School for Scandal Study Guide

School for Scandal by Richard Brinsley Sheridan

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Contents

School for Scandal Study Guide....1

Contents....2

Introduction....4

Author Biography....5

Plot Summary....7

A Portrait....10

Prologue....11

Act 1, Scene 1....12

Act 1, Scene 2....14

Act 2, Scene 1....15

Act 2, Scene 2....16

Act 2, Scene 3....17

Act 3, Scene 1....18

Act 3, Scene 2....19

Act 3, Scene 3....20

Act 4, Scene 1....21

Act 4, Scene 2....22

Act 4, Scene 3....23

Act 5, Scene 1....25

Act 5, Scene 2....26

Act 5, Scene 3....27

Epilogue....29

Characters....30

Themes....34

Style....36

Historical Context....39
Critical Overview....41
Criticism....43
Critical Essay #1....44
Critical Essay #2....47
Critical Essay #3....50
Critical Essay #4....52
Adaptations....53
Topics for Further Study....54
Compare and Contrast....55
What Do I Read Next?....56
Further Study....57
Bibliography....59
Copyright Information....60

Introduction

School for Scandal opened at the Drury Lane Theatre in London, England, in May of 1777. It was an enormous success. Reviews heralded the play as a "real comedy" that would supplant the sentimental dramas that had filled the stage in the previous years. While wildly popular in the eighteenth century, the play has not been as successful with contemporary audiences.

One significant problem is the anti-Semitism that runs throughout the play. Post-World War II audiences are understandably sensitive to the disparaging remarks made about moneylenders, who were often Jewish. That the character of Moses is portrayed as honest and concerned is depicted in the play as an aberration. When Sir Oliver is learning how to disguise himself as a moneylender, he is told that he must ask 100% interest because it is expected that he must behave as an "unconscionable dog."

But anti-Semitism is not the only problem with modern staging. By current standards, the play appears artificial in the characters' speech, dress, and motivations. A comedy about manners is not as interesting to twentieth century audiences because manners and the rules of society are far more permissive and wide-ranging than they were in the 1700s. When *School for Scandal* was revived on the London stage in 1990, the director stated that another problem with staging was the lack of any one strong character to drive the play.

Perceptions regarding the nature of drama also play into contemporary perceptions of Sheridan's work. Peter Woods, who directed the 1990 revival, stated in an interview in *Sheridan Studies,* that "today's audience supposes itself to be watching ART. Sheridan's audience was looking at the funnies." Woods believed that audiences taking themselves and historical plays too seriously are what prevents Sheridan's comedy from being as successful today. Nevertheless, *School for Scandal* remains a standard for comedies of manner and is considered Sheridan's defining work.

Author Biography

Richard Brinsley Sheridan was born in Dublin, Ireland, and was christened on November 4, 1751. His father was an actor and author, a path that Sheridan himself would choose for his vocation. He was educated at Harrow School in London, England. After the family moved to Bath in 1770, Sheridan met and eloped with a young singer, Eliza Linley. Their marriage contract was invalid due to a lack of parental consent, however. Sheridan fought two duels on her behalf, nearly dying in the second, and finally, after three years, the couple's families withdrew their opposition and the pair were legally married in 1773.

Sheridan had begun to study the law the year before, and, in 1773, he entered as a barrister in the Middle Temple. When the law failed to provide him with adequate financial means, Sheridan turned his attention to writing drama. His first play, *The Rivals* was completed in a few weeks and opened in 1775 at the Covent Garden Theatre. The production closed the same day; Sheridan revised the work, shortening the structure and recasting his actors. The play reopened to great success only ten days later. A few months later his second work, *St. Patrick's Day,* opened. Sheridan next collaborated on an operatic play, *The Duenna,* with his father-in-law. Both of these works were popular with audiences.

After writing and producing three successful plays in 1775, Sheridan and some partners bought the Drury Lane Theatre in 1776, and he became its manager. In 1777, his play *A Trip to Scarborough* was presented at the Drury Lane, and, three months later, *School For Scandal* became his most popular play. In 1779, Sheridan became the sole owner of the theatre, and his last play for another twenty years, *The Critic,* opened to the same success as his earlier works.

Despite critical and popular success, Sheridan had accumulated a huge amount of debt. On the surface, he appeared a success. By his late twenties he was the owner of the most famous theatre in England and was a well-known, successful playwright, yet his finances were in ruins.

In 1780, Sheridan was elected to Parliament. By all reports, Sheridan was a brilliant orator, but he never achieved the kind of success he desired, due in part to British prejudices against his Irish birth. Sheridan's wife died in 1792; she had left him years earlier because of his drinking and infidelity. The same year, the Drury Lane Theatre was condemned and torn down. Sheridan went even further into debt but managed to rebuild the theatre. Three years after his wife's death, he married Hester Jane Ogle, the nineteen-year-old daughter of the Dean of Winchester. Sheridan wrote his last play, *Pizarro,* in 1799. The income from this last successful production only slightly reduced his mountain of debt. Finally, Sheridan was ousted from Drury Lane's management due to his mishandling of funds. When he lost his Parliament seat, he also lost protection against arrest for his debts. Sheridan was imprisoned several times for failure to pay his debts; his furniture was sold, and he was living in filth at the tune of his death in 1816.

Although he died in financial ruin and ignominy, the work that he produced for the stage in the years 1773-1779 earned Sheridan a place among the great writers of drama

Plot Summary

Act I

School for Scandal opens with Lady Sneerwell and her henchman Snake plotting a means to break up the romance between Charles Surface and Maria. Itis Snake'sjob to assist in disseminating the gossip that Lady Sneerwell creates, and when he asks why she wishes to destroy this romance, Lady Sneerwell reveals that she wants Charles for herself. Maria's hand would then go to Charles's brother, Joseph.

In the first act, the audience is introduced to the characters who surround Lady Sneerwell and their true nature is revealed. Gossip and slander fill their time; they consider the destruction of marriages and reputations as entertainment

Maria is the exception in this group. She condemns their gossip and refuses to be persuaded that Charles is unworthy of her. Sir Peter and his servant, Rowley, arrive on stage at the change of scene. Sir Peter is openly questioning his wisdom in marrying such a young wife. He thought that by marrying an innocent country girl, his happiness would be assured. Instead, Sir Peter reveals to the audience that his wife spends too much time with her friends and too much money on dresses and extravagances, Rowley tells Sir Peter that Charles and Joseph's uncle, Sir Oliver, is returning to London after a long absence. The audience also learns that it is Rowley's opinion that Charles has more potential than Sir Peter recognizes.

Act II

The second act opens with an argument between Sir Peter and his wife. Lady Teazle, about the money she is spending. He focuses on her extravagant purchase of fresh flowers during the winter. She is not intimidated by his anger. When her husband reminds her of how he rescued her from a simple but poor life, Lady Teazle nearly admits that she would wish her husband dead as his next step toward rescuing her.

In the next scene, the gossips are busy slandering everyone they know as they prepare for a card game at Lady Sneerwell's. Lady Teazle joins them and in a few moments is joined by her husband. Maria is also there and is joined by Joseph who presses his suit for her attention. She is clearly annoyed and pleads with him to change the subject.

In the following scene. Sir Oliver has returned and is briefed by Rowley and Sir Peter regarding his nephews, Joseph and Charles. Rowley and Sir Peter differ in their appreciation of the two young men. Sir Oliver is determined to investigate and decide the nature of his nephews for himself.

Act III

Rowley, Sir Peter, and Sir Oliver are joined by the moneylender, Moses. Moses will take Sir Oliver to meet Charles under the guise of a moneylender, Mr. Premium. Moses coaches Sir Oliver in the behavior and manners of a moneylender, and the two depart for Charles's home. When Maria enters, Sir Peter takes the opportunity to chastise her for her rejection of Joseph, but Maria stands her ground, proclaiming her love for Charles.

The scene ends with a humorous exchange between Sir Peter and his wife. Although the two begin lovingly enough, the compliments soon tum to an argument as the two each claim that the other one is always at fault for their constant quarreling.

In the next scene, Moses and the disguised Sir Oliver arrive at Charles's home. Charles is happily at play gambling, singing, and drinking with his friends, but he is delighted to be visited by the moneylender, since Charles needs cash quite badly. Charles agrees to sell the family portraits to raise money. It is agreed that he will make a game of an auction to sell the pictures to Mr. Premium.

Act IV

During the auction. Sir Oliver buys all the portraits except his own, which Charles will not sell. He has a fondness for his uncle whom he has not seen in many years and refuses to part with the portrait. Sir Oliver is charmed and forgives Charles his faults. While still disguised, Sir Oliver gives Charles far more money than the agreed upon price and leaves with Moses. Charles immediately sends some of the money to a poor relation.

In the next scene, Lady Teazle has called upon Joseph. He has been attempting to seduce her, and, although she has resisted thus far, she has come to Joseph's home because she is tempted. When her husband is announced. Lady Teazle hides behind a screen. Sir Peter has arrived to ask Joseph if his brother, Charles, is having an affair with Lady Teazle. Joseph is taken aback by the suggestion, and although he hedges a bit, finally states that he cannot think Charles guilty of such a thing.

At that moment Charles is announced, and Sir Peter asks to hide so that he might overhear Joseph ask Charles about Lady Teazle. When Sir Peter goes to hide behind the screen that conceals his wife, Joseph tells Sir Peter that his arrival had interrupted a rendezvous with a French milliner and the young woman is hiding behind the screen. Sir Peter hides in a closet just as Charles is ushered into the room.

In a few moments Joseph learns that Lady Sneerwell is arriving, and he leaves the room. Sir Peter, having heard Charles profess that he has no interest in Lady Teazle, reveals himself. When Charles pronounces Joseph too worried about his reputation to risk scandal. Sir Peter knocks down the screen, thinking that he will reveal a French milliner. Instead, his own wife is revealed hiding behind it.

Joseph rushes back into the room and attempts to create a story to explain everything. But Lady Teazle, who has overheard her husband's plans to honor her, is ashamed of her near betrayal and confesses everything to Sir Peter. Sir Peter declares Joseph a villain. The act ends.

ActV

Sir Oliver, unaware of the recent activities, arrives at Joseph's disguised as a poor relation. He asks Joseph for help but is turned quickly away. Rowley returns to tell Joseph that his Uncle, Sir Oliver, has returned to London and wishes to meet with both brothers.

The next scene opens with all of the gossips clamoring for more information about what really occurred between Sir Peter and his wife and Joseph. In a matter of moments, they have concocted a duel and a near fatal injury for the participants. They are interrupted when Sir Peter arrives and throws his wife's former friends outside. Lady Teazle resigns from the scandal club. In the library of Joseph's house, Sir Oliver arrives. Charles and Joseph recognize him from the disguised identities he assumed. Sir Oliver's true identity is revealed, but at that moment, Lady Sneerwell arrives for one last try at breaking up Maria and Charles.

