercourse. Sir Peter seems to voice the normal attitude by saying that "no person should be permitted to kill characters and run down reputations, but qualified old maids and disappointed widows" (239).

The scenes in which Charles appears are marked by a lively and spontaneous light-heartedness. His words, actions and mode of living provoke genuine laughter. In Act III, Scene ii, we find that though bankrupt, Charles lives in a grand style in his house which Sir Oliver aptly calls "temple of dissipation". The latter accompanied by Moses, the money-lender, has gone there in the guise of Mr. Premium, a broker, in order to discover his nephew's true character. Sir Oliver is shocked at the behaviour of Trip, Charles's fashionable footman. We are, however, amused by Sheridan's exposition of the character of Trip. He affects snuff and such gentlemanly expressions as "a propos", "Good lack", "Hark'ee", and "egad" (256-57). He speaks of bills and credits and sounds Moses on the chances of receiving twenty pounds by way of annuity. He airs his legal knowledge by using such terms as "equity of redemption", "reversion", "post-obit" and "collateral" (257).

The third scene of Act III reveals Charles and his drinking companions in great spirits. The subject of their gay and witty discussion is wine and its effect on conversation, gambling and
love. Charles deplores the great degeneracy of the age in which many people abstain from wine. Such people do harm to society, because, he wittily remarks, "instead of the social spirit of raillery that used to mantle over a glass of bright Burgundy, their conversation is become just like the Spa water they drink, which has all the pertness and flatulence of Champaigne, without its spirit or flavour" (253). The irrepressible Charles, singing the praises of wine, remarks that with its help, the lover is able to know his heart. "Fill a dozen bumpers to a dozen beauties", he adds, "and she that floats atop is the maid that has bewitched you". He drinks a hearty toast to his favourite lady, Maria. Sir Toby replies to Charles's toast by a song "Here's to the maiden of bashful fifteen", and the companions join in the chorus. Before long, uncle and nephew get down to business. The latter, having no inkling of the broker's true identity, requests a loan and the question of security arises. Their conversation gives us moments of uncontrollable laughter. For example, Charles speaks to Mr. Premium (Sir Oliver) about his bright prospects of inheriting money: "Then you must know that I have a devilish rich uncle in the East Indies, Sir Oliver Surface, from whom I have the greatest expectations" (262). This is one of those scenes which reveal Sheridan's great ability to use dramatic irony to obtain a comic effect. Unaware of Mr. Premium's real identity, Charles says he is a prodigious favourite with his uncle and speaks of the latter's
poor health ("the climate has hurt him considerably"). He goes on to assert that his uncle is now at Calcutta (264). Sir Oliver discovers that his nephew has already exhausted all sources of credit-plates, heirlooms, trophies and books. Only the family portraits are left because they never attracted any buyer. When Sir Oliver offers to buy them, the prodigal readily agrees. Far from being troubled by any conscientious scruples, he sees great justification for such a transaction: "To be sure! when a man wants money, where the plague should he get assistance if he can't make free with his own relations?" (266).

The first scene of Act IV affords delightful entertainment by means of constant dramatic irony in the situation as well as Charles's consistently epigrammatic comments. Charles is ready to sell by auction the portraits of countless Surfaces. Careless amuses in the role of auctioneer, using for an auctioneer's hammer a chart showing the genealogical tree of the Surface family. An old chair of Charles's grandfather is made to serve as pulpit. The reckless disdain in Charles's tone, while talking about his ancestors in the true spirit of an antique-seller, affords moments of uncontrollable laughter. The portrait of his famous uncle, Sir Richard Ravelin, described as a marvellous general in his day, is sold just for ten pounds. His great aunt Deborah is knocked down for a mere five pounds ten. His mother's grandfather (described by Charles as a learned judge, well-known
on the western circuit) fetches just fifteen pounds. Some more are likewise disposed of, until, growing weary of the process, Charles offers to sell the remaining lot in the lump for three hundred pounds. The fun that has been steadily mounting reaches a roaring climax when the portrait of Sir Oliver himself is referred to by Careless as "that ill-looking little fellow over the settee" (269) and as having "an unforgiving eye, and a damned disinheriting countenance!" (270). Sir Oliver bravely suffers these uncomplimentary remarks, after having stood witness to an auction where his own ancestors have been sold as so much trash to meet the prodigal's pressing need for cash. As we shall see, Charles's role in the famous Screen Scene also provokes genuine laughter.

Again, we are much amused by scenes of recrimination between old Sir Peter and his young impetuous wife. In Act I, Scene ii, Sir Peter says in a soliloquy that he has been "the most miserable dog" (226) since his marriage with Lady Teazle six months ago. The old bachelor had used considerable caution in marrying a frugal, country-bred girl -- one "who never knew luxury beyond one silk gown, nor dissipation beyond the annual gala of a race ball" (227). His present predicament amuses us; after her release from unpleasant life, Lady Teazle has quickly become an extravagant, fashionable lady who behaves "as if she had never seen a bush or a grass-plot out of Grosvenor Square!" He is afraid of being laughed at by his bachelor friend Sir Oliver with
whom he would rail at matrimony before contracting an injudicious alliance. He seeks Rowley's help in keeping his friend ignorant of this side of the story: "But, Master Rowley, don't drop a word that Lady Teazle and I ever disagree" (229).

