THE OXFORD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF

BRITISH LITERATURE

牛津英国文学百科全书

David Scott Kastan

Editor in Chief

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Volume 5

RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN～BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH

Directory of Contributors

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RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN

Susan Staves

Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816) is most remembered as the author of three classic and brilliantly successful comedies: *The Rivals*, first produced in London at Covent Garden in 1775 when he was twenty-four; *The School for Scandal*, first produced at Drury Lane in 1777, after he had become principal manager (and an owner) of that theater in 1776; and *The Critic* (1779), a shorter and more farcical play about theatricality itself. Sheridan was born in Dublin, the second surviving son of Thomas Sheridan (1719?–1788), an actor, producer, and teacher of elocution and pronunciation, and Frances Chamberlaine Sheridan (1724–1766), a novelist and playwright. Richard never attended a university, but spent six or seven years at Harrow and was otherwise taught by his parents and tutors in Dublin, Bath, and London.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan
Pastel by John Russell, 1788
NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON

The meteoric rise of this Anglo-Irishman to distinction as a playwright and to power as a London theater manager before he was thirty was extraordinary. Still more astonishingly, despite his lack of the usual family connections, landed estate, or even money, Sheridan aspired beyond the theater: he wanted to be a member of the English Parliament and influential in British government. On the one hand, such aspirations were not atypical of many eighteenth-century literary men, who often came to London in their twenties with manuscript poems and tragedies, showed their willingness to write political pamphlets, and hoped to get political appointments. Joseph Addison provided an early model of this career trajectory, moving from periodical essay and tragedy to a profitable position as secretary of state. On the other hand, most literary aspirants to political careers failed ignominiously, even those whose family backgrounds were much more promising than Sheridan's. Nevertheless, Sheridan was elected to the English Parliament in 1780 and went on to have a long political career, often in opposition to the government, but on occasion in office, once as undersecretary of state for foreign affairs and once as secretary to the treasury. He was celebrated in his own time as a parliamentary orator. Older criticism tended to see Sheridan's politics as opportunistic, but some recent criticism has argued that he was a serious and progressive politician. Sheridan's latest biographer, Fintan O'Toole, for example, sees Sheridan as seriously committed to the protection of civil liberties, expansion of the franchise, and greater Irish independence.

THE RIVALS

The Rivals has consistently pleased audiences from 1775 until the present day. The principal characters are those of classic comedy, but Sheridan gives them more personality than is usual in classic comedy, which tends to focus on plot. Both the clever characters and the foolish ones are remarkably entertaining to watch. The action is set in Bath, then a fashionable spa, and a desire to keep up with fashions—in dress, in dance, in dueling, in language, and even in feeling—is one theme of the play.

Structurally, there are three rivals for the hand of Lydia Languish: the hero, Jack Absolute; a simple country gentleman, Bob Acres; and an impoverished and irascible Irishman, Sir Lucius O'Trigger. There is also an older generation of parents and guardians: Jack's father, Sir Anthony Absolute, and Lydia's aunt, Mrs. Malaprop. Deluded about her abilities, Mrs. Malaprop fancies herself an accomplished mistress of the English language. Her name has become the word "malapropism," meaning mangling or misapplying a word sounding like the right word but ludicrously wrong. Thus, she pontificates about what education girls ought to have: "I would by no means

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wish a daughter of mine to be a progeny of learning . . . but . . . she should be mistress of orthodoxy, that she might not mis-spell, and mis-pronounce words so shamefully as girls usually do, and likewise that she might reprehend the true meaning of what she is saying."

Sheridan, however, abandons the older comic plot in which parents and guardians are the principal blocks to the happiness of young lovers. Instead, he creates a more psychological comedy in which the lovers' own ideas—what we might think of as their own neuroses—are the important obstacles to their happiness. In the secondary plot, Faulkland, despite his love for Julia, to whom he is contracted, and Julia's sincere love for him, torments himself and her with doubts about her love. Simultaneously, he berates himself for his "captious, unsatisfied temper." A sentimental lover, he finds Julia's cheerfulness disturbing; her tears only temporarily placate him. Sheridan explores a moment when older ideas of character are giving way to newer, not yet fully coherent, ideas of personality. Faulkland cannot be content with being loved for any of his objectively good qualities; paradoxically, he exclaims that he yearns to be loved "for no quality": "To regard me for any quality of mind or understanding, were only to *esteem* me."

Acutely self-conscious about the comic tradition and its conventions, indeed, reveling in playing with those conventions, Sheridan makes Sir Anthony a new version of the choleric old father who angrily orders his child to marry without consulting the child's preference. When this father orders his son to marry a woman the father has chosen, Sheridan makes the father's determination to exercise arbitrary parental authority so hyperbolic that we have to laugh at him. "Z——nds!," Sir Anthony declares, "the lady shall be as ugly as I choose: she shall have a hump on each shoulder . . . yet I'll make you ogle her all day, and sit up all night to write sonnets on her beauty." Sir Anthony is also ridiculous because, while we witness him in paroxysms of bad temper, he insists on the mildness and meekness of his own disposition. He threatens Jack not only with the usual disinheritance and disowning, but further vows—should Jack be disobedient—an impossibility: "I'll unget you."

Sheridan, however, reduces the convention of the blocking parent to a virtually empty shell. Jack soon makes the "whimsical" discovery that his father wants "to *force* me to marry the very girl I am plotting to run away with!" The true impediment to Jack's happiness with Lydia comes not from his father, but from Lydia herself, who is fond of fashionable romance novels and is convinced that, as Shakespeare put it, the course of true love never did run smooth. Knowing that a prospective husband with a decent estate and a match approved by parents and guardians would not excite her, Jack has become his own most serious rival, courting her as the supposedly poor, but romantic, Ensign Beverley.