Sneerwell fails when it is revealed that Snake has betrayed her to someone who would pay him a higher price. She leaves. Joseph follows her after it is made clear that everyone present now recognizes his hypocrisy. Sir Oliver and Sir Peter confer their blessings upon Maria and Charles.

A Portrait

A Portrait Summary

Sheridan admonishes the audience to avoid either creating scandals or listening to tales of the scandals of others. He also reminds the audience that appearances are not all they seem and they should look beneath the surface to find the true worth of men and women instead of listening to the reports that other people give. For, Sheridan says, appearances can be deceiving, and they often mislead people.

A Portrait Analysis

This portion of the play is, essentially, a dedication that gives the audience an idea of the purpose of the play. This sort of dedication was very typical for the time that this play was written and it was used to honor some person. In this case, Sheridan is honoring a beautiful woman by the name of Frances Anne Crewe, the wife of John Crewe. This is because Sheridan was quite infatuated with her at the time and he wished her to know it.

Prologue

Prologue Summary

The writer, David Garrick, tells the audience that the subject of the play will be scandal and the fact that there is no need to bring more of it into the world. Unfortunately, everyone is always eager to hear bad reports and gossip about people, making it altogether impossible to root out entirely. However, Garrick says that Sheridan will try to attack it with his pen so that it might be brought under control.

Prologue Analysis

Prologues were another common device used by playwrights of the period in order to build sympathy for the subject matter and create interest in the play. However, they were usually written by someone other than the playwright and, in this case, it is David Garrick's words that are used.

Garrick makes an allusion to Don Quixote in this section when he refers to Sheridan. This shows that Sheridan is embarking on a noble quest to attack the giant problems of gossip and scandal and bring them down. However, just as Quixote tilts at windmills, Sheridan is foolishly attacking a problem that is impossible to bring down.

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

Lady Sneerwell and Snake are discussing a recent success they had in assassinating someone's character, and they are very pleased with their efforts. In their plot, Snake sent a few lines of a letter to a Miss Clackitt. Someone soon had his life destroyed. However, Snake notes that Miss Clackitt, while certainly very capable of destroying reputations, does not have the subtle abilities of Lady Sneerwell when it comes to bringing people down.

With Lady Sneerwell's talents out in the open, she admits that she is proud of her abilities and she wants to use them on her next project. In this project, she is going to use Snake to break off the affections between Charles Surface, a drunk who is throwing away his money, and Maria, the ward of Sir Peter Teazle. Once the couple is split up, Sneerwell wants to move Maria's affections toward Charles's brother Joseph, a man of good standing in the eyes of many. Finally, after creating this match, she wants to have Charles for herself.

Snake is surprised to hear about this plan, since he is under the impression that Lady Sneerwell and Joseph Surface are an item. However, Lady Sneerwell explains that this is not the case. In fact, Joseph Surface is a sneaky, underhanded weasel who only seems to be an upstanding gentleman. Thus, she wants Charles, who seems to be a miserable drunk, because she knows him to be a very noble soul underneath his shell of decrepit morals and dissipation.

At this point, Joseph Surface enters and he learns of Snake's employment in their matter. Of course, he is pleased to hear that they have such a capable agent for their plans and he looks forward to their successful execution.

Once Snake leaves, Maria enters, worrying about one of her suitors, Mr. Benjamin Backbite, and his uncle Crabtree. Backbite has been following her around and annoying her, so she had to sneak away from him in order to free herself from his incessant blather. Though Sneerwell defends Backbite and describes him as a witty poet, Maria holds no love for him and would rather stay away from him and his brand of wit and poetry.

At this point, Mrs. Candour arrives. She immediately begins her long-winded gossiping about anyone and everyone she knows or has heard about, which annoys Maria to no end. Then, to top things off, Backbite and Crabtree join the party and Crabtree regales everyone with tales of Backbite's witty remarks. Though Crabtree cannot remember anything Backbite actually said, he assures everyone in the room that Backbite was quite witty and very impressive.

Once this company is assembled, everyone begins gossiping about various people and their indiscretions until they begin talking about Charles. Of course, Maria cannot take hearing these people discuss her love in such unflattering terms. So, she makes an excuse and leaves in order to get away from them. However, Mrs. Candour follows her in order to ensure that she is well.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

The names of the characters in this play are symbolic of the roles they play. For instance, Lady Sneerwell sneers at all of society, Snake is as underhanded and sneaky as the animal he is named for, and the Surface brothers are judged by their surface appearance, instead of what lies beneath. Though Mrs. Candour is named for forthrightness and kindliness, she is actually ironically named for the fact that she thinks that she is forthright and kindly. However, candor is also a sort of willingness to speak privately and she tends to share all the stories that she hears privately, so candor is no protection.

When Mrs. Candour says, "tale-bearers are as bad as the tale-makers," she is showing that she is a hypocrite. Though she claims that it is terrible that people pass along gossip, she is more than happy to gossip about other people and she continues to do so immediately after making this observation.

When Joseph Surface says that Snake is such a villain that he cannot even stay true to his own villainy, it foreshadows his willingness to betray Sneerwell and Joseph later in the play. Because Snake is so willing to sell his services, Joseph sees that he will sell off the people who hired him if the money is right and will have no compunctions about leaving others holding the bag.

Crabtree lauds his nephew's stellar wit, yet he cannot actually remember anything that his nephew said. This shows that Crabtree is so lacking in intelligence that he cannot even remember simple epigrams, which are designed to be so witty that they are memorable. Thus, Crabtree's assessment of Backbite is highly suspect and is, according to the needs of the play, entirely false.

Maria is unwilling to listen to people speak badly about Charles, showing that she is both honest and very much in love with him. Thus, when she hears these people speak ill of Charles, her face actually changes color, leaving her looking unwell. This lends further weight to her honesty and love, since it actually damages her.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

Sir Peter Teazle, an old man, married a young woman six months ago and his life has been terrible since then. The once shy, innocent, poor young woman Sir Peter wedded has become a greedy shrew who argues with everything he says and demands everything that he has to give and more. Thus, rather than getting a beautiful, retiring woman, he is tied to an absolute beast.

Rowley arrives to speak with Sir Peter and Sir Peter tells him about his troubles with Lady Teazle. In fact, Sir Peter believes that much of her shrewish behavior is due to her spending so much time with Lady Sneerwell and her gang of character assassins. To add to his worries, Maria is still intent on marrying Charles, despite the fact that he has tried to get his ward to move her affections elsewhere. Thus, he finds himself confounded at every turn and he does not know how to fix any of these problems.

Hearing Sir Peter's worries about Maria, Rowley assures him that Charles is a very upright man and Maria would do well to marry him. However, Sir Peter cannot believe that a free-spending profligate such as Charles can be anything but a disappointment to himself and others. Sir Peter believes that his friend and Charles's uncle, Sir Oliver, was too liberal with Charles and his brother and that his willingness to give them money has led to Charles's decline.

This conversation reminds Rowley of the news that he has for Sir Peter: Sir Oliver has arrived from India and is due to visit. This news concerns Sir Peter because he and Sir Oliver used to sit together and make fun of marriage; now Sir Peter finds himself married and miserable. Thus, he tells Rowley not to tell Sir Oliver about his marital strife so that Sir Oliver will not be amused by the misfortunes of an old bachelor marrying a young woman.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

The fact that Sir Peter could not see that his wife would turn into a greedy shrew shows that he is easily duped by surface appearances. Of course, this point is furthered by the fact that he, much like almost everyone else, thinks that Charles is worthless and Joseph is an upright man. Thus, when he says that old bachelors should not marry young women, it shows that his assessment of the situation may not be entirely accurate, as is shown when he and Lady Teazle sort out their differences. However, the fact that even Sir Peter knows that Sneerwell and her companions are lying, backstabbing cretins shows that this is a widely known fact that cannot be covered up. In fact, the gossips may not be making any effort to prevent people from getting this impression, since it does lend them a certain power over the affairs of other people.

Act 2, Scene 1

Act 2, Scene 1 Summary

Sir Peter and Lady Teazle are having another argument, this time about the fact that Lady Teazle wants some expensive new fashions and Sir Peter is not willing to spend the money. Sir Peter tries to convince her that she should be happy just to get a few things from him, since she grew up poor. She, however, insists that she deserves everything any other woman has and more. After all, Sir Peter showed her how rich people live and it is his fault that she wants to live the best life possible.

The couple argue until Lady Teazle finally tells Sir Peter that she has to be at her appointment at Lady Sneerwell's and, to make matters worse, Sir Peter promised to join her. So, once Sir Peter offers one final complaint about his wife to the audience, the two of them go to Lady Sneerwell's.

Act 2, Scene 1 Analysis

This scene shows that, no matter what a man may do to try to find a good wife, wives may turn out bad anyway. Though Sir Peter tried to find a poor girl of little accomplishment who would not need much money, the girl he chose was merely impressed with his money and now she demands as much of it as she can get. Thus, Sheridan shows that marrying someone and changing their circumstances, while hoping that they stay as they were, is a sure way to be disappointed.

Act 2, Scene 2

Act 2, Scene 2 Summary

Lady Teazle and Maria enter the gathering at Sneerwell's. While everyone else sits down to a good session of talking behind others' backs, Joseph Surface and Maria move off to speak to each other privately. When Sir Peter enters, he is shocked at the gossip and slander he hears. He dislikes everyone there, especially their incessant gossiping, and he cannot abide the fact that they enjoy tearing other people down. Thus, as he listens to the party assassinate the looks, qualities, and characters of people they claim to be friends with, he grows more disgusted by the minute. After listening to them, he finally walks out with the words, "I leave my character behind me." (2, 2, 220)

With Sir Peter gone, the rest of the party eavesdrops on Maria and Joseph Surface. Of course, Joseph is pretending to be a kind friend who does not enjoy the others' gossiping and sniping and Maria warms to him for that. However, Lady Teazle barges in on the two of them and, seeing the intruder, Maria immediately runs out.

Now that Maria is gone, Lady Teazle and Joseph discuss their plans. Joseph wants Sir Peter's wife to come to his house so they can spend some time together, but Lady Teazle is not so easily placated. She wants to know why Joseph was so earnestly entreating Maria to listen to him. However, he manages to calm her down and they arrange for a tryst at Joseph's house.

