

RESTORATION DRAMA

The School for Scandal

- ✚ In this lecture, we are going to start reading and commenting on some passages from Act I, scene i . Before we comment on these passages, we are going to talk about the plot of act I in order to understand the dominated ideas well.
- ❖ Now we will read some information about our play, The School for Scandal, from the book before starting with Act I.

The Play

- ❖ It is often easier to ridicule current abuses and absurdities than to transcend them or avoid them. But Sheridan did transcend them in The School for Scandal, and, as he was not averse to the ridiculous he also provided much laughter in this comedy. The play had its serious side, for it was in part, a satirical comment on contemporary journalism and scandal-mongering.

Note: *a satirical comment on contemporary journalism can be a topic for seminar.*

- ❖ This identification is based on the London Magazine's comment that, beside the general satire of the play, the particular application of it to a certain modern daily newspaper is 'logically true throughout and out to crimson with blushes every cheek which has encouraged such butchery of male and female reputations'.
- Here, we can notice that the play, The School for Scandal, is a satire on contemporary journalism and magazines.

Some notes about the play:

1. We see that every character in our play has his or her own circle that will be different in their members, companions, behaviour, etc.
2. In our play, we have smoothness and quickness in actions. Therefore, scenes are very short.
3. The play has an obvious turning point; the falling screen.

▪ **Q. What is the turning point [the falling screen]?
And when does that turning point appear in our
play?**

- ❖ The turning point is the mirror that shows the reality of characters of the play.
- ❖ It appears when Lady Sneerwell becomes uncovered and exposed at the end of the play; the reality or the turn nature of Lady Sneerwell is revealed.

Prologue

❖ **P. 5**

*“A School for Scandal! tell me, I beseech you,
Needs there a school this modish art to teach you?
No need of lessons now, the knowing think;
We might as well be taught to eat and drink.
Caused by a dearth of scandal, should the vapors*

*Distress our fair ones—let them read the papers;
Their powerful mixtures such disorders hit; ”*

- Here, it is obvious that the prologue is a mockery on aristocratic people or upper-class people, and it is also a satire and attack on journalism. In fact, it reveals the problem of scandals that prevailed in society.
- Also, Sheridan wants to say that even educated people or the upper-class people, as well as contemporary magazines, are very interested in gossip and rumors. So, this can show the general atmosphere of the era.

Act I

The summary:

- ❖ Act I starts with Lady Sneerwell who is the main (center) character. She is a rich widow and a scandal monger. In fact, she likes to spread rumors and scandals because she has already had a bad reputation before her marriage. So, she wants to take revenge on all people, men and women, by gossiping a lot about others.

- ❖ Snake, Lady Sneerwell's companion, helps her scandalize and spread rumors. They work together with Joseph Surface against Charles Surface and lady Teazle. They make plots about Charles and Lady Teazle that both of them have an affair. Consequently, they will prevent Charles from marrying Maria. Then Lady Sneerwell will be able to marry Charles because she loves him, and Joseph will be able to marry Maria for gaining her money.
- ❖ In this act, we can see that Maria is angry with Mr. Benjamin and his uncle, Crabtree, because they talk ill about others. So, she tries to escape them and go to Lady Sneerwell's house. Then Mrs. Candour, who is a gossiping woman, enters after Maria.
- ❖ Moreover, Sir Peter Teazle soliloquizes talking about his wife's spending habits because she behaves as aristocratic women.
- ❖ Then Rowley comes to tell Sir Peter Teazle about the returning of Sir Oliver Surface, the uncle of Charles and Joseph. In fact, Sir Oliver is a wealthy man. He comes from

India to England in order to give his money to one of his nephews. Then Sir Peter Teazle fears that Sir Oliver will mock his marriage although he is so excited to see his friend whom he last saw 16 years ago.

Act I, Scene i

❖ P. 9

“lady sneer. The paragraphs, you say, Mr. Snake, were all inserted? snake. They were, madam; and as I copied them myself in a feigned hand, there can be no suspicion whence they came.

lady sneer. Did you circulate the report of Lady Brittle’s intrigue with Captain Boastall?”

- These lines are taken from The School for Scandal by Richard Sheridan. The speaker is Lady Sneerwell, and the addressee is her servant, Snake. Lady Sneerwell is a rich widow and a scandal monger. She uses her cunning companion, Snake, to scandalize and spread rumors. They plot to destroy other’s reputation by scandalizing them in letters and newspapers. They want to spread slanders and gossip that Lady Brittle. Here, the main idea is gossip and rumors.