When Lydia finally learns that Jack and Beverley are one, even though we have laughed at her romantic foolishness, we may also feel sympathy as she remarks with annoyance and regret that she finds herself "made a mere Smithfield bargain of at last." Instead of being an autonomous heroine in an interesting plot, she finds herself an object exchanged in the usual marriage of property. She reflects nostalgically on the romantic courtship in language that humorously mixes romance with more homely images: "How often have I stole forth, in the coldest night in January, and found him in the garden, stuck like a dripping statue!—There he would kneel to me in the snow, and sneeze and cough so pathetically! . . . Ah . . . that was something like being in love." Conventionally happy as the play's ending is, there is a touch of pathos in Lydia's realization that neither this intensity of amorous feeling, nor the woman's power over the man, are likely to survive the wedding.

THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL

Like *The Rivals*, *The School for Scandal* has been continuously performed from its opening run until the present day. The play takes its name from a salon presided over by Lady Sneerwell, who encourages the salon's habitués to exercise their wit at the expense of their acquaintances' reputations. Going beyond oral scandal, Lady Sneerwell, Snake, and Sir Benjamin Backbite take advantage of the rise of newspapers to spread their tales in print as well as by the more traditional means of gossip. While Lady Sneerwell and her associates are clearly satirized, Sheridan also conveys a lively sense of how deeply pleasurable and even artful and politically significant an activity producing scandalous narratives can be. He is alert to the implications of the historical moment—beginning with the late-seventeenth-century court of the French king Louis XIV and continuing through the British newspaper scandal and print caricatures of late-eighteenth-century England—when scandal about kings, courtiers, and officials, exposing their immoralities and injustices and ridiculing their pretensions, weakened ancien régime states and helped prepare the way for more democratic regimes. Like investigative journalism, scandal could offer truths

banished from ideologically policed official narratives. As members of the scandal school know, what is "everywhere reported" and what "everyone believes to be true" may well be false. Moreover, at its best, scandal admitted more complex narratives and more interesting facts than the official narratives.

Different productions inevitably emphasize different aspects of this rich comedy, but often the great comic villain, Joseph Surface, friend of Lady Sneerwell, seems the star. One plot, which Sheridan explicitly marks as a story from old romance, is the duke-in-disguise test plot familiar from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure.* Sir Oliver Surface returns rich from the East Indies and decides to adopt disguises to see whether his nephews, Joseph and Charles, are worthy of becoming his heirs. Joseph has assumed the character of a virtuous and benevolent man of sentiment and is quick to articulate moral maxims, but is in fact selfish. Like Molière's Tartuffe, he is a conscious hypocrite who usually deceives others all the better because he does not deceive himself. Charles Lamb remembered the performance of Jack Palmer, for whom Sheridan wrote the part, and praised "the downright *acted* villainy of the part," "the graceful plausibility," "the insinuating voice."

Yet Joseph is so clever, resourceful, and persistent in his doomed villainy that we are grateful to him for the entertainment he affords us and even harbor some sympathy for the Machiavellian realism he offers in contrast to the often treacly, although sincere, statements of the more virtuous characters. With a problematic excess of desire, Joseph has allowed an attempt to seduce a married woman, Lady Teazle, to distract him from the single-minded pursuit of Maria's fortune. The young wife of an old husband, and country-bred, Lady Teazle is presumably vulnerable to the temptation of adultery. She comes to an assignation in Joseph's library at the beginning of the famous screen scene (act 4, scene 3). Joseph, however, for all his cleverness, fails to seduce her; he is more attentive to his own wit than to her and does not grasp that a woman is unlikely to be argued into adultery or notice that Lady Teazle is more amused by his convoluted arguments than moved by them. As successive visitors interrupt and threaten to reveal Joseph's secrets and as characters hide behind the screen, the audience enjoys watching Joseph squirm, but also his inventiveness as he struggles to postpone the inevitable exposure of his villainy.

Like his contemporaries Oliver Goldsmith and Laurence Sterne, Sheridan had a complex relationship to sentiment; critics continue to debate to what degree his work is sentimental. In *The School for Scandal,* he satirizes overtly moralizing, platitudinous sentimental verbal formulations like Joseph's line to Sir Peter: "the Man who can break thro' the Laws of Hospitality—and attempt the wife—of his Friend deserves to be branded as the Pest of Society." Not only are such verbal formulae, "sentiments" characteristic of sentimental comedy, problematically related to reality, but Sheridan calls attention to the ease with which pronouncing them fuels smug self-satisfaction. Yet, as is characteristic of the sentimental mode, he sometimes lets old-fashioned demands for consistent ethical behavior be trumped by warm and generous feeling, however transient. In the screen scene, when Charles throws down the screen to reveal Lady Teazle, characters and audience alike expect that she will support the false story Joseph concocts to explain her presence in his room. But an optimistic sentimental surprise wonderfully upsets these expectations and the dim view of humankind that underwrites them. Lady Teazle candidly confesses her misbehavior and testifies that overhearing her husband's tenderness and generosity has touched her heart. Leaving behind the harsher world of Restoration comedy like William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675), the Teazles show tenderness toward one another and reconcile.

THE CRITIC

Sheridan's acute three-act farce, *The Critic,* gives a satirical glimpse at the theater and at the underside of those activities denominated "criticism" in a cultural world increasingly rational and increasingly market-driven. The first act displays the world of the critics. Dangle is a would-be connoisseur and theatrical hanger-on. The more intelligent Sneer is committed to the contemporary literary theory that supported sentimental comedy, and believes that the theater should be "the school of morality." He wants to get a sentimental comedy called *The Reformed Housebreaker* produced, confident that it will convert all the burglars in England. Puff makes his living writing copy for everything from newspapers to auction catalogs.