Act 2, Scene 2 Analysis

When Backbite finally tells the company his poem about Lady Betty Curricle's horses, he spouts off some of the worst doggerel possible, showing that Backbite is not nearly the excellent poet that Crabtree makes him out to be. However, the company gives the poem high praise, showing that they are not the fine judges of poetry that they seem to consider themselves. Rather, they are incapable of determining good poetry from bad and, in fact, they have very low tastes. Thus, they are shown to be simpletons who cannot even judge poetry, much less the worth of the people they gossip about.

When Maria and Lady Teazle enter, Joseph Surface immediately takes Maria aside to speak with her. Lady Teazle is upset by this because she was hoping Joseph would talk to her so they could share some private words while they wait for Sir Peter. This shows that there is something going on between Lady Teazle and Joseph, as she wants to be able to speak to him before her husband arrives, showing that she has things to say to him that she cannot say in front of her husband. Thus, though they may not have consummated their affair, they certainly intend to do so at some point.

Act 2, Scene 3

Act 2, Scene 3 Summary

Rowley and Sir Oliver enter as Sir Oliver is laughing at the news that Sir Peter has married a shrew. However, Rowley admonishes him not to bring up the subject with Sir Peter, as it is a very sore point with him. In addition, it will prevent Sir Peter from learning that Rowley has told Sir Oliver all about his marital strife.

Eventually, the subject turns to Sir Peter's estrangement from Charles Surface. It seems that Sir Peter thinks Lady Teazle has her eyes on Charles. Rowley sees she is after Joseph, but Sir Peter does not believe him. Of course, Sir Oliver knows the sort of gossiping and character destruction that goes on in some circles and he wants nothing to do with it. Thus, rather than listen to the stories told by others, Sir Oliver wishes to judge Charles for himself.

Sir Peter enters and he and Sir Oliver warmly greet each other. However, when Sir Oliver asks Sir Peter about the Surface brothers, Sir Peter contradicts Rowley's words in every way. In fact, he is under the impression that Joseph is the most upstanding of men and Charles is nothing but a dissipated, immoral drunkard. Hearing Sir Peter's words, Sir Oliver admits that he had his wild days and the young man may still have some nobility beneath his unimpressive exterior.

Act 2, Scene 3 Analysis

When Sir Oliver admits that he has had his wild days, it shows that he is a man of the world who can understand that some young people will make mistakes and they can be mended. Thus, Sir Oliver shows that he can be an impartial judge of character and can look beneath the surface to find the worth of a man. This point is furthered by Sir Oliver's observation that any man of worth will have enemies, and thus he does not entirely trust Joseph, who does not have any enemies.

Act 3, Scene 1

Act 3, Scene 1 Summary

Sir Oliver, Sir Peter, and Rowley hatch a plan that will allow Sir Oliver to judge Charles and Joseph Surface on their relative merits. A man by the name of Stanley has appealed to both men for financial help. However, neither man has ever seen either Stanley or Sir Oliver, so Sir Oliver can pretend to be Stanley in order to see how his nephews will treat him. The plan changes slightly when Mr. Moses, a money-lender, informs Sir Oliver that Charles has asked to borrow money from a Mr. Premium. Sir Oliver can actually pretend to be a money-lender when he meets with Charles.

After Sir Oliver and Moses leave to check on Oliver's two nephews, Maria arrives to speak with Sir Peter about her engagement to Charles. Of course, Sir Peter tries to convince Maria to turn her attentions from Charles to Joseph, but Maria will not hear of it. Rather, she insists on her love for Charles, as well as her judgment of his worth, and she leaves angrily.

At this point, Lady Teazle enters and Sir Peter attempts to soften her heart. Though Lady Teazle seems, at first, to be amenable to the idea, things rapidly deteriorate. Once again, the two of them are unable to reach any kind of common ground and their conversation devolves into arguing and name-calling before Lady Teazle storms off.

Act 3, Scene 1 Analysis

In many works of literature around this time, most Jewish characters are money-lenders, as Mr. Moses is in this play. This is not so much a stereotype as a reflection of the fact that Jews in most European countries were legally prevented from entering into more acceptable businesses. Thus, they were often forced to turn to the money-lending practice in order to survive. However, the fact that money-lenders were so widely despised and Jews were normally money-lenders, it was generally considered that Jews were dishonest. Thus, Sheridan is actually attempting to fly against the prevailing anti-Semitism by creating the "honest Israelite" (3, 1, 51) of Mr. Moses.

Act 3, Scene 2

Act 3, Scene 2 Summary

Mr. Moses and Sir Oliver arrive at Charles Surface's house, but Charles's butler, Trip, forces them to wait. Then, while the men are waiting, Trip asks Moses for a loan. Since Trip's credit is no good, Mr. Moses refuses to give it to him without collateral, so Trip offers to provide Mr. Moses with some clothes from Charles's own wardrobe.

Act 3, Scene 2 Analysis

When Sir Oliver and Mr. Moses arrive, they find the butler very well dressed, but he asks Mr. Moses for a loan. This shows that Charles is, indeed, quite a spendthrift, since he gives his own butler plenty of money, yet the butler still wants more. This latter point shows that the butler is learning bad habits from his master and Charles must be quite a disaster if even his butler is begging for a loan and will give Mr. Moses stolen goods in order to secure it.

Act 3, Scene 3

Act 3, Scene 3 Summary

Charles Surface, Careless, and several other men are sitting at the table drinking as Mr. Moses and Sir Oliver enter. Of course, everyone there is drunk and obnoxious and they sing bawdy songs while they empty and refill their glasses. However, when Trip announces Sir Oliver (as Mr. Premium) and Mr. Moses, everyone there sits down to listen to the two money-lenders.

Though Charles is impudent, he is very honest and straightforward in his business dealings. However, Sir Oliver wants to know first if Charles has anything he can sell in order to raise capital on his own. Unfortunately, Charles has already sold off almost all of the family heirlooms and all he has left are the family portraits. Then, thinking about this, he offers to auction them to Sir Oliver. Of course, Sir Oliver is shocked, but he also realizes that he has an opportunity to save the family portraits, so he agrees to the plan.

Act 3, Scene 3 Analysis

Charles Surface is accompanied by a man named Careless, which symbolizes the way in which Charles is heading down the road to complete ruin. He keeps company with Careless, much as carelessness is Charles's most distinct trait. Thus, as Charles continues to keep carelessness in his house, much as he keeps Careless in his house, he continues to destroy himself.

Act 4, Scene 1

Act 4, Scene 1 Summary

Charles, Careless, Mr. Moses, and Sir Oliver enter the portrait room in Charles's house and Charles holds a sham auction to sell off the paintings that it holds. After listing off the names and accomplishments of a few of his illustrious forebears and selling the paintings to Sir Oliver, Charles finally decides to just sells off the rest of the lot for 300 pounds. However, when Sir Oliver points to his own portrait and asks how much it will cost, Charles refuses to sell it. In fact, even when Sir Oliver offers to purchase his own painting for over 400 pounds, Charles still refuses to sell it, since Sir Oliver was very good to him. Of course, Sir Oliver is very pleased to hear that his nephew holds him in such high regard, so he is finally convinced that Charles does have some worth after all.

After Sir Oliver and Mr. Moses leave, Rowley enters. Then, since Charles has someone there to give him some assistance, Charles tells Rowley to cash the check that Sir Oliver has given him and give 100 pounds to Stanley in order to help him out of his troubles.

Act 4, Scene 1 Analysis

Though Charles is more than willing to sell off the portraits of his departed family members, he refuses to sell Sir Oliver's portrait, since Sir Oliver has often helped him. Thus, Charles finally shows that he does have some courage and honesty in his veins. While it is bad that Charles would so easily dispose of his family portraits, those family members are dead and gone. However, Sir Oliver has actually helped Charles and he is noble enough to honor his uncle by keeping his portrait. Then, after Charles finally shows some worth in his uncle's eyes, he shows the audience that he does, in fact, have a very good heart, since he tells Rowley to dispatch 100 pounds to Stanley, who needs the money more than he does.

Act 4, Scene 2

Act 4, Scene 2 Summary

Mr. Moses and Sir Oliver are in Charles's parlor and Mr. Moses points out that all the stories about Charles are true. However, Sir Oliver is impressed that Charles refused to sell the portrait of Sir Oliver, which Sir Oliver appreciates greatly. Then, when Rowley enters and reports that Charles has dispatched him to give money to Stanley, Sir Oliver is even more impressed with his nephew, since the 100 pounds could be used to placate the creditors who are waiting to speak with Charles. Thus, Sir Oliver says that he will pay off Charles's debts himself.

Act 4, Scene 2 Analysis

Though Sir Oliver has seen Charles at his worst, he has also seen that Charles is still noble beneath the surface. Thus, Sir Oliver is shown to be a good judge of character, since he can look past Charles's roguishness and find the good in him.

Act 4, Scene 3

Act 4, Scene 3 Summary

Lady Teazle meets Joseph Surface at his house in order to consummate their affair and make plans for the future. Lady Teazle is, of course, angry at her husband for his unwillingness to give her money. She wishes that he would finally allow Maria to marry Charles, if for no other reason than that it would mean that Sir Peter would stop complaining about it. However, Joseph plays the part of the concerned man and pretends that his worries about Maria and Charles are simply worries about her own well-being.

Lady Teazle and Joseph are interrupted when Sir Peter arrives to meet with Joseph. Unfortunately for Lady Teazle, she is trapped, since she does not want her husband to know that she is visiting with Joseph. Joseph hides her behind a screen so that Sir Peter will be none the wiser.

Sir Peter comes into the room and sits down to discuss Lady Teazle with Joseph. In fact, Sir Peter is there to tell Joseph that he suspects that Lady Teazle is attracted to another man, though Sir Peter actually believes it is Charles and not Joseph to whom she has turned her affections. Of course, Joseph pretends that this cannot be true and he speaks highly of Lady Teazle and her fidelity. However, Sir Peter admits that it probably is true and he realizes that it is inevitable that she, a young woman, would fall for a man who is much younger. Thus, rather than continue to make both his life and his wife's life miserable, he has decided to allow her to live independently until his death, when she will receive the bulk of his estate.

With this said, Joseph's servant announces that Charles is there and wishes to speak with his brother. Of course, Sir Peter wants to eavesdrop on Charles and see what he has to say, so he makes for the screen that Lady Teazle is hiding behind. He is surprised when he sees a lady's petticoats behind the screen and he wonders who she is and what she is doing there. Joseph explains that it is a French milliner he has been seeing and he begs Sir Peter not to look at her. Then, he hides Sir Peter in the closet.

Charles comes into the room and Joseph asks him about Lady Teazle. Of course, Charles has had nothing to do with her and he says so, but he also notes that he has some suspicions about Lady Teazle and her attentions to Joseph. Joseph quickly hushes him and explains that Sir Peter is hiding in the closet and can hear everything they are saying.

