

Classic Poetry Series

**Richard Brinsley Sheridan**  
**- poems -**

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# Richard Brinsley Sheridan(1751 - 1816)

Richard Brinsley Sheridan, third son of Thomas and Frances Sheridan, was born in Dublin.

At the age of eleven he was sent to Harrow school. Sheridan was extremely popular at school. He left Harrow at the age of seventeen, and was placed under the care of a tutor. He was also trained by his father in daily elocution, and put through a course of English reading. He had fencing and riding lessons at Angelo's. He kept up correspondence with his school friend N.B Halhed and they published in 1771 metrical translations of Aristaenetus.

The removal of the family to Bath in 1770-1771 led to an acquaintance with the daughters of the composer Thomas Linley. Thomas Linley's elder daughter, Elizabeth Ann fell in love with Sheridan, The couple married in secret but her father did not allow Sheridan to meet his daughter as he did not consider him an eligible suitor. Sheridan also fought two duels with another suitor of Elizabeth's, a Major Matthews.

Sheridan was sent to Waltham Abbey, in Essex, to continue his studies, especially in mathematics. He was entered at the Middle Temple on the 6th of April 1773, and a week later he was openly married to Miss Linley.

His first comedy, *The Rivals*, was produced at Covent Garden on 17th January, 1775. His second piece, *St. Patrick's Day, or the Scheming Lieutenant*, a lively farce. In February 1777 he produced his version of Vanbrugh's *Relapse*, under the title of *A Trip to Scarborough*. His chief task was to remove indecencies; he added very little to the dialogue and though it is printed among his work he has no title to it.

*The School for Scandal* was produced on the 8th of May 1777. *The School for Scandal*, though it has not the unity of *The Rivals*, nor the same wealth of broadly humorous incident, is universally regarded as Sheridan's masterpiece. Sheridan's farce, *The Critic*, was produced on the 29th of October 1779.

It seems that he had accumulated notes for another comedy to be called *Affectation*, but his only dramatic composition during the remaining thirty-six years of his life was *Pizarro*, produced in 1799 -- a tragedy in which he made liberal use of some of the arts ridiculed in the person of Mr. Puff. He also revised for the stage Benjamin Thompson's translation, *The Stranger*, of Kotzebue's *Menschenhass und Reue*.

He entered parliament for Stafford in 1780, as the friend and ally of Charles James Fox.

Under the wing of Fox he filled subordinate offices in the short-lived ministries of 1782 and 1783. He was under-secretary for foreign affairs in the Rockingham ministry, and a secretary of the treasury in the Coalition ministry.

His last years were harassed by debt and disappointment. He sat in parliament for Westminster in 1806-1807. At the general election of 1807 he stood again for Westminster and was defeated, but was returned as member for Ilchester, at the expense, apparently, of the prince of Wales. In 1812 he failed to secure a seat at Stafford. He could not raise money enough to buy the seat. He had quarrelled with the Prince Regent, and seems to have had none but obscure friends to stand by him. As a member of parliament he had been safe against arrest for debt, but now that this protection was lost his creditors closed in upon him, and the history of his life from this time till his death in 1816 is one of the most painful passages in the biography of great men.

## A Portrait

Tell me, ye prim adepts in Scandal's school,  
Who rail by precept, and detract by rule,  
Lives there no character, so tried, so known,  
So deck'd with grace, and so unlike your own,  
That even you assist her fame to raise,  
Approve by envy, and by silence praise!  
Attend!—a model shall attract your view—  
Daughters of calumny, I summon you!  
You shall decide if this a portrait prove,  
Or fond creation of the Muse and Love.  
Attend, ye virgin critics, shrewd and sage,  
Ye matron censors of this childish age,  
Whose peering eye and wrinkled front declare  
A fix'd antipathy to young and fair;  
By cunning, cautious; or by nature, cold,—  
In maiden madness, virulently bold;—  
Attend, ye skill'd to coin the precious tale,  
Creating proof, where innuendos fail!  
Whose practised memories, cruelly exact,  
Omit no circumstance, except the fact!—  
Attend, all ye who boast,—or old or young,—  
The living libel of a slanderous tongue!  
So shall my theme, as far contrasted be,  
As saints by fiends or hymns by calumny.  
Come, gentle Amoret (for 'neath that name  
In worthier verse is sung thy beauty's fame),  
Come—for but thee who seeks the Muse? and while  
Celestial blushes check thy conscious smile.  
With timid grace and hesitating eye,  
The perfect model which I boast supply:—  
Vain Muse! couldst thou the humblest sketch create  
Of her, or slightest charm couldst imitate—  
Could thy blest strain in kindred colours trace  
The faintest wonder of her form and face—  
Poets would study the immortal line,  
And Reynolds own his art subdued by thine;  
That art, which well might added lustre give  
To nature's best and heaven's superlative:  
On Granby's cheek might bid new glories rise.

