

THE RIVALS AS AN ANTI-SENTIMENTAL COMEDY

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Abstract:

The comedy of manners is a phrase often used in literary history and criticism. It is particularly applied to the Restoration dramatists in England. Sheridan's purpose in writing "The Rivals" was to entertain the audience by making them laugh and not by making them shed tears and serious. The sentimental comedy of 18th century was actually reaction against the comedy of manners which had been voyage during the restoration period. That mainly appears to our feelings of sentimentality, pity, compassionate sympathy. Anti-sentimental comedy is reaction against sentimental comedy. The sentimental comedy did not last language. The sentimental soon degenerated into sentimentality. The motif of the writers of the comedy of manners was to make comic atmosphere of holy characters, middle class morality was exposed. Anti-sentimental comedy is reaction against sentimental comedy. The comedy of manners which goldsmith and Sheridan cultivate in 18th century was the reaction against the sentimental comedy of clibber, steel. Goldsmith opposed sentimental comedy because it place of laughter and humors. Thus, here is new and success output in anti-sentimental comedy.it takes old forms of comedy, comedy of manners. That is also called generally, for anti-sentimental comedy. Anti-sentimental comedy is going to old forms that have a low farce; situational humor.it is high polished in restoration comedy. The representation between Falkland and Julia are satire on the sentimental comedy which was in fashion in those days and against which Sheridan revolted is seen in his drama "The Rivals".

THR RIVALS AS AN ANTI-SENTIMENTAL COMEDY

Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816) occupies an important position in the history of English drama. He is certainly the most important dramatists of the eighteenth century, and some critics give him the second place after Shakespeare. Sheridan was born in Dublin. His father was Thomas Sheridan, an actor and author. Sheridan was educated at Harrow. He was an attractive and alters young man. In the Restoration period England witnessed the emergence of 'comedies of manners' showing the confused and sanctimonious lifestyles of the rising middle class and upper class then "during the 18th century, 'sentimental comedies' encouraged audiences to uphold virtue and avoid vice, chiefly by stirring their emotions." Goldsmith and Sheridan who written in the form of sentimental comedy, attempted a revival of the Restoration comedy of manners without its coarseness and immorality, and satirize sentimental tradition.

Sheridan's contributed to English drama is that he contained the sentimental trend by bringing back genuine humor and wit to the stage. In his three plays **The Rivals**, **The School Scandal** and **The Critic**, Sheridan portrayed the upper class life of the late eighteenth century with the geniality of romance. When he was twenty four and was in need of money, he wrote his first comedy **The Rivals**. When the play was first performed at the convent London Theatre on January 17, 1775, it was a dismal failure. Critics and the moral vocal portion of the audience expressed their displeasures in no uncertain terms. They pointed out to its many blemishes, via, inordinate length, exuberance of sentiment in the long-drawn out sentimental episode of Julia and Faulkland, etc. Although one of the journals had to admit marks of the man of genius, the gentleman and the scholar even in the very impressions.

The Rivals present a direct challenge to the sentimentalists though some minor concession is given to them in the Julia and Faulkland episode. It has humour and wit which resemble those of the Comedy of Manner; but it is free from vulgarity. Lydia's romantic elopement and her notions about a lover's duties are intended as satire on the popular sentimental style. Among the characters Mrs. Malaprop stands out with her amusing **derangements of**

words. A comedy is a play of light and amusing character with a happy conclusion to the plot. It adopts a humorous or familiar style and depicts laughable characters, incidents and situation. Comedy can be divided into two types- the classical and the romantic. Sentimental comedy was an excess of melodrama and moralizing and less of wit and laughter. Sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century, present, in place of laughter, tears in place of intrigue, melodramatic and distressing situation; and in place of rogues and gallants and witty damsels, pathetic heroines and serious lovers and honest servants, says Hudson.

Sheridan too was a born dramatist like Goldsmith, but he was more productive although his active dramatic career was as short as Goldsmith's. As Goldsmith and others had already led the assault against sentiment and sentimental comedy with vigour, Sheridan could gain from their experience and tilt at sentimentalism more confidently. He was no less earnest although he might appear less fiery and furious and more amused in his attack. Sentiment and Sentimentalism were still an issue to reckon with in the theatre and outside when he entered the theatre. Three of his plays and his 'prologue' to the revised version of his first play *The Rivals* are ample proof of it. Like Goldsmith's, his plays too are woven out of eighteenth-century fabric. For his plays he drew freely, like most dramatists, on literary tradition in general, and particularly he drew upon the Georgian comic tradition, notwithstanding his debt to Congreve and Vanbrugh among the Restoration writers of comedy of manners.