When Charles hears this, he immediately commands Sir Peter to come out into the open. With everything clear, Sir Peter is placated and he no longer distrusts Charles. However, when Joseph is called away by his servant, Sir Peter hatches a plan to embarrass Joseph. Since Joseph has been quietly seeing a young woman and she is in the room, Sir Peter and Charles should pull aside the screen and see who she is. Of

course, when Charles pulls the screen aside, he is astounded to find Lady Teazle behind it.

When Joseph enters, Sir Peter demands to know what is going on between the Joseph and his wife. Joseph concocts an elaborate but believable lie that convinces Sir Peter that his wife's visit was benign. However, Lady Teazle will not hear of it and she comes clean to her husband. She also admits she was surprised to hear that Sir Peter loves her enough to give her independence now and a healthy inheritance upon his death and she realizes that she is very happy with her husband. She hopes Sir Peter will forgive her and take her back.

Act 4, Scene 3 Analysis

When Sir Peter tells Charles that Joseph has a young woman hiding behind the screen, Charles is surprised that his overly moral brother would do such a thing. This shows that Joseph's image as the moral and upright young man is so complete that even his own brother cannot see behind it.

In this scene, several things are made clear to the characters, including Sir Peter's love for his wife and Joseph's hypocrisy. Thus, this scene shows that events are working toward a satisfactory conclusion so that everything will be made clear and all wounds will be healed. This foreshadows Sir Oliver's ability to look behind Joseph's outward morality and see the rotten core in his nephew, thus allowing Sir Oliver to make the right choice and give his inheritance to Charles.

Act 5, Scene 1

Act 5, Scene 1 Summary

Sir Oliver has arrived at Joseph's house pretending to be Stanley, but Joseph does not want to see him. In fact, Joseph is in a vile mood after Sir Peter discovered his wife behind the screen, because now he has lost Lady Teazle and the rumors of the event will ruin his chances with Maria. Thus, just as Sir Oliver and Rowley enter the room, Joseph walks out. Needless to say, this leaves Sir Oliver with a bad first impression of his nephew.

When Joseph returns, Sir Oliver explains that he (i.e. Stanley) is in dire straits and he is forced to ask Joseph for money. However, Joseph explains that he has no money to give him, since he is in very straitened circumstances himself. Though Sir Oliver points out that he has heard that Joseph's uncle (i.e. himself) has sent plenty of money to him, Joseph says that it is false. In fact, Joseph says that he has received nothing from his uncle and, furthermore, his uncle is a greedy miser. Though Sir Oliver is none too happy with this assessment of himself and he curses his nephew for his lies on the inside, he graciously offers his best wishes and leaves.

After Sir Oliver leaves, Rowley enters and informs Joseph that Sir Oliver has arrived in London. Of course, Joseph is not happy to hear this, since he has just finished speaking ill of his uncle, but he promises to meet with Sir Oliver.

Act 5, Scene 1 Analysis

In this scene Joseph first curses at his servant and then refuses to help a relation - Stanley - who is in bad circumstances. Thus, Joseph is showing his true colors by badly treating people who are of lower social station. This is indicative of the idea that people are best judged not by their attitudes toward their equals or betters, but by their attitudes toward people lower than them.

Act 5, Scene 2

Act 5, Scene 2 Summary

Candour, Sneerwell, Backbite, and Crabtree are all at Sir Peter's house, discussing the events that so recently transpired at Joseph Surface's house. However, their information is all wrong, since some of them think that it was actually Charles and not Joseph who was caught with Lady Teazle. Furthermore, they seem to think that Sir Peter was wounded in a duel with either swords or pistols and is at death's door. Thus, when Sir Oliver enters, everyone seems to think that he is a physician who is there to treat Sir Peter's wounds.

However, the whole affair is cleared up when Sir Peter walks in, quite healthy and hearty, and he explains that it was Joseph who had designs on his wife. Then, sick to death of all their talking and gossiping, he orders them to leave.

Once Sneerwell and her companions are finally gone, Sir Oliver and Rowley, wishing to bait Sir Peter, tell him that Sir Oliver has decided to give his inheritance to Joseph. Of course, Sir Peter is infuriated by the idea and demands that Sir Oliver do no such thing. However, Sir Oliver and Rowley cannot keep up the pretence and they laugh about the whole affair. However, Sir Peter does not find anything funny in the events of the day, since the news will be all over the papers and he will never be able to show his face in public again.

Despite the disaster at Joseph's house, things do seem to be looking better for Sir Peter's home life, as it seems that Lady Teazle is eager to make up with her husband. Sir Oliver leaves them alone so that Sir Peter and his wife can make amends. However, Sir Peter is still too angry with his wife to go to her, so he and Rowley leave her in order to allow her to suffer in solitude.

Act 5, Scene 2 Analysis

When the news of Joseph and Lady Teazle reaches Sneerwell and her cohorts, they put together an account that is not only misguided, it is entirely wrong. This shows that spreading scandal is not only morally wrong, but the story itself is often so far from the mark that it is completely worthless. Thus, rather than spreading rumors, people should simply accept the fact that the rumors are empty and they should ignore them.

Act 5, Scene 3

Act 5, Scene 3 Summary

Joseph and Lady Sneerwell are discussing their ability to save the situation with themselves and Maria and Charles, but there does not seem to be any solution that would cure the situation quickly. Joseph hopes there might still be a way out of their troubles, but Lady Sneerwell does not share his optimistic appraisal of the situation and she leaves in order to sulk about this recent disaster.

At this point, Sir Oliver arrives, but Joseph is still under the impression that he is Stanley and he wants his uncle to leave. Sir Oliver has no desire to correct his wayward nephew, so he pretends he is there to speak with Sir Oliver and hopefully get some money from him. Joseph will have no part of it and he attempts to physically push Sir Oliver out of his house.

While Joseph is attempting to forcibly remove Sir Oliver, Charles arrives and wonders why Joseph is manhandling his broker, Mr. Premium, in such a manner. Of course, Joseph wonders what he is talking about, since he is under the impression that Sir Oliver is Stanley. Thus, the two brothers disagree about Sir Oliver's real name, but they do agree that, no matter what his name is, they don't want him there when they finally meet Sir Oliver. Thus, they both attempt to shove Sir Oliver out the door so they can cover up their respective crimes.

As this is going on, Sir Peter, Lady Teazle, Rowley, and Maria arrive and they are all surprised to see Sir Oliver being treated in this way. However, it is not until Sir Peter mentions who Sir Oliver is that Joseph and Charles finally understand everything. Needless to say, they are both flabbergasted, but only Joseph attempts to explain away his actions. In fact, Charles makes scant apology for selling the family portraits, but he does say that he is simply happy to finally see his benefactor. However, the biggest shock comes when Maria says that she has given up on Charles, since she believes Charles has been trying to have an affair with Lady Teazle.

Fortunately, Snake and Lady Sneerwell enter and the entire situation is cleared up. As Snake explains it, Sir Oliver has paid him to admit he forged letters that seem to have been sent between Lady Teazle and Charles. Thus, Maria's concerns about Charles are both explained and wiped away, while Joseph and Sneerwell's villainies have been exposed. Thus, everything is clear, Charles is named as Sir Oliver's heir, Lady Teazle and Sir Peter are reconciled, and Charles tells Maria that he will try to reform his ways, if only so that he can be worthy of her.

Act 5, Scene 3 Analysis

The fact that Snake is willing to do a good deed, but he does not want people to know it, shows that he is, in some sense, reformed. Though he admits that he has a distinct

interest in maintaining his reputation as a swindler, he is also somewhat noble in his willingness to not take credit for his good deed. Rather than seeking praise for his improvement, he is content to do a good deed. Thus, walking on the right path for once is something of a private reward for him that does not need to be recognized by other peoples' accolades in order to make it worthwhile.

Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

Lady Teazle admits she is not eager to leave London for the country, but she understands that it is for the best. After all, London is a place of many temptations and she can reform her ways more effectively by living a quiet life of contentment away from the bustling streets.

Epilogue Analysis

The epilogue, which is spoken by Lady Teazle, shows that she is ready to reform her ways after diving into the vile cesspool of London society. In fact, the very idea that she enjoys the excitement of the city shows that she is eager to better herself. This is because she is giving up something she enjoys so she can learn how to be a better person. After all, vices are tempting because they are enjoyable. Thus, rather than enjoy her vices, Lady Teazle is willing to put them aside so that she can live a life of contentment as she attempts to make her life and the life of her husband into pleasures instead of curses.

Characters

Sir Benjamin Backbite

Backbite is a suitor to Marie. He is a gossip who will slander anyone, even those he does not know. Lady Sneerwell admires Backbite's wit and poetry Backbite is an especially malicious character whose rude behavior is encouraged in the company of his uncle, Lady Sneerwell, and Mrs. Candour

Sir Harry Bumper

Toby is one of Charles' s friends who spends his time drinking, gambling, and singing.

Mrs. Candour

Mrs. Candour is a good-natured and friendly gossip whose talkative nature makes her dangerous, since she spreads slander more effectively than Backbite or Crabtree.

Careless

Careless is one of Charles's friends. He plays auctioneer when the family pictures are sold to Mr. Premium.

Crabtree

Crabtree is Backbite's uncle and as big a gossip as his nephew.

Maria

Maria is Sir Peter's wealthy ward. She is in love with Charles and he is in love with her. Her nature is sweet, and she is very disturbed at the vicious gossip she encounters at social functions. Although Maria is considered a principle character, she has only a small role in the play.

Moses

Moses is the moneylender who has been lending money to Charles. He has tried to help Charles with his money problems and bring his spending under control. Moses is honest and helps Sir Oliver in his pretense as a moneylender.

Old Stanley

See Sir Oliver Surface

Mr. Premium

See Sir Oliver Surface

Rowley

Rowley is Sir Peter's servant and was formally a steward to Joseph and Charles's father. He recognizes that Charles is kind-hearted and good in spite of his problems managing money. Rowley has caught Snake at forgery and uses the information to force Snake to betray Mrs. Sneerwell. Rowley serves as go-between for Sir Oliver when he disguises himself to visit his nephews.

Snake

Snake works for Lady Sneerwell; he undertakes the actions that destroy reputations. He is indeed a snake, since his job is to slither around gaining and dispensing gossip. Snake willingly goes to the highest bidder and in the final scene admits that Rowley has paid him a greater fee to betray Lady Sneerwell.