The first scene of Act II entertains us by presenting Sir Peter and Lady Teazle quarrelling with each other spiritedly. Their witty dialogue makes this scene all the more delightful. When Sir Peter declares that he will not bear her extravagance, she exasperates him with her witty rejoinders. She plainly tells him that fashionable women of London are not accountable to anybody once they are married. Asked whether husband is to exercise no authority over wife, she retorts: "Authority! No, to be sure: -- if you wanted authority over me, you should have adopted me, and not married me: I am sure you were old enough" (230). The old husband is no match for his young wife who has a fashionable explanation for every charge of extravagance. For example, when Sir Peter says that what she has spent to provide fresh flowers for her dressing room during winter will even "suffice to turn the Pantheon into a greenhouse, and give a fête champêtre at Christmas", she replies that the fault is rather with the climate as flowers are so dear in winter: "For my part, I'm sure, I wish it was spring all the year round, and that roses grew under our feet!" (230-31). When Sir Peter accuses her of forgetting her situation before her marriage, she readily admits
that she was in very unpleasant state, adding, "or I should never have married you". When he caustically describes the humbler style of life to which she was accustomed before her marriage, she baffles him by completing the account herself. Again, in reply to his charge that she has developed her taste only after her marriage, she pertly says: "... after having married you, I should never pretend to taste again, I allow" (232). She soon hastens away to Lady Sneerwell's, asking him to join her there, despite his great contempt for her scandal-mongering friends referred to by him as "these utterers of forged tales, coiners of scandal, and clippers of reputation" (232).

The concluding part of Act III, Scene i, depicts another amusing quarrel between Sir Peter and his wife. The former is scowling with displeasure, having failed to persuade his ward Maria that Joseph, not Charles, is really deserving of her favour. Lady Teazle is heard approaching, presumably straight from her adventures in the scandal-club. In excellent spirits as usual, she asks Sir Peter for two hundred pounds. He grants her request, saying in a romantic mood: "You shall have it; but seal me a bond for the repayment" (252). He even generously hints at providing her with an independent source of income. For once husband and wife seem to make a resolute effort to win each other's affection when Sir Peter tactlessly blames her for having always started their quarrels. This soon grows into a big row, with both flinging
pointed insults at each other. When he calls her a pert, rural coquette she says she was a fool to marry "an old dangling bachelor, who was single at fifty, only because he never could meet with anyone who would have him" (254). A furious Sir Peter refers to rumours of her relationship with Charles and threatens her with a divorce, adding, "I'll make an example of myself for the benefit of all old bachelors" (255). The unruffled lady promptly agrees to his suggestion of a separation and gaily leaves him. Sir Peter's irritation at her self-composure is amusing: "Plagues and tortures! Can't I make her angry either!"

No less delightful are those anti-sentimental scenes which expose Joseph Surface as an ungenerous hypocrite, a sentimental knave. In the screen scene (iv, iii), the tour de force of Sheridan's comic genius, Lady Teazle, while innocent of any immoral thoughts, is led astray by her affectations of fashionable folly to visit Joseph's house in response to repeated invitations. She complains of her husband's unfair suspicions and of mischievous slanders about her being circulated by Lady Sneerwell and her set. We are amused by Joseph's insidious advice to Lady Teazle with the intention of compromising her honour. The remedy, he suggests, is to do the very thing of which she is suspected so as to give some real ground for her husband to suspect; she should be "frail in compliment to his discernment" (276). Lady Teazle well sums up this paradoxical prescription by saying that she is required to
sin in her own defence and shed her virtue to preserve her reputation. Just when Joseph, Sir Peter's "man of sentiment", takes her hand to tempt her to make a faux pas a servant rushes in to announce that Sir Peter himself is on his way to the library. Lady Teazle hides behind the screen, a prominent item in the room's furnishing. From now on the humour arises largely from dramatic irony. When, for example, deceived by Joseph's pretence of reading, Sir Peter almost pats him on the back and compliments him for making even his screen a source of knowledge, Joseph says, "Oh, yes, I find great use in that screen" (278). The screen is indeed useful to Joseph as it hides what, of all people, Sir Peter should not discover. Again, when Sir Peter remarks that screen hung with maps must be useful to Joseph when he wants to find anything in a hurry, Joseph throws in an amusing aside rich in dramatic irony: "Aye, or to hide anything in a hurry either".

We feel amused when the hypocrite, in his consternation, desperately tries to change the subject as Sir Peter expresses his chagrin over the little progress of Joseph's suit with Maria. As Joseph does not want this to be overheard by Lady Teazle behind the screen, he softly begs of Sir Peter not to mention it, adding, "What are my disappointments when your happiness is in debate?" (281). A temporary diversion, however, is caused when a servant bursts in with the news that Charles Surface is already at the door. Sir Peter wants Joseph to question Charles about his
rumoured affair with lady Teazle so that he may discover the truth while hiding somewhere in the library. Sheridan effectively uses the device of eavesdropping for comic ends. This scene reveals his unerring capacity for humorous situations and entertaining dialogue. To our amusement, the screen appeals to Sir Peter as the best place for concealment where he is startled to see the flutter of a petticoat. The nervous Joseph tells Sir Peter that even though he regards a man of intrigue as most contemptible, "it does not follow that one is to be an absolute Joseph either!" (282). Unlike the absolute Joseph who rejected Potiphar's wife (Genesis xxxix), our Joseph feels that he cannot reject love's demands entirely. The person behind the screen, says the liar, is a French milliner with whom he is having a mild flirtation. He heaves a sigh of some relief when Sir Peter goes instead into a closet: "A narrow escape, indeed! and a curious situation I'm in, to part man and wife in this manner" (283). We cannot help laughing when, just before the entry of Charles, Joseph tries to suffer the great strain of seeing in turn Lady Teazle or Sir Peter peep at him from behind the hiding place to make some rash remark:

Lady T. (Peeping) - Couldn't I steal off?
Joseph S. Keep close, my angel!
Sir Peter T. (Peeping) Joseph, tax him home.
Joseph S. Back, my dear friend!
Lady T. Couldn't you lock Sir Peter in?
Joseph S.        Be still, my life!
Sir Peter T.      (Peeping) You're sure the little milliner won't blab?
Joseph S.        In, in, my good Sir Peter -- 'Fore Gad, I wish I had a key to the door (283).