❖ P. 10+11

“snake. That’s in as fine a train as your ladyship could wish. In the common course of things, I think it must reach Mrs. Clackitt’s cars within four and twenty hours; and then, you know, the business is as good as done.

lady sneer. Why, truly, Mrs. Clackitt has a very pretty talent and a great deal of industry.

snake. True, madam, and has been tolerably successful in her day. To my knowledge she has been the cause of six matches being broken off, and three sons disinherited; of four forced elopements, and as many close confinements; nine separate maintenances, and two divorces. Nay, I have more than once traced her causing a “Tête-à-Tête” in the Town and Country Magazine, when the parties, perhaps, had never seen each other’s face before in the course of their lives.

lady sneer. She certainly has talents, but her manner is gross.

snake. ’Tis very true. She generally designs well, has a free tongue and a bold invention; but her coloring is too dark, and her outlines often extravagant. She wants that delicacy of tint, and mellowness of sneer, which distinguish your ladyship’s scandal.”

- These lines are taken from The School for Scandal by Richard Sheridan. The speaker is the servant, Snake, and the addressee is his lady, Lady Sneerwell. Here, there is an intrigue against Mrs. Clackitt by both of Lady Sneerwell and Snake. We see that Lady Sneerwell is a scandal monger who uses her sunning companion, Snake, to scandalize others and

gossip about them. In fact, Snake is paid by his Lady to place false stories and news in the gossip columns and to forge incriminating letters. These lines show how Lady Sneerwell is able to mock people and gossip about them. So, the main idea is gossip and rumors.

❖ P. 11

“lady sneer. You are partial, Snake.

snake. Not in the least; everybody allows that Lady Sneerwell can do more with a word or look than many can with the most labored detail, even when they happen to have a little truth on their side to support it.

lady sneer. Yes, my dear Snake; and I am no hypocrite to deny the satisfaction I reap from the success of my efforts. Wounded myself, in the early part of my life, by the envenomed tongue of slander, I confess I have since known no pleasure equal to the reducing others to the level of my own injured reputation.”

- These lines are taken from The School for Scandal by Richard Sheridan. The speaker is Lady Sneerwell, and the addressee is Snake. These lines show Lady Sneerwell’s capacity in mocking people and speaking ill about them we see that she tries to justify her work and gossip to Snake by telling him that she was accused of her morals when she was younger. In fact, she has already suffered a lot from people’s gossiping

before her marriage, so she wants to talk revenge on all people by scandalizing them. This passage reveals the real nature of Lady Sneerwell and goes back to her past. The main idea is the bad personality and past of Lady Sneerwell.

❖ P. 11

“snake. Nothing can be more natural. But, Lady Sneerwell, there is one affair in which you have lately employed me, wherein, I confess, I am at a loss to guess your motives.

lady sneer. I conceive you mean with respect to my neighbor, Sir Peter Teazle, and his family?

snake. I do. Here are two young men, to whom Sir Peter has acted as a kind of guardian since their father’s death; the eldest possessing the most amiable character, and universally well spoken of; the youngest, the most dissipated and extravagant young fellow in the kingdom, without friends or character—”

➤ *Read this passage at home and then try to comment on it; it is a homework.*

- Page (12) is not required.

❖ P. 13

“Must I confess that Charles—that libertine, that extravagant, that bankrupt in fortune and reputation—that he it is for whom I am thus

anxious and malicious, and to gain whom I would sacrifice everything?”

➤ *Read the page (13) at home.*

- ***Page (14) is not required.***

❖ P. 15

“joseph s. Every hour. I am told he has had another execution⁸ in the house yesterday. In short, his dissipation and extravagance exceed anything I have ever heard of.

lady sneer. Poor Charles!

joseph s. True, madam; notwithstanding his vices, one can't help feeling for him. Poor Charles! I'm sure I wish it were in my power to be of any essential service to him; for the man who does not share in the distresses of a brother, even though merited by his own misconduct, deserves——

lady sneer. O Lud! you are going to be moral, and forget that you are among friends.

joseph s. Egad, that's true! I'll keep that sentiment till I see Sir Peter. However, it is certainly a charity to rescue Maria from such a libertine, who if he is to be reclaimed, can be so only by a person of your ladyship's superior accomplishments and understanding.”

➤ This page is not for comments. Read it at home and try to quote some lines or phrases when you write an essay.

