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The Rivals

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During a brief but brilliant literary career, Irish-born dramatist and statesman Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816) wrote cleverly plotted plays that revealed his nimble wit and keen eye for comic situations. Two of them — *The School for Scandal* and *The Rivals* — are among the funniest in the English language. *The Rivals*, brimming with false identities and with romantic entanglements carried on amid a cloud of parental disapproval, satirizes the pretentiousness and sentimentality of the age. It features a cast of memorable characters, among them the lovely Lydia Languish, whose pretty head has been filled with nonsense from romantic novels; Capt. Jack Absolute, a young officer in love with Lydia; Sir Anthony Absolute, Jack's autocratic father; Sir Lucius O'Trigger, a fiery Irishman; and Jack's provincial neighbor, Bob Acres, a bumptious but lovable country squire in love with Lydia. Hoping to win Lydia's affection, Captain Jack woos the pretty miss by pretending to be a penniless ensign named Beverley, an act that nearly incites a duel with Acres. His actions also provoke serious objections from Lydia's aunt, Mrs. Malaprop, a misspeaking matron whose ludicrous misuse of words gave the English language a new term: malapropism. Ultimately, the hilarious complications are resolved in a radiant comic masterpiece that will entertain and delight theater devotees and students of English drama alike.

The Rivals Details

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From Reader Review The Rivals for online ebook

Bettie? says

Anna said: "The play mentioned in Wilkie's No name. I did enjoy it and it is available on librivox :) "

<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/24761>

Sarah says

The Rivals was a surprisingly difficult play to read. I think it might be Sheridan's use of language that has me checking and rechecking myself, but I can't say that that is a bad thing in this case. This comedy deals with a man who is courting a woman under a false guise; his father arranges a marriage for him, but with the exact same girl, but only under his real name, not the guise. Confusion and hilarity ensues!

Maybe this play is just a little dated in a way, but is that really bad? I don't think so. I was entertained because this play actually reminded me of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, but in an 18th century costume. I mean, seriously? This whole play is one big case of Bunburyism. I love that I can apply the term to a play besides the play of its origin, yunno?

I liked this play a lot, and I like Sheridan. It's only a shame that he cut off his career so quickly, because I wish there was more. I look forward to reading his next play!

Jordan St. says

"Murder's the matter! Slaughter's the matter!" Hilarious play, even in 2018, especially with the dual identities of 'Ensign Beverly', the characters' attempts at wooing each other somewhat unsuccessfully, and the exuberant, extravagant nature of Mrs. Malaprop and her somewhat odd phrasing. Somewhat like a Twelfth Night of 18th Century theater, but with more nonsense. Some of the language is a little hard to understand and perhaps to our ears misused (ex. 'hussy'), but the play and its conclusion are still quite amusing.

Rebecca Housden says

Although this play may have not received a warm reception the night of its first performance, I did enjoy it. I found it a good portrayal of the stereotype of elegant Georgian society, and it was a light read. Although its plot was made up of a number of different tropes, many of them over used in common literature, *The Rivals* put them to good use, combining them and switching between plots in a simple yet effective way. It cannot be stated that this is a particularly remarkable play, there is nothing that stands out about it to make it a great work compared to many others, but it is an enjoyable portrayal of the Georgian upper class at Bath, caught up in pleasure, romance, and honour. I feel that it cannot be stated that it 'luckily' ends with everything resolved and without tragedy, as, once again, it adheres to the tropes and expectations of literature of that period, with a happy ending, all confusions untangled, all happiness restored, in a very predictable but overall tidy and satisfying way.

Danièle says

As always with plays, they were written to be performed so you don't get the full effect from just sitting with a book. I'm sure I would have rated it higher if I had seen a performance, and I can see from reading it how it could be hilarious - there are some very witty remarks. As it is, from reading it I know that I want to be looking out for a live version!

Kay says

I think it was this reading of *The Rivals* at age seventeen that disabused me of the notion that people several centuries back were not as fond of being entertained as we are today. Prior to that, I think I had lumped all things from earlier times into some great, depressing lump, sure that since our predecessors lacked modern conveniences that they must have found life a dreary affair indeed.