Charles bursts in and it soon becomes clear from what he tells Joseph that he is not, and never has been, Lady Teazle's lover. He says that in fact his impression has been that Joseph himself was her favourite. Anxious to prevent this disclosure, Joseph discloses that Sir Peter is hiding in the closet. It is quite amusing to see the irrepressible Charles pull the old man out, saying, "What, my old guardian! -- What! turn inquisitor, and take evidence incog?" (285). And what follows is even more so. Unfortunately for Joseph, he has to leave Charles and Sir Peter together for a short while in order to attend upon Lady Sneerwell downstairs. Though he takes care to enjoin Sir Peter not to speak of the French milliner, an expansive Sir Peter reveals the secret to Charles in order to show that Joseph cannot be called a complete saint. Nothing can prevent Charles now from taking a look at the little milliner. At the very moment of Joseph's return, he pulls down the screen, only to reveal Lady Teazle of all people. Charles revels in this funny situation: "Sir Peter, this is one of the smartest French milliners I ever saw" (287). He makes an exit after ironically echoing Sir Peter's words, "there's nothing in the world so noble as a man of sentiment!" (288).
Though Joseph's hypocrisy is well exposed in this delightful scene, yet his fall from grace remains to be completed. In Act V, Scene i, Sir Oliver, pretending to be a poor relation (Stanley) calls on Joseph to see whether he is worthy to inherit his riches. The scene owes most of its effectiveness to dramatic irony. Joseph, unaware of the visitor's true identity, speaks nice words to him, being careful, however, to stress that he is too poor to help his poor relation. The old man steers the conversation round to the subject of large sums of money which Joseph received from Sir Oliver. Joseph hastens to correct him, saying that what his uncle has actually done for him "has been a mere nothing" (292). As Sir Oliver leaves, he declares in an aside that Charles, not Joseph, shall be his heir. Joseph is blissfully ignorant of the ruinous blunder he has committed. We feel amused when, after ridding himself of his unwelcome visitor, he chuckles to himself over his capacity for establishing the reputation for benevolence without paying a single penny. He further soliloquises: "The silver ore of pure charity is an expensive article in the catalogue of a man's good qualities; whereas the sentimental French plate I use instead of it makes just as good a show, and pays no tax" (294).

The final scene (V, iii), set in Joseph's library, has enough of the humour that marks most of the play. Lady Sneerwell, seeing no chance to realise her love for Charles, reproaches Joseph, the blunderer, for ruining a good piece of roguery by
seeking to accomplish too much: "I hate such an avarice of crimes; 'tis an unfair monopoly, and never prospers" (305).

Joseph, however, still relies on their agent, Snake, to destroy Maria's faith in Charles and enable Sneerwell to entrap his brother. Sir Oliver's arrival interrupts their plotting and drives Lady Sneerwell to retire to an adjoining room. On seeing Sir Oliver, Joseph takes him for Stanley. In no mood to be plagued by needy relatives when his uncle is due to arrive any moment, he asks Stanley to leave, promising him assistance later. Just when he is going to push him out, Charles enters. He naturally takes Sir Oliver for Premium, the broker, and is anxious to get rid of him in view of his uncle's impending visit. Joseph calls him Stanley, while Charles insists that he is Premium and then says, "Aye, aye, Stanley or Premium, 'tis the same thing, as you say; for I suppose he goes by half a hundred names, besides A.B. at the coffee-houses" (307). When the Teazles, Maria and Rowley enter, they behold the rare sight of the nephews forcing their uncle out. Their comments on the extraordinary situation are very entertaining:

Sir Peter T. My old friend, Sir Oliver -- hey! What in the name of wonder -- here are dutiful nephews -- assault their uncle at a first visit!

Lady T. Indeed, Sir Oliver, 'twas well we came in to rescue you.

Rowley. Truly, it was; for I perceive, Sir Oliver, the character of old Stanley was no protection to you.
Sir Oliver S. Nor of Premium either: the necessities of the former could not extort a shilling from that benevolent gentleman; and now, egad, I stood a chance of faring worse than my ancestors, and being knocked down without being bid for (308).

Sir Oliver declares Joseph to be destitute of faith, charity, and gratitude, but he forgives Charles's light-hearted auction-sale of the family portraits.

At last, when Lady Teazle tries to bring Maria and Charles together, Maria surprisingly states that he loves not her but Lady Sneerwell. In order to discredit Charles, Joseph brings Lady Sneerwell out of her hiding-place. Sir Peter's comment provokes laughter: "So! another French milliner! Egad, he has one in every room in the house, I suppose" (311). Lady Sneerwell calls Charles ungrateful and scolds him for being an unfaithful lover. Her agent Snake is called in, not, as Joseph supposes, to support her statement, but to prove it false. Snake appears to have decided to tell the truth. He greatly amuses us by explaining to Lady Sneerwell how he has been bribed into honesty: "I beg your ladyship ten thousand pardons: you paid me extremely liberally for the lie in question; but I unfortunately have been offered double to speak the truth". Lady Sneerwell is shocked and furious at the collapse of her plot to separate Sir Peter and Lady Teazle as well as Charles and Maria. Lady Teazle stops her to tell her that she wants to return the diploma which her "school for scandal" has conferred upon her. Not knowing that
Sir Peter and his wife are already reconciled, Sneerwell brings down this curse on Lady Teazle: "May your husband live these fifty years!" (312). She makes her exit in a storm of anger and when Joseph hastens after her, Sir Oliver addresses a witty remark to him: "Aye, and marry her, Joseph, if you can. — Oil and Vinegar, egad! you'll do very well together". This remark is quite appropriate; if Joseph's false, fawning politeness suggests oil, Lady Sneerwell's sour temper suggests vinegar. The nature of undertaking that Snake extracts from the company provokes laughter. He is anxious not to let it be known that he has done a good deed. Any suggestion of goodness in his character, he feels, would ruin his prospects (312-13). At last the complications are resolved and all is rounded off happily.