- **Note:** we can notice that most characters in the play describe Charles as a dissipated, wicked and extravagant person.

❖ P. 16+17

“lady sneer. Maria, my dear, how do you do?—What’s the matter?

maria. Oh! there is that disagreeable lover of mine, Sir Benjamin Backbite, has just called at my guardian’s with his odious uncle, Crabtree; so I slipped out, and ran hither to avoid them. lady sneer. Is that all?

joseph s. If my brother Charles had been of the party, madam, perhaps you would not have been so much alarmed.

lady sneer. Nay, now you are severe; for I dare swear the truth of the matter is, Maria heard you were here.—But, my dear, what has Sir Benjamin done that you should avoid him?

Maria. Oh, he has done nothing—but ’tis for what he has said: his conversation is a perpetual libel on all his acquaintance.

joseph s. Aye, and the worst of it is, there is no advantage in not knowing him—for he’ll abuse a stranger just as soon as his best friend; and his uncle’s as bad.

lady sneer. Nay, but we should make allowance; Sir Benjamin is a wit and a poet.

Maria. For my part, I own, madam, wit loses its respect with me when I see it in company with malice.—What do you think, Mr. Surface?”

- These lines are taken from The School for Scandal by Richard Sheridan. The speaker is Lady Sneerwell, and the addressee are Maria Joseph. Maria seems to a good natured, kind and innocent character. She escapes Mr. Benjamin Back bite, who loves her, and his uncle, Crabtree, and comes to Lady Sneerwell’s house because they gossip about people, and she does not like to hear anyone gossips because this will offend her a lot. We can see that Lady Sneerwell is astonished surprised at Maria. The main idea is the good nature of Maria.

❖ **P. 18** **IMP.**

“mrs. can. My dear Lady Sneerwell, how have you been this century?—Mr. Surface, what news do you hear?—though indeed it is no matter, for I think one hears nothing else but scandal.

joseph s. Just so, indeed, ma’am.

mrs. can. Ah, Maria! child—what, is the whole affair off between you and Charles? His extravagance, I presume—the town talks of nothing else.

maria. I am very sorry, ma’am, the town has so little to do.

mrs. can. True, true, child: but there's no stopping people's tongues. I own I was hurt to hear it, as I indeed was to learn, from the same quarter, that your guardian, Sir Peter, and Lady Teazle have not agreed lately as well as could be wished."

- These lines are taken from The School for Scandal by Richard Sheridan. The speaker is Mrs. Candour, and the addressees are Lady Sneerwell, Maria and Joseph. This passage shows how much Mrs. Candour is gossipy and interested in speaking rumors and gossip, we see that when she enters Lady Sneerwell's house, she immediately asks Joseph Surface about fox news he hears. Then she asks Maria to tell her about what happened to the relationship between Maria and Charles. Moreover, we notice that the whole society is interested in spreading rumors and scandals at that time. The main idea is gossip and rumors.

❖ **P. 19** **IMP.**

"maria. Such reports are highly scandalous.

mrs. can. So they are, child—shameful! shameful! But the world is so censorious, no character escapes.—Lord, now who would have suspected your friend, Miss Prim, of an indiscretion? Yet such is the ill nature of people that they say her uncle stopped her last week, just as she was stepping into the York diligence! with her dancing master.

maria. I'll answer for't there are no grounds for the report.

mrs. can. Ah, no foundation in the world, I dare swear; no more, probably, than for the story circulated last month, of Mrs. Festino's affair with Colonel Cassino—though, to be sure, that matter was never rightly cleared up.

joseph s. The license of invention some people take is monstrous indeed.

maria. 'Tis so—but, in my opinion, those who report such things are equally culpable.

mrs. can. To be sure they are; tale-bearers are as bad as the tale-makers—'tis an old observation, and a very true one. But what's to be done, as I said before? How will you prevent people from talking? Today Mrs. Clackitt assured me Mr. and Mrs. Honeymoon were at last become mere man and wife, like the rest of their acquaintance."

- These lines are taken from The School for Scandal by Richard Sheridan. The speaker is Maria, and the addressees are Joseph, Mrs. Candour and Lady Sneerwell. Here, we see that when anyone spreads rumors and scandals in front of Maria, she gets angry with him because she does not like to gossip about people. However, gossiping and spreading women, a green light to go on scandalizing and giving another rumor before people. Moreover, we can see that Joseph tries to pretend before Maria to be a good man in order to admire and then marry him. Mrs. Candour also tries to pretend in front of Maria that she is a kind woman. She justifies and

excuses her gossiping by telling Maria that no one can prevent people from talking. Here, the main idea is gossip and hypocrisy.