Lady Sneerwell

Lady Sneerwell was the target of slander in her youth. She now directs her efforts at ruining the reputations of other women. She prides herself on her delicacy of scandal, which she manages with only a hint of a sneer (she "sneers well"). Slander is her primary source of pleasure. Lady Sneerwell is secretly infatuated with Charles, and that is the real reason she wants to break up his relationship with Maria. Lady Sneerwell plots with Joseph to secure Charles for herself and Maria for Joseph, but the plot blows up when Joseph is exposed to Sir Peter and when Maria refuses to consider Joseph as a suitor. She forges letters in a final attempt to further her plot but is revealed when her partner, Snake, sells his loyalty to a higher bidder.

Charles Surface

Charles is the protagonist of the play and the younger Surface brother. He is extravagant but good-natured. He is in love with Maria and wishes to marry her. Mrs. Sneerwell, however, wants him for herself. Charles sells his uncle, who is in disguise, the family portraits, since he, as usual, needs money. He wins his old uncle's heart when he refuses to sell his beloved uncle's portrait. Sir Oliver finds that Charles is

honest and generous. In the final scene, Charles and Maria receive the endorsement and good wishes of her guardian, Sir Peter, and that of Sir Oliver.

Joseph Surface

The elder Surface brother, Joseph is amiable and well regarded. But he is a hypocrite, since he is courting the wealthy Maria behind his brother's back while also flirting with Lady Sneerwell and trying to seduce Mrs. Teazle. When Joseph refuses to help his disguised uncle, his true nature is revealed. He is artful, selfish, and malicious, but he has Sir Peter completely convinced of his merit and good name until Lady Teazle tells her husband that Joseph has attempted to seduce her. Joseph lacks the qualities of truth, gratitude, and charity.

Sir Oliver Surface

Sir Oliver is Charles and Joseph's rich uncle. He returns to England and attempts to test his nephews' character without revealing his identity. Sir Oliver assumes the identity of a moneylender, Mr. Premium, to test Charles's loyalty. Later, he assumes the identity of Old Stanley, a poor relation, to test Joseph. In the final scene he reveals his true identity to both brothers, and Joseph is disinherited while Charles is rewarded by his uncle for his honesty and generosity.

Lady Teazle

Lady Teazle is young and was educated in the country. But since her marriage and move to London, she has learned to dress well and to spend lavishly. She counts Lady Sneerwell among her friends and engages in flirtations with young men. She fights frequently with her husband, contradicts him, and flaunts his authority, but he continues to love her. When Lady Teazle engages in gossip with her friends, there is a noticeable meanness in her words. Yet her country upbringing makes her hesitate when she considers engaging in an affair with Joseph. When Lady Teazle overhears her husband's plan to settle an income on her, she realizes that he does love her and she quickly comes to her senses. She reveals to Sir Peter Joseph's attempts to seduce her. In the final scene, she resigns from the company of gossips and reaffirms her devotion to her husband.

Sir Peter Teazle

A neighbor of Lady Sneerwell, Sir Peter is also the guardian of Joseph and Charles Surface. Sir Peter was an older bachelor when he married his much younger wife six months before the start of the play. She is making his life miserable with her extravagances and her friends. But he loves his wife, although his friends sneer at him for letting her take advantage of him. Although Sir Peter has always favored Joseph (he even suspects Charles of trying to seduce Lady Teazle), Joseph's hypocritical nature is

revealed when Lady Teazle confesses to her husband that Joseph was attempting to seduce her. Eventually, Sir Peter approves of the marriage of his ward, Maria, to Charles.

Toby

See Sir Harry Bumper

Trip

Trip is Charles's footman. He also needs to borrow money and seeks out the moneylenders when they come to see Charles.

Themes

Honor

Initially honor seems to be in short supply in *School for Scandal:* The gossips are completely without honor; Lady Teazle is considering abandoning the lessons about honor that she learned growing up in the country; Joseph is ready to betray his brother to secure a wealthy wife; and Charles is hopelessly in debt to moneylenders. Even Sir Oliver, whose honor should be above question, is ready to assume a disguise to test his nephews' honor.

By the conclusion of the play, however, it is clear that only the gossips have no true honor. Lady Teazle realizes that she values her husband and that she has more honor than her friends had supposed. Charles, though foolish and intemperate with gambling and money, is honorable. He pays his debts, if slowly, and he is willing to help a poor relation without being asked. Sir Oliver's deception unmasks Joseph's hypocrisy. And the moneylender, Moses, is a man of so much honor that he assists Charles in managing his debts.

Morality

Sheridan asks his audience to question the morality of society in this play. Slandering one's neighbors, acquaintances, and friends is an entertainment. There is no real interest in the truth—and even less consideration is given to the damage that such gossip causes.

In the early acts of *School for Scandal,* the subjects of such gossip are not known to the audience, who cannot determine the truth of Lady Sneerwell and Mrs. Candour's observations. But by the last act, it becomes clear that these gossips need absolutely no element of truth to fuel their stories. The felling of the screen in Joseph's library—and the confrontation that took place immediately after—are fresh in the audience's mind. This earlier scene serves as a nice contrast to the speculation and innuendo that engages the gossips. Although it is all comedy, it is comedy that teaches a lesson to the audience.

Sentiment

School for Scandal is generally regarded as a refutation of the sentimental drama that was prevalent on the London stage prior to and during Sheridan's era. Sentiment was much admired as a replacement for the debauchery of Restoration comedy, but it often proved bland and boring. Often the protagonists were pure to the point of generic blandness. In Sheridan's play, Joseph Surface is much admired for his sentiment. Conversely, his brother Charles is chastised because he is not the man of sentiment that his brother is: "He is a man of sentiment... there is nothing in the world so noble as

a man of sentiment." That Joseph is really not at all noble or admirable makes Sir Peter's compliment more damning and more a mockery of .this eighteenth-century convention.

Truth and Falsehood

Trying to determine the truth occupies much of Sheridan's play. Lady Sneerwell and Snake are engaged in deception and falsehood, and Joseph is willing to bend the truth to get what he wants. When Sir Oliver, disguised as old Stanley, approaches Joseph to ask for money, Joseph easily lies that he has no money. He even blames his brother, Charles, stating that Charles's free-spending has left Joseph without funds. Of course the gossips have no interest in the truth; their goal is to entertain one another with wild speculation. When compared to such exciting exaggerations as theirs, reality—and the truth—is boring.

Wealth

This is certainly a play about wealth. The poor in London were much too busy trying to find shelter and food to engage in such idle distractions as gossip or gaming. Wealth really sets the characters in this play apart from the rest of society. For instance, Sir Peter complains that his wife spends too much on silk dresses and fresh out-of-season flowers. Charles spends his money gaming and drinking with his friends, and the moneylenders are on their way to being wealthy, thanks to idle young men such as Charles. Maria is the object of Joseph's plotting only because she is wealthy, and Sir Oliver is primarily interested in the morals of his nephews because he plans to leave them him wealth.

Style

Act

A major division in a drama. In Greek plays the sections of the drama signified by the appearance of the chorus were usually divided into five acts. This is the formula for most serious drama from the Greeks to the Romans and to Elizabethan playwrights like William Shakespeare. The five acts denote the structure of dramatic action. They are exposition, complication, climax, falling action, and catastrophe. The five act structure was followed until the nineteenth century when Henrik Ibsen *(A Doll's House)* revolutionized dramatic structure by combining elements into fewer acts.

School for Scandal is a five act play. The exposition occurs in the first act when the audience learns of Lady Sneerwell and Joseph's plan to break up the romance between Charles and Maria; the audience also meets the gossips. By the end of Act U, the complication, the audience has met Sir Oliver and knows that he plans to test his nephews' morality. The climax occurs in the third act when Charles meets his uncle disguised as a moneylender and agrees to sell him the family portraits.

The conflict between Maria and her guardian, Sir Peter, is revealed when she refuses his request to allow Joseph to court her. There are several near misses as a series of visits, Lady Teazle and her husband, Charles, and Lady Sneerwell all arrive at Joseph's. As Lady Teazle and her husband each hide in separate areas and each peek to see what is occurring, the screen finally provides the falling action, and the catastrophe occurs in the last act when Sir Oliver's arrival restores order and Sir Peter is reconciled with Maria and Charles.

Plot

This term refers to the pattern of events. Generally plots should have a beginning, a middle, and a conclusion, but they may also be a series of episodes connected together. Basically, the plot provides the author with the means to explore primary themes. Students are often confused by the two terms; but themes explore ideas and plots simply relate what happens in a very obvious manner.

Thus the plot of *School for Scandal* is the story of how Joseph and Lady Sneerwell each try to lie their way to getting what they want, while its parallel plot is how Sir Oliver attempts to discover the truth about his nephews. But the themes are those of falsehood (in the form of malicious gossip), honesty, true love, and a rejection of sentiment as a virtue.

Setting

The time, place, and culture in which the action of the play takes place is called the setting. The elements of setting may include geographic location, physical or mental environments, prevailing cultural attitudes, or the historical time in which the action takes place. The location for Sheridan's play is London during the eighteenth century—more specifically, it is set in London's richer quarters. No exact time markers are provided, but the action takes place during a short period of time.

Character

A person in a dramatic work. The actions of each character are what constitute the story. Character can also include the idea of a particular individual's morality. Characters can range from simple stereotypical figures to more complex multi-faceted ones. Characters may also be defined by personality traits, such as the rogue or the damsel in distress. "Characterization" is the process of creating a lifelike person from an author's imagination. To accomplish this the author provides the character with personality traits that help define who he will be and how he will behave in a given situation.

School for Scandal provides two types of characters. There are traditional heroes and villains and a vulnerable young woman. But some characters are also denned by his or her name. Lady Sneerwell clearly does a good job of sneering contemptuously at everyone else. And Backbiter lives up to his name as well. Charles and Joseph's natures are revealed in their surname, Surface, indicating that they are somewhat superficial characters interested in appearances.

Genre

Genres are a way of categorizing literature Genre is a French term that means "kind" or "type." Genre can refer to both the category of literature such as tragedy, comedy, epic, poetry, or pastoral. It can also include modern forms of literature such as drama novels or short stories. This term can also refer to types of literature such as mystery, science fiction, comedy, or romance.

School for Scandal is most frequently classified as a comedy of manners, although it has also been accurately described as social satire and anti-sentimental drama

Comedy of Manners

"Comedy of manners" is a term applied to a type of play that provides a depiction of the very artificial manners and conventions of society. Characters are usually types and not individuals Their names reflect their "type." The dialogue in these plays is witty and is of more interest to the audience than the plot, which serves more as an excuse to deliver humorous lines. The comedy of manners is associated most closely with the

Restoration of the late-seventeenth century. But the illicit love affairs and lack of morality that denned the genre eventually resulted in their disappearing from the stage. Shendan revived this genre in the late eighteenth century.