The School for Scandal marks the height of Sheridan's reaction against sentimental comedy, and may well be regarded as the embodiment of his views of comedy. It is the antithesis of the tearful, overdidactic sentimental comedy which he challenged in the new prologue to The Rivals, and ridiculed in The Critic. To be sure, he has used here the conventional ingredients — the rich uncle in disguise, the petulant old husband quarrelling with his sprightly young wife, the hypocrite finally exposed, and the prodigal reformed. But by giving a new imaginative force to familiar situations and characters, he has achieved a different tone. Sheridan, as Jeffares points out, "showed that a comedy
could be funny, could include the ridiculous ... and could be satirical, all without the failings of sentimentality".31

Sheridan's distinction lies as much in the sparkle of his wit as in his unerring sense of the theatre.32 Whereas the typical sentimental comedy of the age has little theatrical effectiveness, The School for Scandal has many striking situations in it. Again, while the former displays but few traces of wit, and even reveals "a great deal of Puerility and frothy Stage-language", the latter reveals extraordinary opulence of wit. "Never for a moment", Nicoll rightly notes, "does the sparkle disappear; so that sometimes we are inclined to be surfeited with too much of these intellectual fireworks".33 To be sure, this ceaseless brilliance introduces a tone of artificiality. But we must remember that Sheridan's aim is to give an entertaining picture of that part of contemporary life which was lived in the artificial world of the fashionable society. Sheridan writes in the Restoration tradition, and the dialogue, as we have seen, constitutes the chief fascination of his comedies. Dr. Jackson34 has given many illustrations of Sheridan's preoccupation with

33 Late Eighteenth Century Drama, p. 161.
witty dialogue. He shows how several of the witty speeches, originally belonging to characters in the two draft plays, "The Slanderers" and "The Teazles" are later given to the characters in The School for Scandal. Consequently, some of the displaced lines seem to have little relevance to the plot, or they prove inappropriate to the speakers. Thus, Sheridan could manipulate the plot to fit the dialogue, and ignore minor flaws of characters in order to preserve his favourite aphorisms intact.

In his time Sheridan earned the title of "the modern Congreve" because of his brilliant satirical wit. "As a wit", says C.J.L. Price in Encyclopaedia Britannica (15th edition), "he delivered his sallies against the follies of society with a polish that makes him the natural link in the history of the British comedy of manners between William Congreve and Oscar Wilde". Sheridan's sense of fun stems from the traditions of Restoration wit, and probably Congreve alone possesses his skill at wit and epigram. Sheridan, however, restored the brilliance of the Restoration comedy of manners without its "immorality". For example, the plot-situation in Wycherley's The Country Wife resembles the Teazle story of Sheridan's play, as in both cases a middle-aged man marries a young country girl who, when brought to London, becomes enamoured of its fashionable life. But despite such resemblances, the spirit of Sheridan's play is different from
that of Wycherley's. Sir Peter is no Pinchwife who is actually and deservedly cuckolded; Lady Teazle is no Mrs. Finchwife who persuades herself to commit adultery. In the same way, Lady Teazle is much different from Lady Touchwood in Congreve's The Double Dealer or Lady Brute in Vanbrugh's The Provoked Wife. While "infidelity" is too strong a word for Lady Teazle, it is not strong enough for the dissolute Lady Touchwood. While Lady Teazle refuses to be misled by Joseph Surface's insidious logic, Lady Brute almost loses her virtue to Constant.

As we have seen, the province of comedy in which Sheridan moves like a great master is that of lively scenes, funny situations and witty dialogue. It would be unfair to blame him for not being a deep interpreter of life. He chooses to amuse us by representing contemporary civilized society and its departures from normal expectation of proper behaviour. A writer of witty comedy of manners has little to do with detailed or original characterization; he has to rely mainly on witty dialogue and the comic possibilities of plot. It is, therefore, irrelevant to accuse Sheridan of any lack of reality in his characters. As mentioned earlier, they really represent types, cleverly exaggerated for comic and satirical purposes. For example, the amusing slanderers are mere symbols, representing various methods of

scandal-mongering. Mrs. Candour is presented as one who "with a very gross affectation of good nature and benevolence ... does more mischief than the direct malice of old Crabtree" (219). She amuses us, like Mrs. Malaprop, by her inability to perceive that what she says is entirely different from what she does. Sir Benjamin Backbite lives and speaks up to his name, as "his conversation is a perpetual libel on all his acquaintance" (218). He seems to have joined the scandal-club merely in order to keep up with a fashion. Snake is adequately described by Joseph as one who "hasn't virtue enough to be faithful even to his own villainy" (217). Lady Sneerwell's statement of her revengeful approach reveals her nature adequately: "Wounded myself in the early part of my life by the envenomed tongue of slander, I confess I have since known no pleasure equal to the reducing others to the level of my own injured reputation" (214).