Or point a purer beam from Devon's eyes!  
Hard is the task to shape that beauty's praise,  
Whose judgment scorns the homage flattery pays?  
But praising Amoret we cannot err,  
No tongue o'ervalues Heaven, or flatters her!  
Yet she by fate's perverseness—she alone  
Would doubt our truth, nor deem such praise her own!  
Adorning fashion, unadorn'd by dress,  
Simple from taste, and not from carelessness;  
Discreet in gesture, in deportment mild,  
Not stiff with prudence, nor uncouthly wild:  
No state has Amoret; no studied mien;  
She frowns no goddess, and she moves no queen,  
The softer charm that in her manner lies  
Is framed to captivate, yet not surprise;  
It justly suits the expression of her face,—  
'Tis less than dignity, and more than grace!  
On her pure cheek the native hue is such,  
That, form'd by Heaven to be admired so much,  
The hand divine, with a less partial care,  
Might well have fix'd a fainter crimson there,  
And bade the gentle inmate of her breast—  
Inshrined Modesty—supply the rest.  
But who the peril of her lips shall paint?  
Strip them of smiles—still, still all words are faint!  
But moving Love himself appears to teach  
Their action, though denied to rule her speech;  
And thou who seest her speak, and dost not hear,  
Mourn not her distant accents 'scape thine ear;  
Viewing those lips, thou still may'st make pretence  
To judge of what she says, and swear 'tis sense:  
Clothed with such grace, with such expression fraught,  
They move in meaning, and they pause in thought!  
But dost thou farther watch, with charm'd surprise,  
The mild irresolution of her eyes,  
Curious to mark how frequent they repose,  
In brief eclipse and momentary close—  
Ah! seest thou not an ambush'd Cupid there,  
Too tim'rous of his charge, with jealous care  
Veils and unveils those beams of heavenly light,  
Too full, too fatal else, for mortal sight?  
Nor yet, such pleasing vengeance fond to meet,

In pard'ning dimples hope a safe retreat.  
What though her peaceful breast should ne'er allow  
Subduing frowns to arm her altered brow,  
By Love, I swear, and by his gentle wiles,  
More fatal still the mercy of her smiles!  
Thus lovely, thus adorn'd, possessing all  
Of bright or fair that can to woman fall,  
The height of vanity might well be thought  
Prerogative in her, and Nature's fault.  
Yet gentle Amoret, in mind supreme  
As well as charms, rejects the vainer theme;  
And, half mistrustful of her beauty's store,  
She bars with wit those darts too keen before:—  
Read in all knowledge that her sex should reach,  
Though Greville, or the Muse, should deign to teach,  
Fond to improve, nor timorous to discern  
How far it is a woman's grace to learn;  
In Millar's dialect she would not prove  
Apollo's priestess, but Apollo's love,  
Graced by those signs which truth delights to own,  
The timid blush, and mild submitted tone:  
Whate'er she says, though sense appear throughout,  
Displays the tender hue of female doubt;  
Deck'd with that charm, how lovely wit appears,  
How graceful science, when that robe she wears!  
Such too her talents, and her bent of mind,  
As speak a sprightly heart by thought refined:  
A taste for mirth, by contemplation school'd,  
A turn for ridicule, by candour ruled,  
A scorn of folly, which she tries to hide;  
An awe of talent, which she owns with pride!  
Peace, idle Muse! no more thy strain prolong,  
But yield a theme, thy warmest praises wrong;  
Just to her merit, though thou canst not raise  
Thy feeble verse, behold th' acknowledged praise  
Has spread conviction through the envious train,  
And cast a fatal gloom o'er Scandal's reign!  
And lo! each pallid hag, with blister'd tongue,  
Mutters assent to all thy zeal has sung--  
Owns all the colours just--the outline true;  
Thee my inspirer, and my model--CREWE!



# Had I A Heart For Falsehood Framed

Had I a heart for falsehood framed,  
I ne'er could injure you;  
For though your tongue no promise claimed,  
Your charms would make me true:  
To you no soul shall bear deceit,  
No stranger offer wrong;  
But friends in all the aged you'll meet,  
And lovers in the young.

For when they learn that you have blest  
Another with your heart,  
They'll bid aspiring passion rest,  
And act a brother's part;  
Then, lady, dread not here deceit,  
Nor fear to suffer wrong;  
For friends in all the aged you'll meet,  
And lovers in the young.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan



# Here's To The Maiden Of Bashful Fifteen

Here's to the maiden of bashful fifteen;  
Here's to the widow of fifty;  
Here's to the flaunting extravagant quean,  
And here's to the housewife that's thrifty.

Chorus

Let the toast pass,--  
Drink to the lass,  
I'll warrant she'll prove an excuse for the glass.

Here's to the charmer whose dimples we prize;  
Now to the maid who has none, sir:  
Here's to the girl with a pair of blue eyes,  
And here's to the nymph with but one, sir.

Chorus

Let the toast pass,--  
Drink to the lass,  
I'll warrant she'll prove an excuse for the glass.

Here's to the maid with a bosom of snow;  
Now to her that's as brown as a berry:  
Here's to the wife with her face full of woe,  
And now to the damsel that's merry.

Chorus

Let the toast pass,--  
Drink to the lass,  
I'll warrant she'll prove an excuse for the glass.

For let 'em be clumsy, or let 'em be slim,  
Young or ancient, I care not a feather;  
So fill a pint bumper quite up to the brim,  
And let us e'en toast them together.

Chorus

Let the toast pass,--  
Drink to the lass,  
I'll warrant she'll prove an excuse for the glass.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan

## If A Daughter You Have

If a daughter you have, she's the plague of your life,  
No peace shall you know, tho' you've buried your wife,  
At twenty she mocks at the duty you taught her,  
O, what a plague is an obstinate daughter.  
Sighing and whining,  
Dying and pining,  
O, what a plague is an obstinate daughter.

When scarce in their teens, they have wit to perplex us,  
With letters and lovers for ever they vex us,  
While each still rejects the fair suitor you've brought her,  
O, what a plague is an obstinate daughter.  
Wrangling and jangling,  
Flouting and pouting,  
O, what a plague is an obstinate daughter.

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