



A man of contradictions

Homage to Sheridan by Monaco Ireland Arts Society

The Monaco Times
February 2007

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Irish-born Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816) was such an extraordinary compound of contradictions even his contemporaries were hard put to pin down the essential: dramatist, MP, bon vivant, satirist, social reformer, theatre manager, orator, swordsman and 'rake'.

According to Lord Byron, 'The upper part of his face was that of a god - a forehead most expansive, an eye of peculiar brilliancy and fire; but below he shewed the satyr.'

It is this extraordinary blend of high and low life, lived with equal zest, that The Monaco Ireland Arts Society is intent on capturing in a dramatised reading of scenes from Sheridan's plays, coupled with descriptive narrative and letters. The venue is the Auditorium of the *Lycée Technique*, Ave de

l'Annonciade; the date is the **23rd** starting at 8.30pm.

When Sheridan turned to drama, he used the materials of his own life to pen his first, huge, hysterical burlesque, *The Rivals*. It was an inflated version of his own elopement with Elizabeth Linley and his duels with her rejected, middle-aged suitor. Central to the play's comic inventiveness was the verbal chaos of Mrs Malaprop.

Today, we are all familiar with the character's 'malapropisms', but critics of the time so missed the satiric intention of Mrs Malaprop's absurdities they declared the dialogue, 'defective to the extreme'.

By age 29, after two more great plays, *School for Scandal* and *The Critic*, Sheridan embarked on a second career as a member of Parliament. He could have joined the gentry: he could ride and fence and was a convincing lover of aristocratic ladies, but the emancipation of Catholic Ireland and his concern for the poor were such, that he remained an outsider, sacrificing political principles and friendships.

Sheridan was blessed, in equal measure, with a crusading spirit and a fondness for spirits. Yet no amount of riotous living could touch Sheridan's superb oratory. So potent was the impact of his



Portrait of Sheridan by Hoppner

words that his influence was both feared and assured. His speech in parliament at the trial of Warren Hastings, charged with ruthless dealings during his governorship of India, was so effective that his listeners were heard to whisper 'witchcraft' when the opposition pronounced Hastings guilty. As the author Horace Walpole commented: 'I cannot believe it was so supernatural as they say...Yet witchcraft, no doubt, there has been, for when did simple eloquence ever convince a majority?'

Interpreting the enchanted eloquence of Sheridan's words on the 23rd are actors Nick O'Connor, Paul Connell, Stewart Reading-Kitchen, Mike Muston, Kathy Livesey and Lynn Sharpe.

For your free invitation, call +33 (0)4 93 41 97 22. LB