Secondly, Sheridan is content to present stock characters, though he puts new life into them by endowing them with his own wit and epigrammatic brilliance. Sir Peter Teazle typifies the anxious choleric husband who is much older than his attractive wife and is afraid of being made a cuckold and becoming a laughing-stock. His overwhelming confidence in his infallible

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36 E. C. Rhodes, Harlequin Sheridan: the Man and the Legends (London, 1933), pp. 71-73, suggests that Snake is based on the editor of the Public Ledger, the Rev. Dr. William Jackson.
judgment is ridiculous, as he is easily taken in by Joseph's glib sentiments. His silliness is amusingly exposed in the screen scene. It is interesting to see how Sheridan uses him as a kind of chorus, embodying the sense of outrage at malicious scandal-mongering. The high-spirited Lady Teazle is anticipated by Congreve's Millamant in hating the country and loving the town and its fashions. She, however, greatly delights us by her elegance that often disarms her husband, and by her repartees which leave him at the losing end of the wordy battle. Her gift of mimicry calls forth peals of laughter from the slanderers. Charles Surface — "that libertine, that extravagant, that bankrupt in fortune and reputation" (215) — is the familiar type of the stage-hero whose high spirits and essentially good nature endear him to us. Sir Oliver, the benevolent wealthy guardian; and Rowley, the honest and faithful retainer, are also familiar figures, though Sheridan interprets them with a new comic force.

The School for Scandal is a remarkably gay, witty and satirical comedy. Sheridan's Comic Muse, as Hazlitt points out, "shows her laughing face, and points to her rich treasure — the follies of mankind. She is garlanded and crowned with roses and vine-leaves. Her eyes sparkle with delight, and her heart runs over with good-natured malice". Despite this, however, several

37 *English Comic Writers*, p. 236.
critics complain that The School for Scandal is infected by sentimentality, though they do not offer any detailed evidence. Nettleton notes "some lapses into the diction of sentimental drama", and quotes, by way of illustration, only Charles's last speech to Maria. Bernbaum asserts that Sheridan "kept within the bounds to which sensibility had confined the Comic Muse". Sheridan, he tells us, presents the main personages as amiable, instead of adopting and maintaining an attitude of scorn or mockery towards them. Subsequent critics have been happy to follow him almost unquestioningly. Thorndike sums up the general character of the play in a couple of sentences, and goes on to remark that much of it "is merely the standardized formula of the old comedy of manners adapted to the sentimental decorum of the reign of George III". Elton remarks that "Sentiment re-enters by a back door in the presentment of Charles. Sir Oliver is meant to be applauded for his indulgence to the youth". According to Potts, Sheridan "was himself infected with sentimentality, or made concessions to it, especially in the dénouement of The School for Scandal". Nicoll refers to the sentimental flavour felt in

38 Drama of the Restoration, pp. 306-07.
40 English Comedy, p. 433.
42 Comedy, p. 144.
43 Late Eighteenth Century Drama, p. 161.
the concluding lines, though he is far too learned to ignore its true nature. Moore observes vaguely that "even Sheridan had not wholly escaped the general infection of sentiment". Professor Kaul makes bold to state that Sheridan's plays "strike us in some ways as more sentimental than even Steele's thoroughgoing sentimental comedies". Rodway finds Sheridan "prone to be sentimental while attacking sentiment".

Such criticism arises from a strange anxiety to maintain that sentimental comedy was so dominant throughout the eighteenth century that it caused virtual disappearance of true comedy. Confronted with such a laughing comedy as The School for Scandal, some critics try hard to detect in it some elements reminiscent of sentimental comedy in order to support their preconceptions. The fact, however, is that sentimental comedy was, despite its great popularity, far from monopolizing the stage even in the decade before Goldsmith's essay on sentimental comedy. Many laughing comedies from various playwrights including Goldsmith and Sheridan were as popular as, if not more than, some of the most popular sentimental comedies. A comedy may have a few sentimental elements and yet be gay and unsentimental. It is

44 Twelve Famous Plays, p. xxiii.
45 Action of English Comedy, p. 139.
46 "Goldsmith and Sheridan", p. 69.
primarily a question of treatment. A play does not become sentimental merely because it is not sufficiently cynical or immoral, or because the playwright is fundamentally sympathetic rather than harsh to his lead characters, or because the brilliant conversations do not betray sufficient hardness of heart. After all, in the new climate after 1660, the drama was bound to avoid the grossness of the Restoration comedy, and even Sheridan, whose model was Congreve, was obliged to make his plays decent enough to satisfy contemporary taste.

If we compare The School for Scandal with the typical sentimental comedy of the age, we shall find it a remarkably laughing, non-exemplary and, therefore, unsentimental comedy. Even while using certain situations and characters of sentimental comedy, Sheridan has clearly avoided two of its most important features — its obvious didactic-moral strain and its pathetic scenes. Unlike the sentimental playwright, Sheridan does not use his plays as a means of direct instruction; he does not seek to teach some specific moral lesson or preach any of his beliefs on social and political matters. We may draw our own moral from The School for Scandal, but Sheridan himself points no distinctive moral to satisfy the prevailing taste for morality. In fact, he was criticised in his day for aiming at nothing but entertainment and for throwing much of the gay charm around the prodigality of Charles Surface. Secondly, while the sentimental playwright was
intent upon raising a sigh and calling forth a tear, Sheridan seems to miss no opportunity to arouse laughter. In The School for Scandal the genuine sentiment is completely subordinated to the comic, while false sentiment, as we shall see, is ridiculed. It has no gloomy, moralizing characters, and no insipid dialogue. This, in fact, is so obvious that one feels somewhat embarrassed to have to stress it.