The second half of the eighteenth century was an age of criticism; its leading literary figure, Samuel Johnson, made his reputation not primarily as a poet, playwright, or novelist, but as a writer of literary scholarship, including *The Dictionary,* an edition of Shakespeare, critical essays, and *The Lives of the Poets* (1781). Like Johnson,

Sheridan simultaneously worried about the increasing power of criticism and was convinced that good critical judgment could discriminate between good and bad writing. Both were alarmed at the kind of negative criticism Sneer exemplifies, a criticism, as Johnson put it, concerned not with the appreciation of literary worth but instead with "a rude detection of faults, which perhaps the censor was not able to have committed."

A common tactic of this negative criticism was to find some feature of the work inconsistent, illogical, or unrealistic, and to ridicule it. Sneer does this in acts two and three, when we see Puff's tragedy, *The Spanish Armada*, a play-within-the-play, in rehearsal, with frequent critical questions and interruptions from Dangle and Sneer.

Sheridan nicely balances recognition of the artificiality and even logical absurdity of dramatic conventions with affection for them and a sense of their inevitability. Sneer complains that the plotters in *The Spanish Armada* do not seem to notice the presence of enemy spies listening to them plot. Puff replies: "O lud, Sir, if people who want to listen, or overhear, were not always conniv'd at in a Tragedy, there would be no carrying on any plot in the world." Johnson and Sheridan notice that criticism may be motivated by spite and envy and are disturbed by the ways that criticism offers a way in which people not themselves capable of producing art or even capable of formulating their own judgments claim superiority over those who are.

While Snarl's criticism is negative, Puff's is encomiastic. Indeed, he produces a peculiarly modern form of encomiastic criticism: commercial speech. Sheridan, who was not above inserting anonymous teasers and puffs in the newspapers himself, makes Puff a fertile inventor of devious media strategies. Reminding his audience that writers like Puff insert fictitious items in the newspapers, items that pass for news, Sheridan invites us to wonder whether what are supposed to be nonfictional accounts of events are conspicuously less fictitious than the inventions of the theater. Among Puff's clever strategies, one he boasts is "the newest of any," is the "Puff Collusive." Booksellers and entrepreneurial writers plant supposedly hostile reviews of their own new work, claiming that it is obscene and, shamefully, being read by people of fashion, and items claiming that the work's author is about to prosecuted; these strategies create best sellers.

The Critic, expressing so much skepticism about representation, seems to end with a mindless patriotic pageant celebrating the English victory in 1588 over the Spanish Armada. The pageant, accompanied by the music of "Rule Britannia," invites its original wartime audience of 1777 to celebrate the triumph of Britannia. This ending simultaneously revels in the resources of the theater and spoofs mindless gesture and pageantry. Recent criticism has suggested that Sheridan, who did not support the government's policy of waging war against America, hoped his play about criticism and representations might make his audience more wary of and critical about patriotic spectacle.

RECEPTION

Considering how consistently Sheridan's plays have held their places in the theatrical repertory throughout the English-speaking world, and despite the admiration of writers including the poet George Gordon, Lord Byron and the Romantic critic William Hazlitt, criticism has been less interested in Sheridan's plays than one might expect. To some extent, this has reflected a belief that while the plays are wonderfully funny and Sheridan a gifted man of the theater, the plays lack profundity. Twentieth-century academic criticism, notably that of John Loftis and Mark Auburn, has usefully distinguished sharply between earlier Restoration drama and the later Georgian dramatic contexts in which Goldsmith, Samuel Foote, Hannah Cowley, and Sheridan are principal playwrights. Most recently, literary critics have turned their attention to Sheridan's performances as a parliamentary speaker, appropriately, since he was celebrated as one of the great orators in what was perhaps the greatest age of English parliamentary oratory.

Perhaps the best admirers of Sheridan have been great actors, who have consistently paid tribute to his gifts by wanting to perform and to direct his plays. In the twentieth century John Gielgud played Joseph Surface in a famous 1937 production and later, directing *The School for Scandal* in London in 1962, assigned Sir Peter Teazle to his friend Ralph Richardson and Lady Teazle to Geraldine McEwan. He writes admiringly of the play in his autobiography, *Stage Directions* (1963). Relishing theatricality as Sheridan himself had, Laurence Olivier dazzled Old Vic audiences in a 1945–1946 double bill, playing Sophocles's Oedipus and Sheridan's Puff on the same night in performances that contributed significantly to establishing his position as a leading actor of the century. Olivier also savors his triumph as Sheridan's Puff in his autobiography, *Confessions of an Actor* (1982), describing how he ended the evening by stumbling over a piece of scenery, being catapulted up to the top of the theater,

catching hold of a painted cloud, sailing down, being blasted by a cannon, disappearing, then reappearing (thanks to a rope ladder) clutching the theater curtain, finally somersaulting between it and the footlights. The truest understanding of Sheridan will be gained by combining study of his texts and contexts with study of performances.

[*See also* Joseph Addison; Samuel Johnson; *and* Sensibility.]

SELECTED WORKS

The Duenna (1775)
The Rivals (1775)
Saint Patrick's Day: or the Scheming Lieutenant (1775)
The School for Scandal (1777)
A Trip to Scarborough (1777)
The Camp: A Musical Entertainment (1778)
The Critic (1779)
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JAMES SHIRLEY

Martin Butler

James Shirley (1596–1666) was one of a small group of professional playwrights who dominated the London stage during the reign of Charles I. A versatile and prolific author, his drama was widely admired by the refined audiences of Caroline London, whose tastes were perfectly matched by the mannered comedy and sophisticated tragicomedy that were his specialties.

EARLY CAREER

Shirley was born in London, the son of a citizen. He attended Merchant Taylors' School and Cambridge University, then settled at St. Albans in Hertfordshire. There he married the daughter of the mayor, became master of the grammar school, and was ordained as a minister. But this seemingly predictable life took a surprising turn in 1625, when he launched into an entirely different career as a London playwright. Possibly at this time he converted to Catholicism, though claims about his religion depend on the word of his first biographer, Anthony Wood. Wood's account is not always reliable, and there is no supporting evidence from Shirley's lifetime that he was a recusant. Whatever the truth, his activities for the next seventeen years were wholly given over to the professional playhouses.

