

## ***The Rivals* — some guidelines for A Level revision**

The notes which follow are taken from the overhead projector transparencies used during a revision day for A Level students in 2001 organised by A-Grades Conferences. They are not the complete text of the talk but intended to highlight the key points which were being made. I hope that they are helpful. The main focus for these notes is AQA/AEB 0660 English Literature Paper 2, the set texts paper.

Students were also given some sheets of general revision guidance and a sheet containing extracts from Acts 1 and 3. This is provided separately in a version which includes sections picked out for special attention. The sections which follow concentrate on a few key points about the novel.

### ***The Rivals* — examination questions**

- ? What contribution does Mrs Malaprop make to *The Rivals*?
- ? In what ways does Act 1 Scene 1 prepare and audience for the rest of the play? (2000)
- ? Sheridan's presentation of marriage
- ? Act 1 scene 2 — presentation of Lydia and Julia (January 2001)

### **Sheridan and the theatre**

'Pshaw! Nothing but the fleet and the nation! — I hate all politics but theatrical politics!'  
*The Critic*

*Sheridan was undoubtedly being ironic here, just as in The Rivals he mocks the pretences of his characters — but we need to be aware that he is an intensely theatrical writer. Almost every character seems to be playing at least two parts, even the servant Lucy.*

### ***The Rivals* and romance**

FAG                      Why then the cause of all this is — L,O,V,E, — love... Ah! Thomas, there lies the mystery o'the matter...

*Act 1 Scene 1*

### **Sense, sensibility & sentimentality**

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!

*Prologue*

### **Act 1 Scene 2 — The perils of reading**

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*

....

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 marbled covers! From that moment I guessed how full of duty I should see her mistress!

*Check on the differences between the two kinds of books here: those Lydia reads and those she wants Mrs Malaprop and others to think that she reads.*

### **Act 1 Scene 2 — The romantic quarrel**

JULIA What was his offence?

LYDIA Nothing at all! But, I don't know how it was, as often as we had been together, we had never quarrelled! And, somehow, I was afraid he would never give me an opportunity. So, last Thursday, I wrote a letter to myself...

*Why did Lydia feel she had to initiate a quarrel? What is the effect of this on the audience?*

### **Act 3 scene 3 — The charms of poverty**

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

....

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

*What parts are being played by Lydia and Beverley here? What is the effect on the audience?*