We may now briefly defend The School for Scandal against some specific, although misguided, charges of sentimentality recorded above. My purpose is to suggest that while this play contains some sentimental elements, Sheridan does not, at any stage, allow it to lapse into sentimentality. It has been said that we are supposed to sympathise with Maria as an intended victim of Lady Sneerwell's schemes, that the "ingenue" is passive and insipid, and that the demureness of her relationship with her lover associates her with the sentimental heroine. To be sure, she is much less interesting than, say, Rosalind or Kate Hardcastle. But even in her small role, she is certainly a far cry from the passive, pitiable, weeping sentimental heroine like Indiana or Fidelia. Unlike Miss Marchmont in False Delicacy, she exasperates her guardian by her rebelliousness when he requires her to treat Joseph as more deserving of her favour than Charles: "'Tis true, by my father's will, I am for a short period bound to regard you as his substitute; but must cease to think you so, when you would
compel me to be miserable" (251). This is the antithesis of false delicacy. Maria is also different from Caelia in The School for Lovers as the latter is easily misled by the foppish Modely. Joseph and Lady Sneerwell do not really succeed in alienating Maria from Charles. She frankly expresses her contempt for the slanderers' addiction to malicious gossip: "For my part... wit loses its respect with me, when I see it in company with malice" (218).

If The School for Scandal were a sentimental play, Maria would be in continual tears about Charles's difficulties. But she is certainly not cast in the same mould as Richardson's Pamela or Moore's Fidelia. She boldly speaks of the unmanliness of the male gossips: "We have pride, envy, rivalship, and a thousand motives to depreciate each other; but the male slanderer must have the cowardice of a woman before he can traduce one" (218). At one stage, Joseph remarks that the scandal-mongers have no malice at heart. Unlike the sentimental heroine, Maria silences him on this subject by speaking in an assertive tone: "Then is their conduct still more contemptible; for, in my opinion, nothing could excuse the intemperance of their tongues, but a natural and ungovernable bitterness of mind" (240-41).

Professor Price seems to suggest that Sheridan has made a concession to the sentimental comedy by creating a paragon in

Rowley. The fact, however, is that he is adequately differentiated from such sentimental family retainers as Steele's Humphrey in *The Conscious Lovers* or even Shakespeare's Adam in *As You Like It*. Neither of them is such an efficient planner and accurate judge of human nature as Rowley. He rightly believes that Joseph has only "speculative benevolence" (291), and that Charles is likely to retrieve his errors. He helps Sir Oliver in putting his nephews to the test by playing an active role in arranging the whole scheme. Unlike the serious and lack-lustre stewards of sentimental comedy, Rowley is delightfully witty; he even quotes Shakespeare to voice his justifiable confidence in Charles's goodness of heart (246). A practical man, he reveals to Sir Peter that Lady Sneerwell has been bribing Snake to forge love-letters from Lady Teazle to Charles and answering them herself. He also produces Snake to remove Maria's misunderstanding about Charles. Again, unlike the stewards of sentimental comedy, Rowley can be devastatingly ironical and sneering. When Joseph is properly exposed, Rowley teases Sir Peter by quoting him ironically: "Aye, as Sir Peter says, he (Joseph) is a man of sentiment" (301). After he has seen Sir Oliver (Stanley) being turned out by Joseph, he amusingly remarks, "... I perceive, Sir Oliver, the character of old Stanley was no protection to you" (308).

The benevolent, middle-aged Sir Oliver, we are told, 49 is

introduced to bring in the sentimental element to please his audiences. But one has only to compare him with Sir Friendly Moral, Mr. Drummond and Stockwell to know the difference. These characters, as we have seen, are very fond of sententious, moralizing utterances. Sir Oliver, on the other hand, never attempts to preach; he even shows a healthy disgust at Joseph's pious, but essentially insincere, sentiments: "Oh! plague of his sentiments! If he salutes me with a scrap of morality in his mouth, I shall be sick directly" (245). He tells Sir Peter that Joseph has too good a character to be an honest person (244). He prefers youthful imprudence or honest profligacy to sentimentalism, the author of pretence and hypocrisy. He himself was a gay spark in his youth and presumably sowed many wild oats. He hates "to see prudence clinging to the green suckers of youth" (245). Unlike the sentimental benevolentists, he is concerned with realities; he relishes, in the auction scene, Charles's bluntness and honesty in business dealings.

Whereas the benevolent characters of sentimental comedy are quite grave, Sir Oliver is always jovial. He rails at matrimony and laughs heartily when he learns of Sir Peter's marriage. In the end, he laughs at Sir Peter's folly of extolling Joseph as a man of benevolent way of thinking. He retains his sense of humour even in the midst of trying situations. This is seen in his delightful asides as Premium and Stanley. Some critics call
him sentimental because of his delight when Charles refuses to sell his portrait. Actually, however, Sir Oliver's joy does not spring from a virtuous source; it is due to his vanity occasioned by the demonstration of his nephew's real gratitude for his liberal benefactor. Sprague rightly notes "a happily egotistical emphasis" in his remark, "But he wouldn't sell my picture". Moreover, Sir Oliver's delightful performance as Premium alone keeps this scene from lapsing into sentimentality.

Some critics find a touch of the sentimental in Sheridan's portrayal of Charles Surface. They say that the prodigal is essentially benevolent and that he finally repents and reforms. But the fact of the matter is that Charles is far different from the rakish or wicked characters of the sentimental comedy such as Belmont or Belfield Senior. While the errant characters of the sentimental comedy are often reformed at the end to stress the basic goodness of human nature, Charles is presented as essentially good, though not perfect, throughout the play. The gay spendthrift who deplores the general aversion of the age to wine, is always likable because of his capacity to laugh even when at the lowest ebb of his fortune, his loyalty to his benefactor, his true love for Maria, and his generous nature. He is no rake; we see him only once at a harmless party where no women are present. It is not Charles, but his elder brother, who really needs to be reformed. So Charles's final reformation
cannot be placed on a par with that of, say, Belmont.

