her angry neither! O, I am the miserablest fellow. But I'll not bear her presuming to keep her temper. No, she may break my heart, but she shan't keep her temper.

Exit

Act III Scene II

Charles Surface’s house
Enter Trip, Moses, and Sir Oliver Surface

TRIP Here, Master Moses. If you'll stay a moment, I'll try whether Mr – what's the gentleman’s name?

SIR OLIVER SURFACE Mr – (aside) Moses, what is my name?

MOSES Mr Premium.

TRIP Premium. Very well.

Exit Trip, taking snuff

SIR OLIVER SURFACE To judge by the servants, one wouldn't believe the master was ruined. But, what, sure this was my brother’s house?

MOSES Yes, sir. Mr Charles bought it of Mr Joseph with the furniture, pictures, etc., just as the old gentleman left it. Sir Peter thought it a great piece of extravagance in him!

SIR OLIVER SURFACE In my mind the other’s economy in selling it to him was more reprehensible by half.

Enter Trip

TRIP My master says you must wait, gentlemen. He has company and can’t speak with you yet.

SIR OLIVER SURFACE If he knew who it was wanted to see him, perhaps he wouldn't have sent such a message.

TRIP Yes, yes, sir; he knows you are here. I didn’t forget little Premium. No, no, no.

SIR OLIVER SURFACE Very well. And, I pray, sir, what may be your name?

TRIP Trip, sir; my name is Trip, at your service.

SIR OLIVER SURFACE Well then, Mr Trip, you have a pleasant sort of a place here, I guess.

TRIP Why, yes; here are three or four of us pass our time agreeably enough. But then our wages are sometimes a little in arrear, and not very great either – but fifty pounds a year, and find our own bags and bouquets.

SIR OLIVER SURFACE (aside) Bags and bouquets! Halters and bastinadoes!

TRIP But apropos, Moses, have you been able to get me that little bill discounted?

SIR OLIVER SURFACE [aside] Wants to raise money too! Mercy on me! Has his distresses, I warrant, like a lord, and affects creditors and duns!

MOSES 'Twas not to be done indeed, Mr Trip.

TRIP Good lack, you surprise me. My friend Brush has endorsed it, and I thought when he put his mark on the back of a bill 'twas as good as cash.

MOSES No, 'twouldn’t do.

TRIP A small sum, but twenty pounds. Harkee, Moses, do you think you couldn’t get it me by way of annuity?

SIR OLIVER SURFACE [aside] An annuity! Ha, ha, ha! A footman raise money by annuity! Well done, luxury, egad!

MOSES But you must insure your place.

TRIP O, with all my heart. I'll insure my place, and my life too, if you please.
for the scene, indicating its importance to the play's themes. Charles and Careless complete the visual illusion by improvising with props and roles to create the mock auction. A gouty chair becomes the auctioneer's rostrum, a scroll recording the Surface family tree becomes his mallet. The appropriately named Careless is transformed into the auctioneer. Sir Oliver and the audience witness this scene in the making.

- The portraits represent the contribution that the male line of a family might make to the welfare of England; there are generals, judges, politicians, civic officials. They are paraded before us, mocked and then knocked down at bargain prices; the scandal of Charles's actions increases each time the phrase is repeated. Sheridan adds some cynical social commentary on political bribery, ladies' wigs and the craze for dressing up as shepherdesses; all very topical. How does Sheridan contrast these types to the women maligned by the scandalmongers? The portraits no longer represent cherished memories, being worth only what they will fetch in the marketplace. Their frames isolate them from each other, allowing them to be picked off piecemeal. However, left to the vagaries of market forces and Charles's free spirit, the prices of the portraits soon become arbitrary, showing a rather carefree and liberating attitude to wealth.

- As the scene develops, our outrage at Charles's behaviour does not increase because the surface reality begins to matter less than the gradual revelation of his true heart. Sir Oliver does not resemble his portrait, reminding the audience that representation – be it visual or linguistic – cannot be trusted. Why is it that Charles will part readily with the old order represented by his family but clings to the portrait of the imperial businessman? Why does Sir Oliver particularly regret the loss of the race cups and bowls?

- Sheridan makes the value of piety towards one's family bear the weight of the whole scene. We are meant to believe that Charles can be redeemed by his refusal to sell Sir Oliver's portrait. If we remember that Charles is not the Surface heir and Sir Oliver is not his father, we can see just how makeshift the scene is. Charles shows his complete disregard for the law of primogeniture as he rolls up the genealogy which would serve to exclude him from a father's or an uncle's legacy, and he finds a practical use for it as a mallet. He then sets about making his own claim to the family fortune in his own way. True merit, not the fortune of birth, is what triumphs in the scene.

The value of words

The positive qualities discussed below are all associated with spontaneity of action, plain speaking and simplicity of motive in the play. Their opposites – malice, vice, greed and hypocrisy – are associated with complexity and deviousness. All these abstract nouns, with the exception of heart, which is derived from the Old English word heorte, entered the English lexicon from Latin via Old French.

Sentiment

A sentiment was a thought or reflection influenced by strong emotions. It was fashionable to express sentiments using witty epigrams which made striking and persuasive use of language. A person who used such expressions was considered to be in possession of the most refined, elevated and tender emotions. Sentiment always attracted charges of sentimentality, which we regard suspiciously as we see it as a subjective emotion that can be exaggerated or insincere and overwhelm clear judgement.

Sensibility

Sensibility was the enhanced capacity to feel and express refined emotions. Someone with sensibility could be moved deeply by the suffering of others. Love, friendship and loyalty were values which one could express through open displays of weeping, blushing, laughing, going into raptures and faints. These were signs of true worth. The value of this concept to eighteenth-century culture was shown in the way it was applied to everything from fashion to politics.