



**RICHARD BRINSLEY SHERIDAN:
A STUDY OF HIS DRAMATIC ACHIEVEMENTS**

An M.A. Thesis

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"الحمد لله الذي هدانا لهذا
وما كنا لنهتدي لولا أن هدانا الله"
(الأعراف ٤٣)

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Introduction

Introduction

At the close of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, Richard Brinsley Sheridan was one of the most conspicuous figures in England and the most successful dramatists of his day. Born in Dublin on October 30, 1751, Richard Brinsley Sheridan was the third son of Thomas and Frances Sheridan. His paternal grandfather Thomas Sheridan, was a schoolmaster of high repute, enjoying the close friendship of Dean Swift. The grandson seems to have inherited more traits from the grandfather, a whimsical and clever character, than he did from his father who leaned towards the scholarly and soberly.

Sheridan's father was an actor and teacher of elocution. He tried his hand at acting in Dublin with some success and later as a manager of a theatre. In 1747 he married Frances Chamberlaine, a famous playwright and a novelist. However, despite the respect accorded him, Thomas Sheridan himself did not always look on acting as something interesting. This attitude towards the theatre was one which Richard Brinsley Sheridan certainly shared; he had no desire to be known as player or as a player's son. Finally, Sheridan's father's latter

career was marred by false accusations against him by jealous members of an acting society. Therefore, circumstances forced the family to move to London where Sheridan continued his education.

On his mother's side, Richard Sheridan received some inherited talent as well as an example in literary success. His mother, Frances Sheridan, was both a playwright and a novelist. David Garrick, the great actor, played in her drama entitled *The Discovery* (1763). Another play *The Journey to Bath* (1766) contained the seeds for Sheridan's great comedy of manners, *The Rivals*. The part of Mrs. Tryfort in her play is regarded as a preliminary sketch to that of Sheridan's great comic figure, Mrs. Malaprop. Because of Mrs. Sheridan's frail health, it was necessary for the family to move to France in 1764 where she died in August 1766. The family did not come back to England until 1767, by which time Sheridan was a youth of seventeen.

During the six years that Sheridan stayed in London, he continued his education at Harrow School but he was not a successful student. In 1770 the family moved to Bath. Sheridan was happy at Bath since he found the society there very agreeable. He did his best to appear in the character of a young man of fashion which gave

him the opportunity to mix with great ladies and gentlemen and observe their manners and foibles. This stood him in wonderful stead when he came to write plays about them, but it was not for this purpose that he sought their company; he wanted to be one of them. His determination was from the first to be an important figure in the little Great World of London society.

Fate played into the hands of Sheridan almost at once by turning him into a romantic hero. Among the closest friends of the Sheridan family in Bath were the Linleys. Thomas Linley, the father of the family, was a composer, a favorite singing-master, a conductor of concerts, who headed a musical enterprise in the district. In this large family was Elizabeth, who was already assisting her father as a soloist in his concerts. She was very beautiful, therefore when she was seventeen she had several marriage offers but Linley was in love with Richard Sheridan heart and soul. She agreed to elope with him to France where they secretly married in 1773.

In 1774, Sheridan and his wife eventually settled down in a house in London. Miss Linley was more famous than her husband at that time but Sheridan refused to allow her to sing in order to earn money. He had made up his mind

to depend upon his own mental resources. The only way of bringing money, wit and talent to market was, as he had already discovered to turn author. Encouraged by the manager of Convent Garden Theatre, he wrote his first play *The Rivals* at the age of twenty-three. Its success was regarded as a turning point in his life, he was known by every body. It brought him fame, money, notice and a number of desirable acquaintances. On 2nd May, Sheridan produced his farce *St. Patrick's Day*. This was only a slight piece in two acts and of no particular significance. This is because it was the first time for Sheridan to write a farce and also because he wrote this especially for an Irish actor named Clinch, therefore he was not perfect in proposing it.

On the 21st of November, 1775, a comic opera named *The Duenna* for which Linley was to arrange the music, was written. When it was performed, it proved an immediate success which gave Sheridan the undeniable gratifications of popularity and profit. Towards the end of the year Garrick contemplated retiring from the stage and giving up the management of Drury Lane to Sheridan. This job gave the playwright another source of income and would make any play he wrote in future more profitable for him. His success so far had been won in the