Unlike the reformed prodigals of the sentimental comedy, the "reformed" Charles does not ooze morality or make any tall promises of reformation. While with Maria in the final scene, he is seen in his usual aplomb, and not in the tearful fashion of sentimental comedy. Without even a remote hint of drawing a tear, Sheridan allows him to remark that his wife shall be his gentle guide. As for reforming, he says he would make no promises. Conscious of having been a victim of scandal-mongering, he expresses the moral that true love is proof against the corrosion of malicious gossip. As the polished, witty dialogue is the outstanding feature of The School for Scandal, it is wrong to lay undue stress on phrases that hastily precede the final curtain and to accuse Sheridan of lapsing into sentimental diction. Also it would be wrong to label Charles as sentimental because of his refusal to dispose of his uncle's portrait. Charles's refusal seems to spring from a mere whim. In the true sentimental comedy this situation would have been utilized for wrenching the heart-strings with a lachrymose presentation of Sir Oliver and Charles. But in The School for Scandal it is not at all played for drawing our tears. On the whole, this is, in fact, one of the most delightful scenes of the play.

Sheridan's treatment of Lady Teazle has also given rise to charges of sentimental contamination. To be sure, the play ends
with the reconciliation of Sir Peter Teazle and Lady Teazle. But reconciliation between husband and wife is by no means peculiar to sentimental comedy. Marriages, reunions and reconciliations have always been the common stuff of comedy as they express the vision of hope and faith that comedy reveals. Sheridan employs the traditional device to round off his play without, however, lapsing into sentimentality. In the sentimental comedy, the reconciliation scene reveals the abused wife shedding copious tears of joy, and her husband making extravagant promises of reform. The spectator is supposed to weep in the process. Before her repentance, Lady Teazle is clearly the antithesis of the weeping heroine of sentimental comedy. The gay lady delights us by her sparkling wit, and teases Sir Peter by her extravagance and sarcasm. She is also a far cry from the faultless sentimental heroine, as she murders other people's reputations and strikes a platonic relationship with Joseph. But it is difficult to accept Schiller's statement that the revelations in the screen scene (IV, iii) "cannot account for her astonishingly sudden conversion." Lady Teazle is, in fact, never too bad to reform. She has some reason to think that Sir Peter does not treat her with affection and sympathy ("you forget what your situation was when I married you"). She is also annoyed with him for suspecting her to be in

love with Charles. But although she teases her husband for these reasons, she does not think of parting with her virtue. With all his "honourable logic" (277) Joseph badly fails to seduce her. In the scene she comes to perceive the real evil underlying the sparkle of wit. And when she also overhears Sir Peter's real affection for her, she has good reason to repent and reform.

Lady Teazle's contrition cannot be criticized on the grounds of sentimentality, because it is preceded by her recognition of Sir Peter's amiability and of Joseph's utter perfidy. After this it is only natural for her to be somewhat "tender" while speaking to Sir Peter. It is, therefore, misleading to suggest that she "lapses" into the sentimental heroine's characteristically polished phraseology. Unlike the sentimental playwright, Sheridan makes no attempt to treat the spectator to raptures of repentance. In fact, Lady Sneerwell's parting shot directed at Lady Teazle ("May your husband live these fifty years!") gives a rather ironic twist to the reconciliation of the Teazles. In the theatre Lady Sneerwell's sally is likely to be greeted with a great roar of laughter. This also tends to cause suspicion that this reconciliation will not last long. The true sentimental comedy usually ends in an unadulterated wave of repentance, forgiveness and harmony. The School for Scandal avoids such a smugly satisfactory ending.

Thus, Sheridan prevents The School for Scandal from becoming
sentimental even when he uses some of the familiar situations and character-relationships. Unlike the sentimental playwrights, he never uses them for the display of sensibility, platitudes and tears. All this is, of course, negative. It is through Joseph that Sheridan has introduced a direct attack on sentimental comedy. Its sententious moralizing is held up to ridicule in the person of Joseph whom Sir Peter Teazle foolishly admires as a man of sentiment because of his habit of uttering high-flown moral reflections. Actually, Joseph conceals villainous intentions beneath a moral exterior. It is probable that the idea of this character was evoked by Chesterfield's letters to his Son (1774) which was intensely denounced for encouraging duplicity.

We have already seen how Joseph's exposure as "artful, selfish, and malicious -- in short, a sentimental knave" (215) receives prominent treatment in the play. Indeed, The School for Scandal might well have been entitled The Man of Sentiment. Joseph masks his pharisaic hypocrisy by mouthing moral maxims. The following two examples show how his conversation is larded with hypocritical pieces of moralizing. When Maria voices her disapproval of malicious wit, he remarks, "Certainly, madam; to smile at the jest which plants a thorn in another's breast is to become a principal in the mischief" (213). Later, while talking to Sir Peter about Charles, Joseph says, "Certainly, Sir Peter, the heart that is conscious of its own integrity is ever slow to
credit another's treachery" (279). While the sentimental playwrights present such sentiments as admirable, Sheridan shows them as hypocritical and despicable. Joseph's sentimentalism is only an elaborate pose assumed to conceal his villainy and to promote self-interest. In reality, he plots intrigues to alienate Maria and Charles, fosters rumours to ruin his brother's reputation, courts Maria to get his hands on her fortune, and attempts to seduce Lady Teazle. He is worse than Lady Sneerwell because she does not pretend to fashionable sentimentality. He is lower than even Snake who does not pretend to nobility of character. Hagstrum rightly notes Joseph's similarity to Fielding's Blifil: "Fielding's Blifil and Sheridan's Surface are men of sentiment not because they are men of feeling (both are cold villains), but because they hypocritically mouth morality. Fielding and Sheridan were satirising that kind of moral sentiment which, without feeling, became hypocritical and vicious".\(^1\)