From 1625 to 1636 Shirley was house dramatist for Queen Henrietta's Men at the Phoenix Playhouse in Drury Lane. The Queen's Men were a prestigious company, second in reputation only to the King's Men, and the players staged work by other well-regarded dramatists, such as John Ford, Philip Massinger, and Thomas Heywood. Shirley wrote nineteen plays for them, giving just one other to a rival troupe. His service to the queen's players was rewarded in 1633 with a small court sinecure, making him valet of the chamber to Henrietta Maria. He built on his court profile with a comedy, *The Gamester* (1633), written to a plot provided by the king. In 1634 he was granted membership of Gray's Inn, one of the Inns of Court at which London's lawyers practiced their profession. He had written a masque, *The Triumph of Peace* (1634), for the lawyers to present at court, and his honorary admission represented their gratitude for the occasion's spectacular success.

However, this period of happy output and personal acclaim was disrupted in 1636, when the plague closed all of London's playhouses for eighteen months. With some actors from the Queen's Men, Shirley found employment in Ireland. Lord Deputy Wentworth was establishing an outpost of English culture at Dublin, and Shirley became house playwright for the new St. Werburgh Street Theatre. Here he wrote six more plays, including the first English play on Irish mythical history, *St Patrick for Ireland* (1639?), but he continued to cultivate his London links by arranging for several plays to be printed at home and by sending two more to the Queen's Men (after 1637 reorganized and performing at the Salisbury Court Playhouse). An opportunity to return came in 1640 with the death of Massinger, who had been employed by the King's Men. Shirley moved back permanently to take Massinger's place and wrote a further six plays. But this service came to a sudden end in September 1642, when the playhouses were closed by parliamentary edict. They would remain shut for the next eighteen years.

PLAYS AND SOCIETY

Shirley's long and productive career gives him some claim as the dramatist who did most to set the social tone for Caroline London. During these years there was a growing separation between the robust, old-style, open-air playhouses, such as the Globe, and the smaller, more refined, indoor playhouses, like the Phoenix and Blackfriars (where the King's Men played). These theaters took their patrons from the social elites who, before the civil war, were beginning to gravitate to London for the sake of its round of pleasure. Although it was not until the Restoration that a "town" society of ladies and wits fully established itself, Caroline London saw the beginnings of a metropolitan culture that crystallized around the fashionable residences and watering holes between Westminster

and the city. And since the playhouses were one of the few public areas where people of leisure could gather in relative comfort and on their own terms, Shirley's plays became a sounding board for their lifestyle and attitudes.

Shirley's comedies of London life draw their characters from the emerging social elites—refined ladies and gentlemen, country squires, wealthy citizens, would-be men of fashion, and the occasional aristocrat—and their geography traverses the familiar territory of the developing beau monde—semiprivate, semipublic spaces, such as parks and gardens, drawing rooms, ballrooms, and bedrooms. They are absolutely of their moment. *The Ball* (1632) celebrates the social innovation named in the play's title; this is the first appearance in English of the word "ball" with the meaning "an assembly for dancing." *Hyde Park* (1632) is no less up-to-date. Much of its action depicts life in the urban green world of the title, formerly a royal hunting ground but now opened as a leisure space for London's elite, and the horse races and footraces, eating and drinking, gambling and dueling that go on there. These plays represent the pull of a newly urbanized class toward the metropolis, and by depicting its everyday dealings, they promoted and consolidated the process. Unlike the beau monde of the Restoration years, there is nothing cynical or relativistic about Caroline society as Shirley depicts it. He set a high ethical tone for London sociability, promoting an ethos of refinement and decency, and his plays are remarkable for their restraint. Indeed the Master of the Revels (the court official responsible for regulating the stage) was so struck by the "beneficial and cleanly" dialogue of Shirley's tragicomedy *The Young Admiral* (1633) that he wrote in his office book a recommendation that it be used as "a pattern to other poets . . . for the bettering of manners and language." The historical significance of these comedies is the sense of identity and values that they helped confer on the London round of pleasure. They presented their audiences with a mirror to regulate their own behavior, manners, and habits of speech.

In *Hyde Park* and other plays, events develop apparently at random. Often there is little incident beyond the seemingly casual meetings and separations of the crowd, although underneath this drift there is always a pattern beginning to coalesce. The typical Shirley play is an intricately plotted and skillfully engineered structure that interweaves multiple actions, exploiting situational opportunities for comparison and contrast. For example, *The Witty Fair One* (1628) focuses on the love lives of two young cousins of wealthy backgrounds, Violetta and Penelope. Violetta is intended by her father for a rich booby, Sir Nicholas Treedle, but she is loved by Aimwell, a gentleman of slender means. Penelope is pursued by Fowler, but he is careless and promiscuous, and it becomes clear that his intentions are primarily sexual. The plots follow the different strategies by which Violetta gets her man and Penelope reforms hers. Treedle is trapped into accidental marriage to the chambermaid, and Violetta, though acting with apparent loyalty to her father, manages to communicate her love to Aimwell and contrive a stolen marriage with him. Meanwhile Fowler is humiliated by Penelope, who arranges for him to hear what his friends think of him by having them pretend he has died and come back as a ghost. What counts in this slight but amusing story is not any vigorous through line but the underlying impression of a society gradually working out its shared values. The stupid are punished, the immoral reformed, and the deserving eventually rewarded.

