



The Rivals and Polly Honeycombe (Broadview Editions)

Richard B. Sheridan, George Colman the Elder

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The Rivals and Polly Honeycombe revolve around young women who wish the world would conform to novelistic convention. Unlike most eighteenth-century heroines keen on novel reading, however, Lydia Languish and Polly Honeycombe are neither deluded nor in any real danger. Rather, they inhabit a world in which everyone is engaged in some sort of quixotic performance; the more appealing characters are just willing to admit it. Both farcical and wise, these plays teasingly celebrate the perennial appeal of fiction, while never letting us forget how much it relies upon the everyday rituals of performance.

The introduction to this Broadview edition explores the interrelations between print and performance in the eighteenth century, including a detailed and well-illustrated account of what it was like to go to the theater. Appendices include material on the original casts, the often dubious reputation of novel reading and circulating libraries, Sheridan's high-profile elopement with Elizabeth Linley (which made him a celebrity before he ever staged a word), and the narrative possibilities conjured up by setting *The Rivals* in the resort city of Bath.

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