



Jeremy Neumark Jones (Wadham 2009)

James taught me at Bryanston Summer School, and then at Wadham while I was an undergraduate. I was lucky enough to enjoy the benefit of his knowledge of Greek tragedy at the former, and prose composition and *The Iliad* at the latter. We kept in touch after I graduated, and it delighted me — and I hope him — to share with him stories from the acting world.

My reading is a passage from James' book on Sheridan that describes the farcical Act IV climax of 'The School for Scandal'. In this a wife (Lady Teazle) is made to hide behind a screen and later her husband (Sir Peter Teazle) in a cupboard. While hidden they each begin to learn truths about the other and about their host Joseph. It is Joseph's brother Charles who eventually throws down the screen, expecting to reveal a 'little French milliner', not his benefactor's wife. It's a complicated scene, funny and illuminating; but what matters today is to hear James' voice describing its dramatic and humane qualities, and combining his interest in classical tragedy with the reading of the Harrovian Sheridan.

**Reading from James Morwood, *The Life and Works of  
Richard Brinsley Sheridan***

Finally, there is more to be said about the screen scene. Aristotle, talking of the constituent parts of tragedy, laid down that the moment of recognition (anagorisis) is 'most beautiful' when it happens at the same time as that of reversal (peripeteia) (Poetics, x.5). We are here dealing with a comedy, of course. Nevertheless, it may be that the screen scene provides the finest example of reversal simultaneous with recognition in English drama. For the throwing down of the screen reveals to us three characters whose circumstances are fundamentally altered and whose true natures have been suddenly brought into focus. We see in Lady Teazle a woman who has recognised her previous folly and is now determined to become a pattern of wifehood. Joseph Surface, his mask as a man of Sentiment irretrievably shattered, stands exposed as a Sentimental Knave (I.i.71). And Sir Peter, disabused of his trust in a false friend, now perceives his wife through changed eyes and can base his future relationship with her upon their hard-won recognition of the truth.

And Charles? How is he revealed at this crucial moment in the play? With an amused and suave urbanity, he leaves the other three to sort out their problems. It may be in his speech at this point that we come closest to a tone that underlies *The School for Scandal*. In its encounter with human weakness it betrays no rage, though certainly a hint of scorn, and it never for a moment loses its sense of humour.