Satire

Satire attempts to blend social commentary with comedy and humor. Satire does not usually attack any individual but rather the institution he or she represents. The intent is to expose problems and create debate that will lead to a correction of the problem. *In School for Scandal,* Sheridan satirizes a society that is so shallow that gossip and slander— and the destruction of a reputation—are forms of entertainment.

Historical Context

Sheridan's England was a very different one than that of earlier British playwrights. The mid-seventeenth century had brought the German House of Hanover to the English throne The first two King Georges spoke little English and had no interest in patronizing the arts. Royal patronage, which had supported so many writers in the past, ended. By the time George III became king in 1760, England was more concerned with colonization and reform than with supporting the arts.

While the British were cementing their control over Canada and India, the American colonists were proving themselves restless with Britain's rule. England had always seen itself as a military power; when the discontent in the colonies developed into the American Revolutionary War, which the British ultimately lost, George III took the news badly. But George III, who had always been popular with his subjects, was ill and at the mercy of his son who constantly plotted to seize the throne

At the same time, the industrialization of England had resulted in an even sharper division between classes. Industrialization brought a great deal of wealth to England but little of it found its way to the working class or the poor. What the poor had, instead, was even less than before. With the Enclosure Act, the lower class were shifted from the country, losing a simple existence that permitted them to grow some of their food and trade for their needs

With no where else to go, these displaced people moved into London. There was little shelter and even fewer jobs to greet them. But there was cheap gin, and public drunkenness became a serious problem. But there were also public executions to entertain the poor and prisons for those who could not pay their debts. For those with money, there was tobacco and opium. There were coffeehouses, where tea was served more frequently than coffee, and men met there to drink and talk and read the newspapers.

Women were usually excluded from these social activities, but they did make attempts at social integration and suffrage (the right to vote). Gambling was a proper occupation for gentlemen, as was the visiting of brothels. While paying a prostitute for sex or having a mistress was acceptable for men, the same behavior was not permitted for women.

Ladies of the eighteenth century were to be chaste and early marriage was encouraged to ensure this; girls could wed at twelve years-of-age. Still, no such high standard interfered with men's behavior.

By the last half of the eighteenth century, drama had almost disappeared from the theatre. There were many great actors, but few playwrights were creating memorable work. There was little incentive for good writing. The playwright collected only the third, sixth, and sometimes (if the play lasted), ninth nights' profits. Theatre owners and actors, however, made a great deal of money. Still, theatre flourished, and several of

London's more notable drama houses (including Sheridan's own Drury Lane Theatre) were established in the 1700s.

Surrounding the theatres were brothels, and this reflected the dual nature of the city. London was a complex city, and, in many ways, it reflected the chaos of the royal family. There were huge stores that imported the finest objects from around the world, and the city was crowded with artisans and street singers. The municipality tried to keep the streets cleaned and sewers were being built. But coal dust turned the buildings black and covered everything in its path. And on the edge of all this civility the slums existed. Sewage was dumped into the river Thames, and the poor made use with outside privies and slept in the doorways. Whole families shared one room-—if they could afford it.

The city overflowed with life and vitality, but there were two distinct worlds present. One of the rigidly defined life of society, where social convention ruled behavior. This is the world of Sheridan's *School for Scandal.* The other world lay just outside the theatre's doors. Those dark, depressed, and often twisted lives would not be the subject of plays until the next century.

Critical Overview

School for Scandal opened in May 1777 to enthusiastic audiences. Since it appeared at the end of the London theatre season, it played only twenty performances before the season closed, but Sheridan's play reappeared the following season for an additional forty-five performances. Since few plays enjoyed runs of more than fifteen performances, *School for Scandal* was, by prevailing standards, a success.

In the *Dictionary of Literary Biography,* Mark S. Auburn noted that "the play engendered wildly enthusiastic support. Passing by the outer walls of Drury Lane just as the famous screen fell and the audience exploded in laughter and applause, a journalist of that day claimed to have run for his life in fear that the building was collapsing."

The reason for the play's success, stated Auburn, is "the witty repartee of fashionable society, the Cain-and-Abel motif, and the delightful recitation of the May-and-December theme." Richard C. Taylor, writing in *Sheridan Studies,* noted a different reason for the play's success. Taylor stated that critics overlooked the play' s faults because they "recognized the topicality of Sheridan's moral concern and that Sheridan was targeting hypocrisy." Still, both Auburn and Taylor felt that *School for Scandal* was very popular with audiences and with reviewers. The audience appreciated the plot, especially since gossip had become an important feature in newspapers of the time (a foreshadowing of the gossip-frenzy that dominates many forms of multimedia information in the twentieth century).

But besides plot, Sheridan himself had ensured the play's success by opening it after a popular revival of William Congreve's comedies at Drury Lane. Sheridan eliminated some of the more offensive sexuality, and Congreve's work, which had been unpopular in recent years, received generally good reviews. When Sheridan opened *School for Scandal* immediately after showcasing three of Congreve's comedies, the critics quickly drew comparisons between the two dramatists. Suddenly Sheridan was the new comedic playwright of his generation, just as Congreve had been in his era.

Several critics, who made the intended connection between Congreve and Sheridan, pronounced Sheridan's work the superior while additionally congratulating him on resurrecting Congreve's reputation. In an examination of Sheridan's ties to Congreve, Eric Rump included several of the 1777 reviews of *School for Scandal* in an essay for *Sheridan Studies.* For instance, the reviewer for *The Gazetter* applauded Sheridan's "Manly sentiments, entirely divested of affectation, and which are conveyed to the heart through the purest channels of wit" But an even more important compliment follows when the same reviewer stated that Sheridan' s work presents a real challenge to Congreve's "royal supremacy."

The reviewer for the London *Evening Post* celebrated *School for Scandal's* "wit and fancy... decency and morals." Sheridan, stated the same reviewer, demonstrates that "the standard of *real comedy* is once more unfurled." Seven years later, the connection to Congreve was not forgotten; a critic for the *Universal Magazine* wrote that Sheridan's

play "has indeed the beauties of Congreve's comedies, without their faults; its plot is deeply enough perplexed, without forcing one to labour to unravel it; its incidents sufficient without being too numerous; its wit pure; its situations truly dramatic."

School for Scandal has endured as a popular play worthy of revival. The work was produced in England in 1990, and while the language, dress, and behavior appear alien to modern audiences, the revival still found appreciative viewers. The 1990 London production's director, Peter Woods, stated in *Sheridan Studies* that the characters are difficult, since "Nobody's fond of anybody."

The play is more difficult to stage in the contemporary dramatic era because audiences are too far removed from the issues presented in the play. The falling screen is still considered funny, but the context is not as filled with tension. Adultery and divorce are simply not as scandalous to a twentieth-century audience. Whereas a 1777 London audience would be tense with anticipation that Lady Teazle might be discovered, with the falling screen providing an explosion of laughter and release, a modern audience might only appreciate the slapstick nature of the scene. Woods described *School for Scandal* as "an artificial comedy about an artificial society in an artificial city."

An additional reason for the difficulty in staging the play is the anti-Semitism in its references to moneylending. Contemporary audiences are not comfortable with this, said Taylor, and the sections cannot be cut without compromising an important part of the play. Still, many of the societal malignancies that Sheridan sought to criticize are just as prevalent in modern society as they were during the playwright's lifetime. Combined with its distinction as a model comedy of manners, these touchstones to contemporary life allow *School for Scandal* to be appreciated by generations of audiences.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

In this essay, Metzger discusses the merits of viewing a production of School for Scandal *as opposed to merely reading the play. She also discusses the cultural problems—notably the anti-Semitism that is woven throughout the drama—that prevents a wider contemporary audience from embracing and fully appreciating Sheridan's work.*

I often tell my students that a play needs to be seen and heard to be properly appreciated. Reading a play requires an ability to visualize, and it is very difficult to manage this visualization without a careful scrutiny of the stage directions and some experience reading drama. This notion is especially true for Richard Brinsley Sheridan's, *School for Scandal,* which makes the reader *wish* for a fine production to view.

In the fourth act when Lady Teazle and Sir Peter are each peeking out of their respective hiding places, and Joseph is cautioning each to retreat, the reader can only imagine the fun occurring on stage. But when the screen falls later in that same act and Lady Teazle is exposed, this bit of slapstick demands to be seen. Mark S. Auburn related in *Sheridan Studies* that anyone passing by the theatre during that scene would have heard the riotous laughter of the audience that erupted from the theatre. This type of comedy was an early inspiration for the silly situation comedies that are a staple of television viewing; but if this play is so funny, why is it so infrequently staged?

Some critics suggest that the language is stilted or the subject matter not topical. When Peter Wood was interviewed about his 1990 production of *School for Scandal,* he expressed the opinion that the public might be developing a new appreciation for the rhythm and tone of language such as Sheridan's. And while it is true that the comedy of manners motif might be of less interest to twentieth-century audiences, it is certain that with tabloid journalism an especially hot topic on television and in mainstream newspapers, the public's interest in gossip, or in a play that satirizes gossip, should be apparent.

But if language and topic do not limit the play's reception, what other reasons might? One possibility is offered by Richard Taylor, who suggested in *Sheridan Studies* that the play's anti-Semitism may present a problem for audiences. Taylor asserted that "the anti-Semitism that runs through *School for Scandal* produces palpable discomfort in contemporary audiences, and no amount of directorial cutting easily eliminates it.'

Anti-Semitism was a part of eighteenth-century English life. An act that would have permitted Jews to become naturalized citizens was repealed immediately when anti-Semitic street mobs loudly protested the law. When Moses is introduced in Act III *of School for Scandal,* his name is prefaced with the character descriptor "Honest." Since it was Moses who led the Jews from Egypt to their salvation during the Biblical Exodus, the audience should expect that this Moses will help Charles to his reward. But as important as his name is the qualifier that comes before it. Sheridan places great

emphasis on "honest," using the word many times to describe Moses. The obvious inference is that Moses is an exception: moneylenders are stereotyped as dishonest.

The same is true for the overly used "friend" or "friendly." If descriptions of Moses must note his friendliness, then the point is made that most moneylenders are not their client's friends. Historically Jews have been identified with usury or moneylending, and in *School for Scandal,* Sheridan also identifies Jews as dishonest and unfriendly—proven by the fact that Moses's honesty and friendship are repeatedly inferred as anomalous to both his race and occupation.