Sheridan's sparkling wit and exuberant language made short work of that notion. I've also retained a lifelong affection for Mrs. Malaprop (and, of course, for malapropisms - my own contribution to the genre being, "it is a mere *fig newton* of your imagination" - but I guess that can't really be a malapropism since it's self-conscious. Needless to say, I'm blissfully unaware of any *real* malapropisms I have committed!)

I seem to have read this immediately after *Hamlet*. Now *there's* a contrast for you!

Jonathan Dauermann says

For a play written almost 200 years after Shakespeare's comedies, it's telling that this play feels much more dated. A marriage comedy that requires multiple characters to take the most convoluted, illogical paths to getting what they want, the plot's contrivances grow tiring after the first two acts. However, this is a distressingly common sin in most romantic comedies through history, where a playwright can seemingly only offer comic situations that arise out of a steadfast refusal on the part of the play's lovers to indulge in common sense for a single moment.

The most successful aspect of the play, and in fact the aspect of its writing that merits its continued relevance and consideration, is the fact that the silliness of the four main characters' romantic difficulties are rooted in genuine, relatable character flaws. Whether that is a pre-constructed ideal of a perfect mate that exists less to guarantee your own happiness than to flout and reject the conventions of your parents, a willingness to debase your own moral structure and engage in escalating deceits in order to win the love of someone who may simply be asking too much of you, or a lack of self-regard and self-love so all-encompassing you literally cannot accept the love of another, these basic dynamics remain as recognizable now as they were in 1775.

Still, the play lacks the depth of character and the believability of plot to be much more than an entertaining, fizzy, thin treat. Most of its verbal humor has lost its efficacy with the passage of time, and the passages of poetry that dot the play's prologue and epilogue are tedious and strained. It's hard to see this play now as much more than something that belongs in a museum rather than on a modern stage.

Gideon says

“...surely a little trifling indisposition is not an unnatural consequence of absence from those we love.”

Zan says

Sheridan's plays use conventions of the melodrama to move his plots along, and I can't help but be entertained by them all. The entanglements of Lydia Languish and Capt. Jack Absolute, as well as the other supporting cast of ridiculous characters, play on language, mistaken/hidden identity, and miscarried letters only to peak with a climactic series of duel challenges (one of them leveled at a fictionalized suitor).

I still am chewing on this one, since there is a VERY stage Irishman in this play who comes off almost as the villain; what am I supposed to do with this when Sheridan is himself an Irishman? I think this play could be really fun to discuss in an Irish studies classroom. I might get that chance in the fall.

Oh, and just for funsies, I took the time to watch an amateur theatre production of this play on YouTube. The costumes would undoubtedly be the highlight of any staging of this play.

Book Wyrms says

Occasionally funny with its sarcasm and the many roaring, scene chewing opportunities for the audio actors:

'So you will fly out! Can't you be COOL LIKE ME-EE!?!'

Otherwise, this is utterly forgettable with stock characters, stock romances, stock coincidences and preposterous conflicts, as well as being longer than necessary. I'd suggest *The Importance of Being Earnest* instead, as it shares most of the plot anyway.

Nadja says

I stumbled upon this play because I've read that Jane Austen performed *The Rivals* with her family in her time. Unfortunately I didn't like it that much. The premise of the story sounded fun but the language was hard to understand at times and the writing was rather dull.

Jane Austen July 2018: Read a book by a contemporary of Jane Austen.

Paul LaFontaine says

George Washington's favorite play, a young couple plays off each other in a bewildering array of mistaken identities and competing love interests.

I found this one hard to decipher as the language is antique and the monologues long. Another play where the English hide identities to obscure problems of class.

Can't recommend.

Amandanoel says

Another play that I just found really hard to get through but seriously believe would be a charming, delightful piece of fluffy comedy when performed

Fabfabian says

Helped along by viewing scenes from Bristol Theatre production, I found this 18th century comedy still rewards with numerous laughs. There is still much to learn about "The Game of Love and Chance" as exemplified by the behaviours of Julia/Falkland, and of course Lydia/Captain Absolute.

Ace McGee says

More mistaken identities than you can shake a stick at in the 18th century play-not that I could keep them all straight. Features Miss Malaprop of Malapropism fame!

Audiobook
