

The Rivals as a sentimental Comedy.

"Sentimentalism in drama in the 18th century banished laughter from its legitimate place and introduced tears to fill the vacuum. The sentimental drama simply revelled in the excess of pathos and tearful situation in which wronged innocence was held up to draw forth the sympathetic tears of the audience. Throwing light on the vague of such drama. A Nicoll observes: Comedy had departed from its original home. In the place of laughter, tears: in place of intrigue, melodramatic and distressing situation; in place of rouges, gallants and witty damsels, pathetic heroines and serious lovers and honest servants - That is what we discover in the typical Sentimental Drama of the late eighteenth century. We are in the world of drama not of comedy; in the realm of emotion, not of intellect."

Before Goldsmith and Sheridan appeared on the scene, there had been a decay of the spirit of true Comedy of which the best exponent was Congreve. The Comedy of Manners, so popular in the Restoration period was now rapidly degenerating. It became much too coarse artificial and ~~but~~ blatantly immoral. Its hero became the young gallant who was profess-
edly immoral and its heroine, a woman of fashion who had no sound moral principles to go by. Surely, such a state of things could

not last long. Towards the beginning of 18th century, a revulsion of feeling set in against this type of coarseness and immorality and a change in tone and moral outlook was soon discernible. Great social and economic changes also affected the fortunes of ~~English~~ English comedy with the rise of the middle class. Matters soon came to a head with the publication of Jeremy Collier's 'Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage' in 1698, which gave expression to the middle-class protest against the grossness into which the Restoration Comedy of Manners had sunk. By the middle of the eighteenth century the Sentimental Comedy had fully established itself on the English stage. Its characteristic became more clearly defined and the process of moral reformation was carried a step further when wit and humour were completely replaced by conscious moralization and the comedy became professedly moral in its purpose and outlook. In the works of such writers as Hugh Kelly and Richard Cumberland there was little life of the true spirit of comedy. Naturally a reaction began to be visible in the domain of drama against growing sentimentalism.

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

The Rivals is an artificial Comedy of Manners. But it is not totally devoid of Sentimentalism. Of course, Sheridan has tried to satirize the heroine of Sentimental Comedy in the person of Lydia Languish who is ready to die with disappointment when 'the greatest distress imaginable' and the prospect of 'one of the most sentimental elopements' seem about to fade into the common light of conventional matrimony. So in the main plot Sheridan attempts to carry out his challenge to perfection. But the sub-plot still contains some of the features of the Sentimental Comedy. This Julia-Faulkland episode verges on sentimentality. Julia young parentless girl, possesses laudable qualities of head and heart.

She loves Faulkland who is an incorrigible sentimentalist. He is obsessed with some fixed ideas about love, sex and marriage. He is full of doubts about the sincerity of his beloved. He nourishes a number of doubts about the singleness and loyalty of Julia. The result is that Julia has to pass many unhappy days and nights and is made to shed tears. Every time Faulkland meets Julia, he finds occasion to quarrel with her and Julia has to leave him with tears when she is unable to bear the excesses of her lover. All this draws sympathy from the spectators for poor Julia. The play ends with a note of moral preaching. Julia's last speech to Faulkland seems to be a moral lecture from the pulpit. She advises Faulkland: "When hearts deserving happiness would unite their fortunes, virtue would crown them with an unfading garland of modest hortless flowers; but ill-judging passion will force the gaudier rose into the wreath whose thorn offends them, when its leaves are dropped."

Though Sheridan tried to attack sentimentiality in his plays, yet he could not completely get rid of the prevailing force

of sentimentality. In this regard Wattleton observes: curiously not, he (Sheridan) allowed the Julia-Faulkland sentimental drama. Though Faulkland is a 'humour' character in whom jealousy is carried to comic exaggeration, some of his and Julia's speeches seem rather an unconscious echo of sentimental ~~satire~~ ~~satirization~~ than revilery at its extravagance". In the warfare against sentimentality, Goldsmith was an 'elder' though not a better soldier than Sheridan whose challenge to sentimental Muse was admittedly more deliberate than that of the former. This is evident from his prologues to all his principal plays. In The Critic Sheridan satirizes the whole species of the sentimental comedy—the affectations of the stage in general including the excesses of sentimentality. It is true that Sheridan does not succeed in completely excluding sentimental from his plays but his plays do not aim at moral preaching through sentimental effusions. Sheridan achievement in comedy, however great its success did not destroy the vitality of the sentimental play; the contagion of seductive vague was stronger than the example of an individual and transitory triumph."