

## The Revals - Malapropism

(10)

Sheridan's dramatic work marks at once the height of the reaction against sentimental drama and the most finished achievement of the Comedy of Manners. The Revals is the most popular of his Comedies. He has dexterously employed all the tactics and techniques of the dramatic art. He is also very much conscious of the aim of a Comedy that is to provide thoughtful laughter. Malapropism is one of the different devices used in the Revals to arouse laughter. Let us see it in a brief.

M.A. HAQUE

The word Malapropism is a derivative of Mrs. Malaprop, an important character in the Revals. It is as much effective as the word Quixotic. It stands for anything said unreasonably or unsuitably, ludicrous misuse of words, specially for one resembling it. Mrs. Malaprop is a monumental instance of this. It seems as if her name is derived from French *mal a propos* which means out of place. Sometimes, both Malaprop and her words seem out of place. Mrs. Malaprop is not only a source of humour in the Play but also a butt for Sheridan's inoffensive satire against pretentious ladies trying to pose as intellectuals of the highest orders. She is also a type of aunt, jealous in her guard over her niece with poor ideas about female education. She is also a husband cheating old woman who thinks herself charming enough to attract young men.

It is often said that fools betray themselves. Mrs. Malaprop fully testifies this saying. Her violent outbursts on language are extremely diverting. She is called the unrivalled queen of Dictionary, with nice derangement of epithets. Her stupidity, headiness, self conceit, egoism and vanity make her an unforgettable character. Sheridan reaches the climax of farcical exaggeration in delineating her character which makes the triumph of his dramatic art. The following comment of Mrs. Malaprop about female education presents her as a perfect snob. This is also the instances of Malapropism. -

"But above all, Sir Anthony, she should be mistress

# M.A. HAQUE

of orthodoxy, that she might not mis-spell and likewise that she might reprehend the true meaning of what she is saying. This, Sir Anthony, is what I would have a woman know and I do not think there is a superstitious article in it." (11)

How ironical is the comment. It gives us a deep insight into her own knowledge of the Language. One more example of unconscious irony which amounts to self-condemnation of her egoism and vanity, when she says to Absolute: -  
"Sure, if I reprehend anything in this world it is the use of my oracular tongue and a nice derangement of epitaphs."

This single sentence furnishes as many as four instances of Malapropism. Malprop uses reprehend for apprehend, oracular for vernacular, derangement for arrangement and epitaphs for epithets as in the earlier quote, orthodoxy for orthography, reprehend for comprehend and superstitious for superfluous. Mrs. Malprop is so muddle-headed, egoistical and lacking in a sense of humour that she does not even understand the sarcastic comments of others. Once Sir Anthony comments: -

"You are truly a moderate and polite arguer, for for almost every third word you say is on my side of the question."

Sir Lucious criticises the letter in these words: -

"Here is a great many poor words pressed into the service of this note, that would get their habeas corpus from any court in Christendom."

However, in spite of the varied Malapropism of Mrs. Malprop, there is some method or gradation in her use of wrong words. Out of enthusiasm to be recognised as intellectual, she uses words high sounding, though they do not serve any useful purpose. For example, she uses

(12)

ineffectual for intellectual, exhaust for escort. Some of these words sound a little alike and differ by a syllable or so. For example, Laconically for ironically, or prodigy for prodigy. But, the height of absurdity involved in Malapropism is seen in use of words that sound alike but convey just the opposite of the intended meaning. malevolence for benevolence.

Thus, Mrs. Malaprop is an important character in the history of drama for she has given a new word, Malapropism, to English Literature.

M.A. HAQUE