An Anti-Sentimental comedy is a kind of comedy that achieved some popularity with the middle-class audience in the eighteenth century. It showed virtue reward by domestic bliss, its plot usually involving unbelievable couples. It was pioneered by Richard Steele. Anti-Sentimental comedies of Sheridan and Goldsmith retrieve comedy from too much of weak moralizing and ridiculous sentimentalism. They combined morality with wit and sobriety with laughter. Anti-Sentimental comedy is reaction against sentimental comedy. The explorer of anti-sentimental comedy is Oliver Goldsmith, who criticized the sentimental comedy in his essay 'Essay on the theatre' or 'A comparison between Laughing and sentimental comedy'. Oliver Goldsmith concentrates on the true function of a comedy was to give a humorous

exhibition of the follies and vices of men and women and to rectify them by exciting laughter. Goldsmith rejected sentimental comedy because in place of laughter and humour, it leads to tears and distressing situations, pathetic lovers, serious heroines and honest servants.

Sentimental and Anti sentimental comedy is written by Goldsmith and Sheridan. The sentimental comedy of 18th century was against the comedy of manners. Sentimental comedy is a kind of comedy that achieved some popularity with respectable middle class audience in 18th century. Anti-sentimental comedy is reactions against sentimental comedy. Generally the Anti-Sentimental comedy focuses on major character as lover and it is divided into subplot like the dramatic way and the relations with the pathos.

Characteristics of Anti-Sentimental Comedy...

- Amusing intrigues and situations
- Satirical comedy and Irony
- Marriage for Love and Marriage for Money
- Wit of Language and verbal dialogue
- Farce and disguise
- Emotions have boundaries

Undoubtedly Sheridan's purpose in writing **The Rivals** was to entertain the audience by making them laugh and not by making they shed tears and were written as a comedy, pure and simple. Though there are certainly a few sentimental scenes in this play and they are regarded as a parody of sentimentality. The scene between Faukland and Julia are satire on sentimental comedy which was in fashion in those days and against which Sheridan ridicules the excessive solicitude and concern which an over-sentimental lover like Faukland experiences when separated from his beloved.

Sheridan's 'The Rivals' is regarded as an anti-sentimental comedy because it is a comedy packed with wit, laughter, and mirth provoking scenes, while the sentimental comedies move the audience to tears not to laughter. Sheridan illustrates sentimental characters and situations in such a way that they arouse in the audience funny feelings. Thus he ridicules their sentiments. At the very first, Sheridan educates us about the sentimental heroine of the play through the dialogue between Coachman and Fag. She is so wealthy that if she wanted she could pay the entire national debt as easily as Fag can pay his washerwoman's bill. Yet she is so sentimental that she has an 'odd taste'. She is, Fog says –

“A lady of a very singular taste: a lady who likes him [Beverley] 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.”

Moreover she does not change her notion to marry, without her anti consent, a low paid man even after knowing the penalty of losing her resources. She deliberately makes a quarrel with her lover just for pleasure and making fun, because lovers usually quarrel in sentimental novels. Furthermore, when she discovers that there will be no elopement, she is moody and quite prepared to call off her engagement. Actually, Sheridan has flattered Lydia's funny, logical and sentimental notions and activities. Lydia cries out-

“When I thought we were coming to the prettiest distress imaginable... I had projected one of the most sentimental elopements! So amiable a ladder of ropes! Scotch parson ... such paragraphs in newspapers! Oh, I shall die with disappointment!”

In **The Rivals**, Sheridan introduced some sentimental element in the Julia and Faulkland under plot, though he revolted against the sentimental comedy. He allowed the Julia-Faulkland under plot to retain in some measure the conventional phrasing of sentimental drama. Though Faulkland is a humour character, in which jealousy is carried to comic exaggeration, some of his and Julia's speech seems rather an unconscious echo of sentimental diction than raillery at its extravagance. Julia and Faulkland episode virgues on sentimentalist. He is full of

doubts about the sincerity of his beloved and so Julia has to leave him with tears when she is unable to bear the excess of her love.