This kind of plot tends to focus attention on the women, and Shirley wrote a series of substantial female roles. Typically his women are conflicted: they are poised uneasily between justified freedom and dangerous excess. In *The Witty Fair One* Violetta and Penelope both get what they want but have to confront the dilemma of achieving their emotional needs without failing in duty to their fathers or falling prey to lovers who regard them merely as sex objects or wealthy prizes. In later plays this difficulty becomes even more acute. In *Hyde Park* Carol is a "wild" woman on the model of Shakespeare's Beatrice, who has to be tamed into marriage. She is a scorner of love and has a proviso scene with her future husband Fairfield that prefigures the humorous marriage contracts of Restoration comedy, but at the end of the play she repents and gives herself to him wholeheartedly. It is important to Shirley that, for all her "peevishness," Carol be seen ultimately to submit to Fairfield's authority. In *The Lady of Pleasure* (1635) there is a sharp contrast between the gay widow Celestina, who enjoys herself in town but keeps a close eye on the limits to pleasure, and the prodigal Lady Aretina, whose pursuit of hedonism is so licentious that it threatens to ruin her husband. When Celestina's steward tries to restrain her spending and suggests that her free behavior will damage her reputation, her reaction is incandescent. Nonetheless she can indulge herself only because it is clear in other ways that she has internalized the necessary financial and moral boundaries.

In such scenarios Shirley used the depiction of female "misbehavior" to work through underlying anxieties

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about the economic and social uncertainties of his time. The disciplining of the women brings up arguments about sexual and financial spending that implicitly project the larger opportunities and risks associated with this new society. But in other respects the women do get their say. Particularly, Shirley was attracted to plots in which a woman defends her virtue and right to respectful treatment in response to a man who assumes that her social freeness means she is sexually promiscuous. In *Hyde Park* the gentlewoman Julietta is put to the test by her lover Trier, who introduces her to Lord Bonvile, hinting secretly to him that she is a courtesan. Unsurprisingly this shatters her love for Trier, but it kindles an unexpected alliance with Bonvile. He tries to seduce her, but her lofty rebukes return him to a proper respect for his aristocratic honor, and he ends the play professing himself the "servant to [her] virtue" (act 5, scene 2, line 120). Similarly in *The Lady of Pleasure*, Celestina is besieged by a lord who supposes that the platonic friendship he has struck up with her will be a mask under which they can pursue a carnal affair. Celestina shames him by asking if he would sell his aristocratic honor as readily as he wants her to abandon her female good name, and the play ends with him regretting his viciousness and promising to behave better in the future.

It is striking that these encounters not only reaffirm the woman's autonomy but act out tensions across the social divide between gentry and aristocracy. The women have to show self-discipline, but no less dangerous are courtiers and noblemen who assume that their social prestige permits them to indulge their desires with impunity. Shirley may have been a loyal subject, but his dramas do not simply reaffirm the court's political privilege. His genteel society exerts control over its own freedoms but is also concerned to rein in those above it who have positions of power but are careless about the freedoms of others.

This political edge in Shirley's comedies is more overt in his tragedies and tragicomedies, where the plots tend to turn on collisions between loyalty and desire. Critics have complained that the social range of these plays is narrower than that of their Elizabethan and Jacobean precursors. Shirley's tragic theater is indeed confined to courts and princes, and its mode is romantic, involving complex love affairs, secret passions, and strained friendships. Yet this is no exclusively "cavalier" drama, since the passions of the court entangle kings' lives with those of their courtiers and subjects, so affairs of the heart become catalysts for dilemmas of loyalty and resistance. For example, in *The Traitor* (1631) the duke of Florence's lust for Lady Amidea pushes her brothers, against their own better instincts, into a rebellion, while the duke's kinsman Lorenzo is a self-serving Machiavellian who covertly foments emotional discord to advance his selfish political ambitions. All pay with their lives for their ungoverned passions. Similarly in the tragicomedy *The Court Secret* (1642), the children of the Spanish king fall in love with minor Spanish aristocrats instead of the Portuguese royalty they are supposed to wed. Here royal desire is at best irrational and arbitrarily willful, but at worst it is a violent and ruthless drive that threatens the stability of the state.

As in the comedies, the loyal but perplexed gentry come out best. Usually they are the victims of untrammeled royal passions, and their obedience is strained by their political masters. They are torn between submitting to the expected codes of honor and reasserting their own virtue and inner truth. Although these plays are sensational and usually end with tragic bloodbaths or tragicomic revelations of hidden identity, it is difficult not to feel that, at some level, they were processing the ideological strains of the prerevolutionary period. Their apparently fanciful plots helped their audiences to rehearse ideological dilemmas that soon they would face in real life.

LATER LIFE AND REPUTATION

After the playhouses closed, Shirley became an active Royalist and saw military service, probably in troops commanded by one of his patrons, William Cavendish, earl of Newcastle. Subsequently Shirley resumed his first career as a schoolmaster. He took up school in London, published two books on Latin grammar and two volumes of poetry, and wrote several short masques or moral interludes, some of which his boys performed privately. The most remarkable of these, *Cupid and Death* (1653), was staged (by adults) as an entertainment for a visiting foreign diplomat and can be claimed as a genuine example of Cromwellian festivity, a relic of court culture resurrected in service to the republican state. This time as a schoolmaster was prosperous. By his death Shirley had accumulated estate worth £950, and he lived to see his Caroline plays come back into vogue after 1660, when the playhouses reopened. However, his end was unfortunate, for he and his wife died from shock brought on by the loss of their home in the fire of London.

After his death, Shirley's reputation gradually declined and has never really recovered. His plays were frequently

revived after 1660, for they prefigured the developing comedy of manners, while *Cupid and Death* remains a significant precursor of English opera. But compared with the brittle comedy of George Etherege and William Wycherley, his plays probably seemed too moralistic, and in his satire *MacFlecknoe* (1682) John Dryden memorably accused him of dullness. In modern times Shirley has been remembered by his much anthologized lyric "The glories of our blood and state" (*Honoria and Mammon*, 1659), and through occasional revivals of a few plays. A successful example was the Royal Shakespeare Company's 1987 production of *Hyde Park.* Updating the play to the Edwardian era, this revival presented Shirley's London as a society that could still be at ease with itself, because, given its historical position, it had yet to experience any serious crisis or warfare. In this world the most disturbing thing was the rise of increasingly self-assertive, bluestockinged women. Perhaps Shirley's plays suffer by being so embedded in the speaking tones and social nuances of their own time that it takes a careful ear to catch their exquisite nuances and delicate engineering. Their modern neglect does not do justice to the scale and historical importance of his achievement.