In *School for Scandal,* to be a moneylender is to be a cheat. Sir Oliver is told that to be successful in his disguise, he must demand 50% interest. And if the subject seems especially desperate, then 100% interest would be appropriate. Thus, to be a successful moneylender, one must also be greedy, unfeeling, and unsympathetic. In Sheridan's play, Jews must even look different from other men. Sir Oliver asks if he shall be able to pass for a Jew. The response is that this moneylender is a broker—a step up socially, and since he is also a Christian, Sir Oliver's appearance will be satisfactory.

The text never explains what a Jew should look like, but Sir Oliver's "smart dress" is in keeping for a broker though not a moneylender. Sir Oliver is even told that moneylenders talk differently than other men. All of these points create an image of Jews that sets them apart from other businessmen. The implication is that Jewish businessmen are different—in clothing, in speech, and in morality. While this depiction would have raised little concern in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, twentieth-century audiences have the example of the Holocaust. The realization that anti-Semitism is never harmless and never acceptable intrudes on the otherwise light-themed *School for Scandal* It cannot and should not be forgotten, and since the scenes with Moses and the disguised Sir Oliver form an important section of the text, their deletion would be nearly impossible.

If its portrayal of moneylenders detracts from *School for Scandal,* Sheridan's glimpse at the morals and social manners of the period do offer much for an audience to appreciate. As Louis Kronenberger observed, this is a play with a "sense of naughtiness"; this "play is concerned with the *imputation* of sinning; of sin itself there is absolutely nothing. No one ever actually commits a sin. The actors only talk about sin."

Of course, it could be argued that slander and gossip is in itself a sin, and Sheridan might have agreed; but for the audience, gossip is the subject of satire, and satire's result is laughter. All this talk about sin, accompanied by its absence, is a departure from Restoration theatre. The *comedy of manners* of the earlier century emphasized sexuality and sexual situations, and the writers relied on the titillation of the audience as a necessary component of comedy. But Sheridan's play offered a fresh voice. There is a mystery associated with what is hidden by shadow.

As Kronenberger noted, "sin now seems far more wicked and important than it used to." All of this absence of sex might be as equally refreshing to modern audiences who have become jaded by the explicit sexuality portrayed in film and drama. When Kronenberger

stated that with *School for Scandal,* "we are back in an age when sex has become glamorous through being illicit," I am reminded of the popularity of Hollywood films of the 1930s and 1940s. The audience could anticipate a happy resolution. Romance ended in weddings, but only after one of the stars had resisted illicit temptation. This is also the happy ending *of School for Scandal*

Although romance provides the play's happy ending, very little of the play is actually concerned with the romance that ends the play. Maria has a very small part, and there is little interaction on stage between her and Charles, little to exemplify the devotion they profess for one another. The romance between Lady Teazle and Sir Peter is given greater emphasis. And although they are married, it is their discovery of romance that offers much entertainment for the audience.

Auburn related that Sheridan rejected the stock depiction of May-December romance. How to recreate a new approach to a familiar story was a challenge, and Auburn said that "in an early version [Sheridan] toyed with a harsh cuckolding story like Chaucer's "Miller's Tale" andWycherley's *Country Wife* (1675), but in the final version he sought and achieved the amiable tone of Georgian comedy." The couple's happy resolution is based on an awareness of their love for one another. Lady Teazle's country origins, which led her to believe that Lady Sneerwell represented fashion, help remind the young bride of why she chose to marry. And Sir Peter, who had too often focused on his age, recognized that although he might be old enough to be Lady Teazle's father, he was, instead, her husband.

Sheridan's decision to soften the relationship between Lady Teazle and her husband was also noted by Rose Snider, who compared Sheridan's handling of May-December romance to that of Wycherely and Congreve. Snider stated that Sir Peter "reacts in a more gentlemanly fashion" than Wycherely or Congreve's similarly challenged husbands. Accordingly, "Sir Peter Teazle is a far pleasanter person than the earlier prototypes." Snider pointed out that the Teazles introduce some sentiment into the comedy; thus, Sheridan's play is more pleasant for the audience, as well.

Lady Teazle and Sir Peter are, as Aubrey de Selincourt noted, stock characters. The task for Sheridan was to make these familiar characters interesting. Sheridan does succeed, says de Selincourt, "with unsurpassed brilliance and precision." In *School for Scandal,* Sheridan creates a genuinely comic moment with the falling screen; it is sincerely funny because the audience likes these two characters. A cuckold husband and an unfaithful wife do not invite the audience's loyalty, but Sheridan creates two characters the audience can like. Their discovery of one another's value provides a more genuine appreciation of romance than the too brief framing of Maria and Charles's courtship.

Source: ShenMetzger for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 1998

Critical Essay #2

Copeland reviews a Stratford Festival production of Sheridan's play. While finding the text as theatrical and resilient as ever, the critic was less than impressed with the production.

As conceived by Robin Phillips, *The School for Scandal* displays a harsh and glittering world of exquisite beauty and viciousness, where sentimental sobriety—when genuine—is the only refuge from the savagery that lies in wait for vitality and virtue. Phillips has read the play as apiece of senous social criticism, with decidedly mixed results- his version of this classic comedy of manners is thought-provoking, visually stunning, but finally a failure.

Sheridan wittily exhibits the machinations of the hypocritical Joseph Surface, who joins with the malicious Lady Sneerwell in a campaign of slander originally designed to obtain his uncle Oliver's fortune and the hand of the wealthy Maria by the destruction of his brother Charles's reputation, but which eventually expands to threaten the marriage of Sir Peter and Lady Teazle. In his program note, Phillips emphasizes the importance of reputation in a mercantile society, where to lose respectability is literally to lose "credit." In such an environment, the power of Lady Sneerwell and her "scandalous college" of gossips is no laughing matter, and Phillips's production takes its tone from the seriousness of their crime. The characterizations are subdued, the comedy is underplayed: the audience is never allowed to forget that the events it is witnessing could end as easily in suffering as in happiness.

Flamboyant performances are therefore the rare exception in this *School.* As that victim of a May-September marriage, Sir Peter Teazle, William Hurt is a sober, tender husband, whose very irascibility is restrained. He is seen at his most characteristic in his Act III scene with his young wife, where his childlike delight in her affection succumbs with reluctance to her attacks, to be replaced by deeply felt hurt, rather than rage, when her wounding remarks struck home. His violent emotions are reserved for his ward Maria, whom he reduces to tears with his attempt to bully her into accepting Joseph as her husband. Douglas Campbell's excellent Sir Oliver is almost equally grave, although he is captivatingly comic during the debt-ridden Charles's private auction of the family portraits and in his encounter with the slanderers who gather at Sir Peter's door to gloat over Lady Teazle's apparent indiscretion with Joseph. Susan Wright's Mrs. Candour typifies the treatment of Sheridan's wit in this production, delivering her catalogue of scandal in a matter-of-fact tone that underlines the speech's audacity while it almost eradicates its humor. Only Richard Curnock and Keith Dinicol, as the arriviste gossips Crabtree and Sir Benjamin Backbite, are allowed to fully exploit the comedy of their roles, to the considerable delight of the audience.

Sheila McCarthy combines these two approaches to delineate this production's central action: the maturation of Lady Teazle. In her first scene McCarthy emphasizes the broad comedy of her role, playing a squeaky-voiced caricature of an empty-headed flirt as she tantalizes and torments her hapless spouse with her childlike longings for fashionable

extravagancies. But in the course of her trials at the hands ot'Colm Feore's lascivious Joseph and the chorus of scandalmongers, she gradually adopts the subdued style of the more experienced characters, as the enthusiastic girl dwindles into the sedate—but safe—wife. The diminished Lady Teazle of the last act is the poignant symbol of the price to be paid for social security in Phillip's London.

This autumnal drama is played out most clearly in the visual aspect of the production. Michael Eagan's set is a vision of geometric opulence: a long, narrow thrust covered in white tile with a metallic border, terminated upstage by an enormous moveable three-tiered cage, in white and silver, that perfectly balances the proportions of the playing area. The spare luxury of the set is matched by an enormous silver rocking horse that appears, surrounded by a chorus of dancers and a fireworks display, in a spectacular *entr'acte* representing the temptations of fashionable London. Anne Curtis' s equally lavish costumes provide an emblematic commentary on the action through a general movement from white and beige in the early scenes, punctuated dramatically by Lady Teazle's orange hair and gown and the complete blackness of Snake's costume, toward more sombre colors, as the circumstances of Charles and the Teazles became more precarious. Matters are at their darkest when the vultures descend on the house of the supposedly cuckolded Sir Peter dressed in deep brown and carrying black umbrellas. The arrival of Sir Oliver in fawn and Sir Peter in an oatmeal-colored coat prepared the way for the denouement, in which the blacks and dark browns of the evil characters are ranged against the sensibly muted buffs and beiges of the virtuous. Maria arrives for her happy ending dressed in realistic beige and brown stripes, while the chastened Lady Teazle appears in very pale peach.

The emblematic quality of the costuming is echoed in Phillips's use of tableaux. The prologue is set against a spectacle of voyeurism: while Sir Peter describes the evils of slanderous newspaper paragraphs, upstage, inside the cage, Lady Teazle exhibits herself in a state of undress to a crowd of scandalized gawkers. Once again surrounded by an attendant crowd, she delivers the epilogue from the back of the silver rocking horse amid darkness and dry ice, the spotlit image of her wistful lament for her lost pleasures. The prologue tableau is preceded by a mysterious sound effect—a prop-driven airplane—but the use of sound is generally more straightforward, indeed, prosaic: music underlines moment of turmoil and sentiment; Snake is accompanied by a synthesized rattle and hiss. Even the lighting design functions symbolically, reinforcing the theme of relentless social scrutiny by the frequent use of spotlights.

By taking Sheridan seriously, Phillips discovers in *The School for Scandal* a critique of urban consumenst culture that has unexpected resonance, but his approach is finally self-defeating. His reliance on schematic visual effects betrays the conflict between his interpretation and the text, which promulgates its ethics by means of blatantly theatrical comedy. In the service of his solemn interpretation, Phillips attacks the play's comic structure, retarding its rhythms, evading its comic builds, and eschewing its invitations to physical comedy and broad characterizations. Drained of comic energy, Phillips *Scandal* is ultimately a lackluster performance, despite its considerable intelligence and beauty, and, as such, a misrepresentation of Sheridan's work.

Source: Nancy Copeland, review of *The School for Scandal* in *Theatre Journal,* Volume 40, no 3, October, 1988, pp. 420-21.

Critical Essay #3

Clifford expresses disappointment at being denied the full pleasure of Sheridan'splay. Complaining of poor technical values and a general lack of enthusiasm, the critic feels that the play deserves better attention.