The true character of Faulkland is indicated to us by Absolute's description of him as the **most teasing captious, incorrigible lover**. Faulkland's description of his state of mind about his beloved Julia also makes him appear absurd. He says that every hour is an occasion for him to feel alarmed on Julia's account. It veils, he feels afraid lest some shower should have chilled her. If the wind is acute, he feels afraid lest a rude blast should affect her health. The heat of the noon and dews of the evening may endanger her health. All this is good humored and certainly not to be taken vigorously.

Sheridan continued to sketch Faulkland in the same satirical manner. When Acres appears and is questioned by Absolute regarding Julia's activities in the country side Acres replied that Julia has been enjoying herself thoroughly and been having a gay time. Now, a standard lover would feel extremely happy to learn this. The same reaction from Faulkland because he has assured Absolute that he would be happy **beyond measure**, if he were certain that Julia was hale and hearty. But his definite reaction is quite different and greatly gratifies us by its absurdity.

In both his interview with Julia, Faulkland betrays the same absurdity. In the first interview, he complains to her of the mirth and gaiety she has been enjoying during his absence. He wanted to be loved for his own sake and for no particular reason and he also expects her lover to be **fixed and ardent**. In short, his perfect manner of talking to her and his aside at the end of this scene reveals him in a still more comic light. The second interview again shows him a ridiculous light. He subjects Julia to a test in order to convince himself of the good will of her love. The author's intention is to show the absurd length to which an over-sentimental lover can go and the author expects us to laugh at this kind of lover. Even Julia suffers from an excessive sentimentality; she too is made to appear absurd and ridiculous for that reason. The

appearance in which she characterizes her lover to Lydia shows the kind of mentality that she has. In the two interviews with Faulkland, Julia is again overflowing with emotion.

Sheridan satirized the heroine of sentimental comedy in the person of Lydia languish, who is really to die with disappointment when the **prettiest distress, imaginable**, and the prospects of one of the most sentimental elopements seem about to fade into the common light of conventional matrimony. Lydia too over-sentimental girl though in a different way. She too becomes the subject of ridicule in the place. Her romantic ideas and her romantic planning appear absurd to us. She wants not the usual routine marriage but a run away marriage.

Lydia languish is more than a whimsical exaggeration of the heroine of sentimental comedy. She is as Mrs. Malaprop might say **the very fine apple of sentimentality**. The accentuation of the particular trait of character emphasized by the **languish** in the heroine of the play is that she is pinning away in a depressed state of mind with her romantic and sentimental conception of life and love and amorously forward to some romantic elopement with her young and gallant lover.

The way in which the other characters have been showed is also confirmation of the anti-sentimental character of the play. Captain Absolute is a practical man and though he assumes the name and status of Ensign Beverly, he would not like to forfeit the rich dowry which Lydia will bring him. Mrs. Malaprop is conventional, practical woman whose attitude to marriage is business-like. Sir Anthony Absolute to be a practical, worldly man. Bob Acres is a county boor with no romantic or sentimental pretensions by towards the end of the play he shows that he is more practical than anybody else by saying:

**If I can't get a wife without fighting for love,
By any, I'll live a bachelor.**

The art of heightening by contrast the comic aspects of character has rarely been exhibited more amazingly than in the conversation of Mrs. Malaprop and Bob Acres with the others and more exquisitely than in the dialogues between Captain Absolute and Jack his father Sir Absolute.

Thus Sheridan tried to attack sentimentality in his plays yet he could not completely get rid of the prevailing force of sentimentality. In this regard Nettleton observes, **Sheridan's achievement in comedy however great its success, did not destroy the vitality of the sentimental play: the contagion of seduction vogue was stronger than the example of an individual and transitory triumph.** Sheridan no doubt attacked and satirized the sentimental drama of the age, but there was a certain sentimental strain in him of which he could not wholly rid himself. Sheridan was a master in the creation of comic situations and scenes and each situation and scenes abounds in humour and wit. The technical perfection of the scenes and the general air of wit, pleasant repartee and laughter disappeared from the English Theater with the death of Sheridan. Anti-sentimental comedy is becomes more famous with the comedies that were presented by Richard Brinsley Sheridan's the rivals. it is kind of comedy representing complete and highly developed code of behavior current in fashionable circle of society.

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