[*See also* John Dryden *and* Masque.]

SELECTED WORKS

The School of Compliment (1625)
The Maid's Revenge (1626)
The Witty Fair One (1628)
The Wedding (1629)
The Grateful Servant (1629)
The Humorous Courtier (1631)
The Traitor (1631)
Love's Cruelty (1631)
Changes; or, Love in a Maze (1632)
Hyde Park (1632)
The Ball (1632)
The Bird in a Cage (1633)
The Young Admiral (1633)
The Gamester (1633)
The Triumph of Peace (1634)
The Example (1634)
The Opportunity (1634)
The Coronation (1635)
The Lady of Pleasure (1635)
The Duke's Mistress (1636)
The Royal Master (1637)
The Constant Maid (1638?)
The Doubtful Heir (1638)
The Gentleman of Venice (1639)
The Politician (1639)
St Patrick for Ireland (1639?)
The Imposture (1640)
The Brothers (1641)
The Cardinal (1641)
The Sisters (1642)
The Court Secret (1642)
The Triumph of Beauty (1646)
Narcissus; or, The Self-Lover (1646)
Poems, &c. (1646)
Cupid and Death (1653)

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PHILIP SIDNEY

Roger Kuin

Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586) was the seminal author of the Elizabethan age. In his short life he created the first major critical essay, the first important prose romance, and the first Petrarchan sonnet-sequence in English. He influenced Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, John Donne, and many others. Yet it was not as an author that he lived or wanted to be remembered; and in his case, more than in any other of his time, the biography and its details are the key to his nature and to his literary importance.

Philip Sidney
Anonymous portrait, c. 1576
NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON

FAMILY AND EDUCATION

Philip Sidney was born on 30 November 1554 at Penshurst (an estate in Kent) as the first child of Sir Henry Sidney and Lady Mary Dudley. Elizabethan families are an important part of their members' identity. Sidney's grandfather, Sir William, had been made a Knight of the Garter by Henry VIII (reigned 1509–1547); Sidney's father, when young, had been companion to King Edward VI (reigned 1547–1553) and had been knighted by him. At Mary's accession he kept favor and two years after Philip's birth became viceroy of Ireland, a post he retained, with interruptions, under Elizabeth (reigned 1558–1603). The Sidney family, in favor with the Protestant Edward VI, nevertheless kept strong Catholic connections: Philip was the godson of King Philip II of Spain, whom his father had accompanied to England for marriage to Queen Mary (reigned 1553–1558).

Sidney's mother was the daughter of John Dudley, the ambitious earl of Northumberland, and the sister of Guilford Dudley; of Robert Dudley, later earl of Leicester and Queen Elizabeth's great favorite; and of Ambrose Dudley, later earl of Warwick. She was lady-inwaiting to Queen Elizabeth, whom she nursed through her devastating smallpox in 1562; the queen recovered, but Lady Mary was left ravaged for life. Philip's Dudley uncles were childless (though Leicester had a son who died young), and one of Philip's trump cards was his position as heir to two earls and a viceroy.

Philip was educated first at home, then, with his lifelong friend Fulke Greville, at Shrewsbury School in Shropshire under the eminent humanist pedagogue Thomas Ashton. In 1568 he went to Christ Church, Oxford, where, like many sons of the nobility and gentry, he did not take a degree; his fellow undergraduates included the geographers Richard Hakluyt and Richard Eden and the neo-Latin poet Richard Willes. Others then at Oxford were the theologian and philosopher Richard Hooker, the writer and playwright John Lyly, the scholar and diplomat Thomas Bodley, and the Jesuit martyr Edmund Campion.

INTO THE WORLD: CONTINENT, COURT, AND POLITICS

By 1571–1572, Sidney was a well-connected, elegant, deeply serious young man obviously destined for some major role. Leicester seems to have urged his sister and brother-in-law to make their promising son a courtier; he himself flourished at court, and it was there that he could sponsor his nephew's career. To complete his education and be introduced to the court, Sidney (then seventeen) was sent abroad in the summer of 1572 in a special embassy to the king of France. He already spoke excellent French and was well received at the Valois court: Charles IX (r. 1560–1574) made him a gentleman of the bedchamber and a French baron (a title he kept quiet in England, but which Henry III, Charles's brother and successor, renewed, as Sidney reminded him some years later).

In Paris he made the acquaintance, probably at Francis Walsingham's permanent embassy, of the Huguenot

thinker and political analyst Hubert Languet (1518–1581). Languet worked as an observer for the elector of Saxony, the most important of the imperial princes, and was a pupil of Philip Melanchthon, a friend of Martin Luther and the humanist among the Reformers. Sidney and Languet became fast friends, conducting during the nine remaining years of Languet's life a correspondence of which the older man's letters, in published form, would become a best-seller of political education a century later.

From Languet and from Walsingham Sidney learned a fundamental solidarity with the Huguenot point of view, which was strengthened when in August 1572 he was caught up in the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Thousands of Protestants were slaughtered in the streets and houses of Paris; Sidney, a high-ranking foreigner, was taken to Walsingham's embassy on the Left Bank but was shown the killing first. It appears to have strengthened his conviction that international politics was chiefly a struggle against the pope and his champion, the king of Spain.

