

Page - (01)

B.A. Part II (English Honours)

Date :- 25.01.22

"The Rivals"

Question :- Write a note on the autobiographical element in 'The Rivals'.

Answer :- It is a known fact that literature grows out of life. It is a vital record of what the author has seen in life, when he has actually experienced it. The personal experience of the author's private life - outer and inner - are the data of the work of art. But art is not a mere copy of reality, it is the artist's impression of reality through his fancy and imagination. It is the emotional significance of life - not its mere outer appearance that really matters in a work of art, the chief function of which is to produce through the artist's emotional experience of life, an illusion of reality.

Thus 'The Rivals' reflects Sheridan's personal experiences through characters and situations. Certain aspects of the main plot run parallel to the life of Sheridan himself. Let us have a look into these autobiographical

which would guide the uneducated in correspondence. The volume was to contain a number to instruct girls who go out in 'service', how to behave and how to avoid the snares laid for their seduction. Richardson remembered a story told to him twenty five years ago of a landowner who tried to seduce his maid who resisted him by all innocent means. This ultimately ended in the landowner's decision to marry her. out of this womb was born the first epistolary novel. Richardson put aside the 'Familiar Letters', retained the letter form and wrote his 'Pamela' or 'Virtue rewarded'. The novel was an immediate success and many women always circled round him in adoration because they thought him to be "a sage, a prophet, and a law giver".

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In this novel the novelist was tackling the situation of the age in the most intensely dramatic manner. The next novel 'Clarissa' came out in 1748. This is the longest novel in English. Once again the entire novel is told in letters, sometimes of enormous length between Clarissa and her family, between Lovelace and his friends etc. In the preface to his novel he makes clear his purpose - (i) instantaneous descriptions and reflections (ii) writing in the light of a present distress "the mind tortured by the pangs of uncertainty than the dry narrative, unanimated style of a person relating difficulties and dangers surmounted can be.

Richardson has followed a dramatic technique. The letters which the characters write to one another are equi-

ivalent of dramatic speeches. While going through 'Clarissa' or 'Sir Charles Grandison' we experience the something as if watching a play or a film in continuous present, always with the characters in their present pleasure or distress. The letter form produces greater immediacy and intensity. The success of Richardson owes much to the great length at which he describes the events like a slow motion film. The characters scrutinise themselves as if they are their own subjects. Hazlitt calls Richardson's work as "artificial reality". Smollett's 'Humphrey Clinker' has also been told through letters but the aim is quite different from that of Richardson. There is no plot in the novel and the letters have been designed partly to present the characters

with their tastes, morals, manners etc. and partly to make us acquainted with the places they visit. Two more novels written in this manner are Frances Burney's 'Evelina and Cecilia'. It is true that she adopted the epistolary method of Richardson but rejected melodrama for comedy. Evelina narrates the adventures of a young girl on her entrance into the world. Her comic characters are life like and not mere caricatures like those of Smollett. She has less delicacy than Jane Austen but creates more humour and presents more animated scenes.

The end. //

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