To a writer a theatre like the Royal Lyceum is a magic box full of enticing possibilities—to all of which, almost invariably, you are denied access. To an Artistic Director, on the other hand, such a place must more often feel like a black hole—with row after row of empty seats that somehow, mght after night, have got to be filled.

The theatre's understandable response to this has been to mount two classic comedies in repertory—a revival of their immensely successful production of *Tartuffe* in tandem with a new production of Sheridan's *School for Scandal.*

This opened recently to an almost uniformly hostile press, which the production did not really deserve. The Lyceum tends to open with a cheerful free preview and follow it with a press night that almost always falls flat; a strongly self-destructive process to which this in many respects perfectly acceptable show has also fallen victim.

Colin MacNeil's set is an elegant and serviceable rectangular box, fronted by a row of footlights, that neatly and effectively conjures up a feeling of the period; the cast are splendidly bewigged and crinolined; the show looks good, and by the end had enough basic buoyancy to it to ensure that the very special magic exerted by so beautifully structured a comedy would work on its audience.

The basic groundwork was all in place; the show's problems arose because somehow hardly anyone seemed to be working quite as hard or quite as sharply as they could.

One soon began to long, for instance, for a more elegant and imaginative solution to the problems of scene changing than the inevitably shame-faced lackeys embarassedly shoving bits of false bookshelf off and on the stage, or collapsing and re-erecting chmese screens; and particularly in the first half, when so much of the comedy depends on the words, one could often not stop longing for a cast more totally and incisively in command of the language. In fact it was hard, sometimes, to escape the feeling that most of them, given the chance, would probably have been happier doing something else.

The much stronger theatrical possibilities of the second half seemed to bring out much stronger and more lively performances. The cast's timing picked up, as did their capacity for inventiveness, and they began to approach the whole play with a delightfully infectious relish.

Garry Stewart, for instance, who had been looking wretchedly uncomfortable in wig and rouge as die foppish Benjamin Backbite, approached the part of the dissolute but good-hearted Charles with exactly the right kind of swagger; and Andrew Dallmeyer, who had

produced a rather somnabulistically grotesque Crabtree, came into his own as the nameless but wonderfully malevolent lackey to Billy McElhaney's haplessly hypocritical Surface.

Sarah Collier's splendidly piratical Lady Sneer-well-—complete with eye-patch—David McKail's pop-eyed and genial Sir Oliver, Gerda Stevenson's bubbly and charming Lady Teazle, all turned out consistent and skilfull performances which were a pleasure to watch. It all added up to a pleasant, entertaining, undemanding sort of evening, which did not quite do justice to the skills and talents of everyone concerned. With stronger direction, a greater sense of commitment and purposefulness, it could easily have added up to a very great deal more.

Source: John Clifford, review of *The School for Scandal* in *Plays and Players,* Number 407, August, 1987, pp. 33-34

Critical Essay #4

In this uncredited review, a 1963 production of School for Scandal *receives a favorable appraisal. The critic terms the play as "iridescently enchanting, contagiously amusing."*

The Shoolfor Scandal, by Richard Brinsley Sheridan, is a kind of dramatic harpsichord. It has surface vivacity rather than inner strength. It has elegance of style rather than profundity of substance. Thumped by realism's heavy hand, it would jangle and go mute; stroked with exquisite artifice, it enchants and amuses. The present import from Britain, top-star- ' ring Sir john Gielgud and Sir Ralph Richardson, is iridescently enchanting, contagiously amusing.

Gielgud is Joseph Surface, the hypocrite as moral snob, a kind of holier-than-thou heel. Richardson is Sir Peter Teazle, a crusty, crestfallen bridegroom in his 50s, loving, but not loved by, young Lady Teazle (Geraldine McEwan), a predatory country kitten so sure of her city ways that her voice seems to be crunching canary-brittle. The ostensible question is: Will Lady Teazle cuckold Sir Peter with Joseph? But Sheridan is less concerned with virtue in peril tiian with vice masquerading as virtue. In the famously comic screen scene, when Lady Teazle is finally discovered by Sir Peter in Joseph's library, it is not her folly that is impugned and exposed but Joseph's bad character. All high comedy is a deliberately moral unmasking of moral pretense, the ultimate poseur being Society itself.

What Gielgud the director brings to *The School for Scandal* is a sense of how the play traps constancy of man's frivolity in its high-polish comic veneer. Gielgud the actor evokes an entire social structure with the delicate flourish of a snuffbox. Richardson *et al.* are similarly and superlatively good. The cast is sumptuously costumed, but its kingliest array is English speech, heard with the ringing clarity of fine crystal on a U.S. stage too long debased by caveman playwrights and actors who are masters of the grunt, the mumble and the slur.

Source: "Elegantly on the Harpsichord" in *Time,* Volume LXXXI,no 5, February 1,1963, p 65.

Adaptations

School for Scandal was videotaped in 1965. The 100 minute-long black and white film, taped during a stage performance of the play, stars Joan Plownght and Felix Aylmer. The Hal Burton production is available from Video Yesteryear.

Topics for Further Study

Sheridan is a male writer who writes about marriage and women in *School for Scandal.* Research the role of women in London society. Do you think that Sheridan accurately portrays women? Is the marriage depicted in this play an accurate reflection of marriage in the late-eighteenth century?

Sheridan's biography indicates that he made a lot of money from writing plays. Investigate play-writing and other theatre work as money-making ventures. How successful financially was acting? Or the writing of plays? Or owning a theatre"

School for Scandal focuses on gossip and slander as a social disease. How serious a problem was slander in London society In your research did you find that Sheridan was using slander as a symptom of a more serious social issue?

The eighteenth century was a period during which the line between poverty and wealth became even more pronounced in England. Because of enclosure laws, more people, who had formerly made an adequate living in the country, were forced to move to London to look for employment. At the same time, gin bars proliferated, and public drunkenness became a serious problem. High unemployment and public drunkenness combined to created some serious issues in London. Research the effects of these two events. What new issues were created?

Sheridan was one of the last play wnghts to write a "comedy of manners." This genre of comedy became very popular after the Restoration but was waning when Sheridan began to write. Explore this genre and discuss the conventions that define a comedy of manners.

Compare and Contrast

1777: The Continental Congress votes to accept the services of the Marquis de Lafayette, who will command a division during the American Revolutionary War. Lafayette will assist the American Colonies, although he has been forbidden to do so by the king of France, Louis XVI. The French have secretly been supporting the American war effort for nearly two years.

Today: The United States regards England as one of its closest allies and strongest supporters. The two countries frequently support one another in economic, military, and cultural efforts.

1777: The victory at Saratoga is a turning point for the Revolutionary War. For the first tune, the English realize that they can not beat the Americans. Parliament asks George in to back down and end the war. He refuses to consider the option.

Today: The monarchy of England has little political power and could neither declare war nor sustain one in opposition to parliament.

1777: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is composing music and his Concert No. 9 for Pianoforte and Orchestra in E flat major debuts in Salzburg. Europe remains a center for great music, with London better known for its theatre than its musical composers.

Today: England has been an important force in popular music since the 1960s, delivering such influential groups as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and Led Zeppelin.

1777: Disease is a major threat to living a long life. Ailments such as tuberculosis cripple and kill many people. George Washington obtains approval to have his troops inoculated against smallpox.

Today: Advancements in medical technology have resulted in treatments, preventions, or cures for such diseases as tuberculosis and polio. Smallpox is considered to be completely eradicated, and vaccination is no longer required.

What Do I Read Next?

Sheridan's firstplay, *TheRivals,* written in 1775, is also a comedy that uses disguise and romance to probe social issues. A clever use of language is notable in this play, which, like *School for Scandal,* offers generational discord as a motif.

Sheridan was often compared with William Congreve, whose *Way of the World is* considered to be one of his finest comedies. This comedy makes use of witty dialogue to demonstrate how foolish human nature can be.

The French playwright, John Baptiste Poquelin Moliere, is often cited as an influence on Sheridan. *School for Wives,* was first presented in 1662. The play is a satire and makes use of mistaken identity and misunderstandings to help further its plot.

Oliver Goldsmith's play, *She Stoops to Conquer,* presented in 1773, was also an attack against the sentimental comedy of the Restoration Age. Goldsmith is sometimes described as the only other successful playwright, besides Sheridan, to emerge in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

England in the Age of Hogarth, written by Derek Jarrett and published in 1986, provides a glimpse of the social history of English in the years just before Sheridan began writing his plays.

Further Study

Auburn,MarkS. "RichardBnnsley Shendan" *lnDtctionary of Literary Biography,* Volume 89. *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Dramatists,* edited by Paula R. Backscheider, Gale, 1989, pp. 298-322.

Auburn provides a general overview of Sheridan's plays and his life.

de Selincourt, Aubrey. "Sheridan" in Set *Great Playwrights: Sophocles, Shakespeare, Mohere, Sheridan, Ibsen, Shaw,* Harmsh Hamilton, 1960, pp. 105-31.

This essay is an examination of the construction of several of Sheridan's plays, with a brief look at Sheridan's development of characters

Hay, Douglas and Peter Linebaugh, Editors. *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England,* Pantheon, 1975

This book explores the legal problems that confronted the differences in class. The book includes a number of detailed studies.

Hogan, Robert. "Plot, Character, and Comic Language in Sheridan" in *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan,* edited by A, R. Braunmiller and J. C. Bulman, University of Delaware Press, 1986, pp. 274-85.

Hogan compares Shendan's use of plot and comedic language in *School for Scandal* and *The Rivals.*

Rronenberger, Louis. *"School for Scandal"* in *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Comedy,* edited by Scott McMilhn, WW. Norton, 1973, pp. 558-63.

Kronenberger discusses the strengths and appeal of *School for Scandal.* He focuses on the themes and on the play's contrasts with Restoration comedy

Jarrett, Derek *England in the Age of Hogarth,* Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1974

Derek presents a social history of the eighteenth century The author uses diaries and letters to provide authenticity to his Ideas Mikhail, E. H., Editor *Sheridan: Interviews and Recollections,* St. Martin's Press, 1989

Mikhail provides an interesting examination of the private Sheridan through the use of letters and recollections from the period to offer a different biography of Shendan. The author has tried to use information that has not been previously printed in other biographies

Porter, Roy. *English Society in the Eighteenth Century,* Penguin, 1982.

Porter tries to provide a comprehensive look at eighteenth-Century English life. He offers a number of small details on every aspect of English social life, from the small country town to London.

Stone, Lawrence *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500-1800,* Penguin, 1977.

Stone's study of family life and the relationship between family, state, and law is easy to read and absorb. Stone includes examples to support this account of social history. This volume makes it easy to see the progression of family structure and values during 300 years of political and social transformation.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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