

The Rivals — two extracts

These extracts include text picked out in bold type. This is to emphasise some sections which will repay study, though you will need to work out for yourself why, using the notes from the talk as a guide!

From Act I scene 2

Lydia Here, my dear Lucy, **hide these books** — quick, quick — fling *Peregrine Pickle* under the toilet — throw *Roderick Random* into the closet — thrust *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 leave Fordyce's Sermons open upon the table.**

Lucy O burn it, Ma'am, **the hairdresser has torn away as far as 'Proper Pride'.**

Lydia **Never mind — open at 'Sobriety' — fling me Lord Chesterfield's Letters.** Now for 'em.

Exit Lucy

Enter Mrs Malaprop and Sir Anthony Absolute

Mrs Malaprop There, Sit Anthony, there sits the deliberate simpleton, who wants to disgrace her family, and lavish herself on a fellow not worth a shilling!

Lydia Madam, I thought you once —

Mrs Malaprop You thought, Miss! I don't know any business you have to think at all — thought does not become a young woman; the point we request of you is, that you will promise to forget this fellow — **to illiterate him**, I say, quite from your memory.

Lydia Ah! Madam! our memories are independent of our wills. It is not so easy to forget.

Mrs Malaprop But I say it is, Miss; there is nothing on earth so easy as to forget, if a person chooses to set about it. I'm sure I have as much forgot your poor dear uncle as if he had never existed — and I thought it my duty to do so; and let me tell you, Lydia, these violent memories don't become a young woman.

Sir Anthony Why sure she won't pretend to remember what she's ordered not! Aye, this comes of her reading!

Lydia What crime, Madam, have I committed to be treated thus?

Mrs Malaprop Now don't attempt to extirpate yourself from the matter; you know I have proof controvertible of it. But tell me, will you promise to do as you're bid? Will you take a husband of your friend's choosing?

Lydia Madam, I must tell you plainly, that had I no preferences for anyone else, the choice you made would be my aversion.

Mrs Malaprop What business have you, Miss, with *preference* and *aversion*? They don't become a young woman; and you ought to know, that as both always wear off, 'tis safest in matrimony to begin with a little aversion. I am sure I hated your poor dear uncle before marriage as if he'd been a blackamoor — and yet, Miss, you are sensible what a wife I made! — and when it pleased Heaven to release

me from him, 'tis unknown what tears I shed! But suppose we were going to give you another choice, will you promise to give up this Beverley? Could I belie my thoughts so far, as to give that promise, my actions would certainly belie my words.

Lydia

Mrs Malaprop Take yourself to your room. You are fit company for nothing but your own ill-humours.

Lydia Willingly, Ma'am — I cannot change for the worse. *Exit Lydia*

Mrs Malaprop There's a little intricate hussy for you!

Sir Anthony It is not to be wondered at, Ma'am — **all this is the natural consequence of teaching girls to read.** Had I a thousand daughters, by heaven! I'd as soon have them taught the black art as their alphabet.

Mrs Malaprop Nay, nay, Sir Anthony, you are an absolute misanthropy!

Sir Anthony In my way hither, Mrs Malaprop, I observed your niece's maid coming forth from a **circulating library!** She had a book in each hand — they were half-bound volumes, with marble covers! From that moment I guessed how full of duty I should see her mistress!

Mrs Malaprop Those are vile places indeed!

Sir Anthony Madam, a circulating library in a town is as an ever-green tree of diabolical knowledge! It blossoms through the year! And depend upon it, Mrs Malaprop, that they who are so fond of handling the leaves, will long for the fruit at last.

Mrs Malaprop Well, but Sir Anthony, your wife, Lady Absolute, was fond of books.

Sir Anthony Aye — and injury sufficient they were to her, Madam. But were I to choose another helpmate, the extent of her erudition should consist in **her knowing her simple letters**, without their mischievous combinations; and the summit of her science be — her ability to count as far as twenty. The first, Mrs Malaprop, would enable her to work A.A. upon my linen; and the latter would be quite sufficient to prevent her giving me a shirt, No. 1 and a stock, No. 2.

Mrs Malaprop Fie, fie, Sir Anthony, you surely speak laconically!

Sir Anthony Why, Mrs Malaprop, in moderation now, what would you have a woman know?

Mrs Malaprop Observe me, Sir Anthony. I would by no means wish a daughter of mine to be a progeny of learning; I don't think so much learning becomes a young woman; for instance — **I would never let her meddle with Greek, or Hebrew, or Algebra, or Simony, or Fluxions, or Paradoxes, or such inflammatory branches of learning**

From Act 3 scene 3

Absolute **But we trifle with our precious moments — such another opportunity may not occur — then let me now conjure my kind, my condescending angel, to fix the time when I may rescue her from undeserved persecution, and with a licensed warmth plead for my reward.**

Lydia Will you then, Beverley, consent to forfeit that portion of my paltry wealth — **that burden on the wings of love?**

Absolute Oh, come to me — rich only thus — in loveliness — bring no portion to me but thy love — 'twill be generous in you, Lydia — for well you know, it is the only dower your poor Beverley can repay.

Lydia How persuasive are his words! **How charming will poverty be** with him!

Absolute Ah! my soul, what a life will we then live? Love shall be our idol and support! We will worship him with a monastic strictness; abjuring all worldly toys, to centre every thought and action there. Proud of calamity, we will enjoy the wreck of wealth; while the surrounding gloom of adversity shall make the flame of our pure love show doubly bright. — By heavens! I would fling all goods of fortune from me with a prodigal hand to enjoy the scene where I might clasp my Lydia to my bosom and say, the world affords no smile to me — but here (*Embracing her*). (*Aside*) If she holds out now the devil is in it!