Sidney then spent three formative years on the Continent, including a year at the University of Padua, the favorite Italian venue for foreign Protestants, as the Venetian Republic was relatively tolerant. He traveled widely and had free access to Languet's extraordinary circle of learned and influential friends, ranging from Heidelberg theologians to Prince William of Orange. William even proposed his eldest daughter as a bride for the young Englishman.

In 1575 Sidney made his debut at court, where he quickly became a glamorous and popular figure, and (partly owing to his exceptional horsemanship) a champion in the tiltyard. The queen called him "the most accomplished gentleman in Europe." More seriously, he acted as his father's representative. Sir Henry's Irish government was relatively fair and just, but this did not help him at court: he spent more money than the queen thought she could afford, and treated the Irish nobles she liked (such as Thomas Butler, earl of Ormond) without special favor. Philip staunchly and intelligently defended his father where he could. In 1576 he was appointed cupbearer to the queen, a ceremonial office Sir Henry had also held.

Early in 1577 came what would prove to be the apotheosis of Sidney's career: he was chosen as the queen's envoy to the new Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolph II, to offer her condolences on the death of his brother and her congratulations on his accession. The secret part of Sidney's instructions was, first, to get a sense of the people and mentalities prevailing at the new emperor's court; and second, to investigate the possibilities for a Protestant alliance in response to the recent Catholic Holy League. According to all contemporary accounts, the twenty-two-year-old Sidney carried this off brilliantly and came home covered in glory.

LEISURE AND LITERATURE

It is after this return that we first get a glimpse of Sidney as an author. For the queen's visit to Leicester's manor of Wanstead in May 1578, he wrote an "entertainment" called *The Lady of May*, in which the queen herself was accorded the final choice between the Lady of May's two suitors: the wild, free, but violent forester Therion, and the quiet, wealthy shepherd-poet Espilus. The queen chose Espilus, going, as critics have believed, against Sidney's purpose; but she was choosing for the May lady, and by sixteenth-century standards a law-abiding, wealthy, socially useful poet can hardly have been thought a worse match than a lively, thieving, wife-beating forester.

In 1579 Spanish military successes in the Netherlands made the queen look once more to France, and to a French marriage, for a counterweight. The only Valois still available was the duke of Anjou (formerly Alençon), and the autumn of 1579 was taken up with serious negotiations. The court was split: the faction of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, worried about the succession, was in favor; the faction of Walsingham and Leicester, more militantly Protestant, was against. The magnates of the latter group persuaded Sidney to write an open *Letter to the Queen*, in which he employed all his sagacity and skill to dissuade Elizabeth from the marriage. A minor Puritan gentleman, John Stubbes, who had printed a similar but less tactful discourse was severely punished; but there is no evidence that Sidney's manuscript letter, written and received as part of a courtier's duty, was unwelcome to the queen. A year or two later she followed its advice and quietly dropped the project.

In the meantime, though, Sidney had become embroiled in a dangerous quarrel with Edward de Vere, earl of Oxford, a dissolute character who brutalized his wife (Burghley's daughter Anne) and unhesitatingly murdered his adversaries. This fate, we know, he planned for Sidney, who, in the right but rebuked by the queen for challenging an earl, wisely departed for the country and spent most of a year at the manor of Wilton with his talented sister Mary, who was married to William Herbert, earl of Pembroke. Mary was a fine poet in her own right and, according to one source, encouraged her brother in the art.

It was probably at Wilton that Sidney wrote *The Defence of Poesie*, a sparkling reworking of contemporary Continental literary theory. Basing it on the work of Antonio Sebastiano Minturno and Joseph Justus Scaliger in particular, he took the form—a forensic oration—from Richard Willes's 1573 *De Re Poetica*. Defending "poesy" (imaginative writing, whether in verse or prose) against its mainly Puritan critics, Sidney makes large claims for its role as an agent of moral growth. What he values is poesy's capacity to entice by realistically portraying the ideal. "[Nature's] world is brazen: the poets only deliver a golden." Like all good orators, he begins with a witty anecdote, neatly structures his arguments, and ends with wishing on poet-haters "that as long as you live, you live in love, and never get favour for lacking the skill of a sonnet."

As if to illustrate his defense of imaginative writing, Sidney now wrote, at Wilton, the first version of his prose romance *Arcadia* (known nowadays as the *Old Arcadia*). It is a charming tale in the Greek manner, of shipwrecked princes falling in love with sequestered princesses, of combat and adventure, interspersed with virtuoso interludes of singing shepherds. Much attention is paid to problems of government (which includes, and indeed begins with, self-government): the root of Arcadia's problems is its king, Basilius, who is, first metaphorically and then literally, asleep at the helm.

Around this time Sidney also began the first important English adaptation of the Continental sonnet-sequence form. In *Astrophil and Stella*, printed posthumously, Sidney revitalized the Italian and French tradition by what in the *Defence* he calls *energia*: the use of rhetorical devices to convey genuine and powerful emotion. While his rhetorical skill dazzles, perhaps the deepest *energia* is moral, mercilessly highlighting Petrarchism's fundamental contradiction: that the spotless Beloved, married to another, is obtainable only through mortal sin. Sidney makes this moral dilemma the core of his sequence and performs it with an incomparable mixture of emotion and wry self-mockery. It was an instant success, heralding several years of sonnet sequences (including Spenser's *Amoretti* and Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, both of which react to Sidney's), and elements of its *energia* are still clearly seen in much of Donne's work.

POLICY, PROTESTANTISM, AND POESY

After his return to court, Sidney went through a period of financial difficulty and political frustration. His family was not wealthy enough for its status: his father was offered a barony but, without the means to sustain a suitable lifestyle, felt obliged to refuse it. When Philip was offered a share of confiscated Catholic properties—the early 1580s saw a Catholic scare and repressive measures in response—he regarded the proposition with mixed feelings, since his family had always maintained good relations with recusants.