❖ P. 20 **IMP.**

“Joseph s. Ah! Mrs. Candour, if everybody had your forbearance and good nature!

mrs can. I confess, Mr. Surface, I cannot bear to hear people attacked behind their backs; and when ugly circumstances come out against our acquaintance, I own I always love to think the best.—By the by, I hope ’tis not true that your brother is absolutely ruined?”

➤ Comment on it at home; it is a homework.

- ***Continue reading the rest pages from 20 till 26 at home.***

Act I, Scene ii

❖ P. 27 **IMP.**

“Sir Peter t. When an old bachelor marries a young wife, what is he to expect? ’Tis now six months since Lady Teazle made me the happiest of men—and I have been the most miserable dog ever since that ever committed wedlock! We tiffed a little going to church, and came to a quarrel before the bells had done ringing. I was more than once nearly choked with gall during the honeymoon, and had lost all comfort in life before my friends had done wishing me joy. Yet I chose

with caution—a girl bred wholly in the country, who never knew luxury beyond one silk gown, or dissipation above the annual gala of a race ball. Yet she now plays her part in all the extravagant fopperies of fashion and the town with as ready a grace as if she never had seen a bush or a grassplot out of Grosvenor Square! I am sneered at by all my acquaintance, and paragraphed in the newspapers. She dissipates my mfortune, and contradicts all my humors; yet the worst of it is, I doubt I love her, or I should never bear all this. However, I'll never be weak enough to own it."

- Here, Sir Peter Teazle soliloquizes in his house complaining about the extravagance and the excessive spending habits of his young wife, Lady Teazle. It is clear that Sir Peter married Lady Teazle, she started to behave as aristocratic women although she is a daughter of square in the countryside. We see that aristocratic women spend all their time and money uselessly and pretend in front of people to be very happy despite their disputes and troubles. So, this soliloquy reveals the physical appearance of the upper-class people.

❖ **P. 28+29** **IMP.**

"rowley. Oh! Sir Peter, your servant: how is it with you, sir? sir peter t. Very bad, Master Rowley, very bad. I meet with nothing but crosses and vexations.

.....

rowley. You know, Sir Peter, I have always taken the liberty to differ with you on the subject of these two young gentlemen. I only wish you may not be deceived in your opinion of the elder. For Charles, my life on't! he will retrieve his errors yet. Then worthy father, once my honored master, was, at his years, nearly as wild a spark; yet, when he died, he did not leave a more benevolent heart to lament his loss.

sir peter t. You are wrong, Master Rowley. On their father's death, you know, I acted as a kind of guardian to them both till their uncle Sir Oliver's eastern liberality gave them an early independence. Of course, no person could have more opportunities of judging of their hearts, and I was never mistaken in my life. Joseph is indeed a model for the young men of the age. He is a man of sentiment, and acts up to the sentiments he professes; but, for the other, take my word for't, if he had any grain of virtue by descent, he has dissipated it with the rest of his inheritance. Ah! my old friend, Sir Oliver, will be deeply mortified when he finds how part of his bounty has been misapplied.

rowley. I am sorry to find you so violent against the young man, because this may be the most critical period of his fortune. I came hither with news that will surprise you."

- Here, the speaker is Mr. Rowley, and the addressee is Sir Peter Teazle. After they talked about sir Peter's unsuccessful marriage, they moved to discuss the matter of both of Charles and Joseph. We see that both of Mr. Rowley and Sir Peter have contradictory opinions. Concerning the Surface brothers, and each one of them tries to prove that he is the right. In fact, Sir Peter prefers Joseph to Charles, unlike

Rowley, because he is cheated and deceived by Joseph. He describes Joseph as a virtue young man and thinks that Joseph is the good example for the young men of his age. However, he talks about how Charles wastes his money, and he describes him as a bad, Careless, dissipated and extravagant young man. We see that Mr. Rowley tries to Convince him of the true characters of both brothers, but he cannot. Then Mr. Rowley tells Mr. Peter that Sir Oliver is coming to town from the East Indies. The main idea here, is the false appearance of the Surface brothers in front of Sir Peter Teazle.

- ***Continue reading at home till the end of page 30.***

- THE END -