Several characters in the play recognize Joseph for the villain he is. Lady Sneerwell fully understands the falsity of his apparently pious utterances. At one stage, she cuts him short, saying, "O lad! you are going to be moral, and forget that you are among friends" (217). The use of "moral" as a term of abuse is significant, as every sentimental comedy contained numerous passages of moralizing speech. Rowley prefers the

\(^1\) J. H. Hagstrum, Samuel Johnson's Literary Criticism (Minneapolis, Minn., 1952), p. 198.
prodigal Charles to the hypocritical Joseph, and Marie despises Joseph and refuses to marry him. Sir Oliver, as already shown, finds him something of a fraud and declares him to be dishonest, selfish and hypocritical. Joseph continues unchanged to the last. Indeed, he is, as Lawrence points out, "the irrefutable arraignment of the hollow insincerities of the sentimental school". 52

The School for Scandal is, thus, the antithesis of sentimental comedy, as it avoids the latter's distressing situations, pathetic characters, emotional dialogues, heavy didacticism, and excessive emphasis on the goodness of human nature. It ridicules the sententious moralization of sentimental comedy and contains what the latter lacks -- amusing, sharply dramatic situations; entertaining, remarkably witty characters; and pleasing, unusually polished dialogue. It is characterized by sparkling wit, free laughter and abundant humour. The School for Scandal remained the last important comedy until the early years of the twentieth century.

Thus in a sense we have come full circle. The Restoration comedy of manners, evolved to meet the needs of the new aristocracy, failed to satisfy the needs of the new age at the end of the century. As we have seen, sentimental comedy came into existence

in reaction against this "immoral" comedy and in response to a new climate, and became, for various reasons, a popular form of drama in the eighteenth century. There is no need here to repeat what has already been said in the course of this survey about the distinctive features of this comedy. Both Goldsmith and Sheridan, as we have noticed, found it too lachrymose to be true comedy, and they took occasion to cast ridicule on it. They consciously wrote in the laughing comedy tradition, avoiding what they considered to be the major weaknesses of sentimental comedy. The main characteristics of their comedies are quite antithetical to the most salient features of sentimental drama. Even while they use some of the plot-situations found in it, they produce a wholly different effect by a different technique. The elements of sentimentalism, if any, are made to provide the material for satire. Genuine sentiment is not necessarily excluded in their plays, but it never takes the form of pathos, and the comic element always overshadows the serious, if any. Unlike the sentimental playwrights, Goldsmith and Sheridan are refreshingly brief and spontaneous in treating the situations that may be potentially sentimental. Consequently, the contrast between their plays and those of the sentimental school is as marked as could well be.

The comedies written after Sheridan withdrew from comic drama (1779) fall outside the limits of this survey. It may,
however, be said in conclusion that sentimental comedy continued to be popular even after Goldsmith and Sheridan. Sentimental traits continued to appear in varying degrees in the comedies following their works. For example, Miss Sophia Lee's The Chapter of Accidents (1780) is clearly sentimental in its main plot, dealing with the secret marriage of Cecilia, the heroine, with Woodville. Her pathetic life is similar to that of Harriot in The School for Rakes. Bernbaum refers to its brilliant success and remarks that it "marks the final triumph of sentimental comedy over its enemies". This, however, is a misleading statement if it suggests that after 1780 the other types of comedy were driven off the boards by sentimental comedy. As Sherbo shows in the concluding part of his study, the drama after 1780 was "essentially heterogeneous rather than essentially homogeneous". But it is true that sentimental comedy which was popular, though not dominant, during the years which saw the unsentimental, laughing comedies of Goldsmith and Sheridan, attained even greater popularity after they had ceased to write for the stage. The statistics provided by Sherbo show an increase in the number of performances of sentimental plays in the last decade of the century. The theatre-goers liked sentimental plays, and the playwrights like Cumberland and the younger George Colman continued to oblige them until near the end of the century.

There is a good deal of sentimentalism in the revolutionary humanitarian plays of Mrs. Inchbald and Thomas Holcroft. The Road to Ruin (1792), for example, shows Holcroft under the sway of the tearful muse. It presents Harry Dornton, prompted by a high-minded filial love, ready to marry Mrs. Warren, a passionate widow, though he actually loves her daughter, Sophia. This play in which the emotional situations are greatly accentuated, gave Holcroft a lasting fame. Writing about Mrs. Inchbald's comedy, Each One Has His Faults (1793), Holcroft declares in the Monthly Review No. 91 that "of all the delights which comedy can give, that of exciting tears and laughter by the same thought is supreme". Stallbaumer shows that Holcroft was not a sentimentalist in principle and that he was prepossessed by the comic rather than the sentimental. But though he personally favoured laughing comedy, he was "forced to indulge more and more the ever-growing taste for weeping comedy". Probably, many playwrights of the last quarter of the century felt bound to make similar concessions to sentimentalism.

Sentimentalism, as we know, was one of the salient features of the Romantic Movement. It was, however, to poetry and fiction that the sentimentalists turned in the early nineteenth century, and the theatre-goers had to remain content with farce and melodrama. But in the middle of the century Dion Boucicault, a

minor playwright, complained that the public still liked pathetic and sentimental plays. The drama continued to be in an uncertain state until T.W. Robertson (1829-71) and H.A. Jones (1851-1929) endeavoured to bring it closer to life during the second half of the century.