His friend Languet had died in 1581, but Sidney's commitment to what he represented grew rather than waned. His Protestantism, formed by Languet and his circle, was Melanchthonian, doctrinally tolerant but implacable toward what it saw as the international Catholic conspiracy (led by Rome and Madrid) to throttle the reformed faith. Melanchthonians always looked for a committed prince to lead a reformed Europe. The one most nobly engaged was William of Orange, but many Continental Protestants turned to Elizabeth of England as the only Protestant ruler of what was becoming a major power. The Netherlands' struggle against their former liege lord, Philip of Spain, was not going well; help from England was continually requested but was prudently denied by the queen, the only European monarch with even an inchoate understanding of the financial cost of the new, postfeudal kind of warfare.

By 1583 Sidney's life changed. He married Frances Walsingham, whose father was the former ambassador to France and now the queen's principal secretary. Walsingham was, in politics and religion, an English Huguenot: upright, personally kind but implacably Protestant, convinced of the need for cunning as much in the armies of Light as in those of Darkness; he was the first English spymaster and the nemesis of Mary, Queen of Scots. Sidney was also made joint master of the ordnance alongside his elderly uncle the earl of Warwick, helping prepare the country for possible Spanish action. Third, he was knighted, if only as proxy for the Elector Palatine at his investiture.

This newly active life changed his writing's direction. The *New Arcadia* (probably begun at this time) revises the earlier version toward greater narrative complexity; it is also no longer meant as a charming romance for ladies, but as the "poesy" proposed by the *Defence*—a serious work of moral and political education that draws its force from fiction. Sidney consistently draws the reader's attention to the ways in which moral traits of character and political circumstances and events implacably influence one another.

The *New Arcadia*, like many other long and ambitious literary works of the Renaissance, was left unfinished; indeed, it breaks off in the middle of a sentence. The fact that there appeared, in the next hundred years, a number of attempts to finish evidences the admiration with which it and its author were viewed. However, the only more or less authoritative attempt is that put together by Sidney's sister Mary after his death and published in 1593 as *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*. It uses the first three books written by Sidney of the *New Arcadia*, completed by a slightly revised version of the *Old*. This composite, an enduring best-seller, was the only *Arcadia* known until the discovery of a manuscript of the *Old* at a London bookseller's in 1907 and its publication in 1926.

Another work begun by Sidney at this time, left unfinished and completed by his sister, is his versification of the Psalms. Among many such versifications, the Sidney Psalms (Philip completed 43, Mary the remaining 107) stand out for the complexity and virtuosity of their verse. It is not known if they were intended to be sung, but they may have been meant as religious lute-songs.

Also written and completed during these years, but since lost, was Sidney's translation of Du Bartas's *Semaine*, or Week (of the Creation). Guillaume de Salluste, seigneur du Bartas (1544–1590), was France's great Protestant poet, and this translation again testifies to Sidney's increasing self-fashioning as an English Huguenot. That development is further borne out by *The Trewnesse of the Christian Religion*, his translation of a lively defense of Christianity against atheists by the French Huguenot leader Philippe de Mornay, seigneur du Plessis-Marly (1549–1623). This too was left unfinished, later to be completed by Arthur Golding (1535/6–1606).

GOING TO WAR: THE FINAL YEAR

By 1585 Sidney was leaving to attack Spain in the New World with Francis Drake, when at the last moment he was called back by order of the queen and sent to the Netherlands, where the Spanish *riconquista* and the assassination of William of Orange had made the situation far more dangerous than before. In return for sending English troops and supplies, the queen had obtained three "cautionary towns," to be garrisoned with English soldiers and regarded as English-controlled territory, as surety for Dutch repayments. Of these the most important was Flushing (Vlissingen), on the southern tip of Zeeland's Walcheren Island; the only deep-water harbor on the coast not in Spanish hands, it dominated the Scheldt estuary and was tactically important and strategically priceless. It was of Flushing that Sidney was now made governor, and he arrived in November of 1585, taking up residence in the newly built prince's house.

Throughout the winter Sidney tried to feed, clothe, cure, and arm the miserably neglected garrison. Soldiers on all sides in the Dutch War habitually went unpaid, with dire results for their relationship with the population, on whom they were quartered. Sidney tried to get some "maisonettes" built around the governor's house to lodge them, and he wrote repeated letters denouncing the penny-pinching of the authorities in England. In the winter of 1585–1586 he became involved in the notorious controversy around Leicester's governorship. The earl, commander-in-chief of the English forces, had walked into a political trap by accepting the States' offer to make him supreme governor of the Netherlands. The queen's cautious diplomacy was thus dealt a rude blow; she was outraged, and blame was being spread around until well into the spring.

But by then the fighting season was beginning, and, as Sidney wrote to his father-in-law, "we shall have a sore war upon us this summer." He himself commanded the largest cavalry regiment after Maurice of Nassau, the young warrior prince of Orange. Together they took the Zeeland town of Axel in a daring night raid with minimal losses. They were, however, facing Alessandro Farnese, the incomparable duke of Parma, and it was a sore war indeed. By autumn the action had moved east to Zutphen on the Ijssel river, a crucial stage in the Burgundian corridor through which Spanish men and supplies could reach the Netherlands without having to go by sea. Held by Spain, it was being besieged by the English when an armed supply column was observed coming up from the south to relieve it. On the morning of 22 September, a small English force of 250 horse and 500 foot crossed the river to Warnsveld, an outlying village, to attack the column. When the morning mist rose, the escort was seen to be far larger than anticipated: at least three thousand Spanish troops accompanied it. The English cavalry charged the improvised Spanish trenches three times; in the third charge, Sidney's horse fell, and he received a ball in the thigh.

They took him by boat downstream to Arnhem, where at first he seemed to be recovering. But the ball, lodged too deep, could not be removed, and after about ten days gangrene set in. On 17 October Sidney died, aged thirty-one. His body was kept in the Netherlands at first, and not returned to England until early in the following year

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