

THE LIMNER COMPANY



LADY CAROLINE LAMB (1785 - 1828)

Thomas (Tom) Sheridan (1775-1817)

Circa: Circa 1805

Circa 1805

Watercolour and pencil on paper

Signed: *By Lady Caroline Lamb / T. Sheridan Esq.*

Written in pencil: *A leaf from Marcia Sheridan's scrapbook, from the contents of The Court, Frampton, Dorsetshire, previously of Frampton Court (demolished 1931), the home of the Sheridan family, descendants of Richard Brinsley Sheridan.*

Thomas (Tom) Sheridan (1775-1817) was the only son of R. B. Sheridan, accomplished and skillful poet. His wife, Caroline Henrietta, was a novelist. His son – Richard Brinsley Sheridan Jnr married Marcia, daughter of Lt. General Sir Colquhoun Grant of Frampton Court, which became the home of the Sheridan family until 1931.

This watercolour portrait of Thomas (Tom) Sheridan (1775-1817), son of the esteemed Anglo-Irish playwright and politician Richard Brinsley Sheridan I (1751-1816), is taken from a leaf of Marcia Maria Sheridan's, his daughter in law's, scrapbook and is pasted in just over the page from a nautical ditty most likely composed by Sheridan's daughter, Helen Selina Blackwood (1807-1867) regarding her husband, the Royal Navy captain Commander Price Blackwood (1794-1841).

The Sheridans were a family entangled with the literary over generations, as well as with politics, exceptional diplomatic careers and a marital history notably peppered with scandal, as Tom Sheridan (painted above), his grandfather and his son all opted to run away to become wed. This scrapbook page conjures up some of this history, as Marcia Maria, the scrapbook's owner, herself entered the Sheridan lineage when Tom Sheridan's son, Richard Brinsley Sheridan II (1806-1888), ran away with her to get married. Contrary to such an elope typically suggesting youth, recklessness and a break from the pillars of familial approval and affirmation, Marcia and Richard Sheridan II only conformed to the Sheridan's preferred nuptial traditions through this act of rebellion, as Tom Sheridan, whose portrait

Marcia has collected here, also ran away to marry his wife Caroline Henrietta Callender (1779-1851) on the 21st June 1805, around the time this portrait was painted. Tom's father, the famed Richard Brinsley Sheridan I, had also caused significant scandal when he secretly married Bristolian singer and performer Elizabeth (Eliza) Ann Linsley (1754-1792), whilst escorting her to France to help her escape the pursuit of a different suitor, whom Richard later had to fight two duels against.

These similarly ulterior pathways to nuptials are not the only Sheridan family traditions that this scrapbook leaf is evocative of, however. The Sheridans, and indeed this portrait in particular, were also deeply intertwined with the arts and the literary. Most famous are Richard Brinsley Sheridan I's plays, particularly *The School for Scandal* (1777), although his grandfather's close friendship with Jonathan Swift further embeds the family's Irish literary roots long before. Richard Brinsley Sheridan I's plays also attracted the attention of Lord Byron (1788-1824), who reportedly stated that whatever Sheridan produced, it was 'always the best of its kind', which is not the only linkage between Lord Byron and the above portrait. Richard Sheridan I cemented his son Tom's life-long entanglement with the theatrical when he gave his son a quarter-share of the Drury Lane Theatre in 1806, which had opened under Richard Sheridan I's purchase and management on the 21st September 1776. Tom's financial futures were becoming increasingly uncertain after three electoral failures in Liskeard and Stafford, futilely funded by the Prince of Wales. Tom, who had supposedly inherited both of his parents' creative attributes, was himself an accomplished singer and actor who proved to be a much more successful theatre manager than politician, accumulating the Lyceum Theatre into his managerial portfolio, as well as writing a popular melodrama *The Russian*, which was first staged on the 13th May 1813 and continued for a further ten performances. It took a calamitous fire at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1808 and declining health for Tom to accept the posting from the Duke of York as colonial treasurer at the Cape of Good Hope in 1813. Taking only his wife and daughter Helen with him and leaving the other children with family at home, this return to the political and diplomatic strand of the Sheridan family oeuvre proved to be Tom's final posting, as he died of consumption on the 12th September 1817.

Perhaps such early overseas travel sowed an early penchant for the maritime in Helen Selina Sheridan, who became engaged to Commander Price Blackwood at the tender age of 17 following her return from the Cape of Good Hope to Hampton Court. The initials 'HSB' (Helena Selina Blackwood) on the written poem entitled 'The Captain' link this poem to her husband Price, who was a captain in the Royal Navy, but also the heir to the title and estate in Ireland of Baron Dufferin and Clanboye, hence the refrains to Captain Blackwood's work 'for the glory and the honour of ould Ireland'. Helen wrote numerous poems, songs and verses throughout her life, including a particularly popular ballad 'The Lament of the Irish Immigrant'. When Helen died, her son Frederick Temple Hamilton-Temple commissioned none other than Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) to write a memorial poem dedicated to his mother. Frederick's own travel writing piece, *Letters from High Altitudes* (1856), which records his journeys to Iceland, was later commended by D.H Lawrence too, threading yet another notable British literary figure into Sheridan maritime history.

It is therefore only fitting that Lady Caroline Lamb be the painter of Tom Sheridan's portrait here, as another Anglo-Irish playwright, poet, novelist and writer. Whilst Lady Caroline Lamb is most notorious for her affair with Lord Byron in 1812, reportedly calling him 'mad, bad, and dangerous to know' and aptly foreshadowing 'that beautiful pale face is my fate', she also attracted renown through her devoted feminism, inspired by her reading of Mary Wollstencroft's *A Vindication Against the Rights of Woman* (1792). She was also known for her cropped, page-boy hairstyle and an association with the bluestocking intellectual circle, who later did make attempts to have Lamb certified insane due to her unpredictable behaviours. After Byron ended their relationship, Lady Caroline Lamb wrote *Glenarvon* (1816), a Gothic tragic-romance novel set in Ireland with a central vampiric hero, a thinly veiled depiction of Byron himself, through which Lamb condemned Byron as villainous, self-obsessed and a dual seductor-betrayer. *Glenarvon* is highly regarded as a foundational female amorous commentary,

not only through Lamb's jilted condemnation of Byron himself, but also as a critical subversion of the intellectual, brooding Byronic hero archetype. As noted by the Daniel Katz gallery, it is possible Lady Caroline Lamb and Tom Sheridan grew up together, but it is also possible that Tom's own literary endeavours could have piqued the interest of Lamb, leading to an acquaintance born of their mutual intellectual and theatrical pursuits. In addition to the successful *The Russian* melodrama, Tom Sheridan's homage to the HMS Saldanha, 'The Loss of the Saldanha', written after the wreckage of the frigate off the Irish coast, received much praise. Lady Caroline Lamb's sketchbook contained various other examples of her watercolour depictions of friends, family and other social acquaintances, such as of her husband, William Lamb.