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INTRODUCTION

Staging an Irish Enlightenment

David O'Shaughnessy

I

Surveys of the Enlightenment have tended to focus on the major thinkers of the period; more recently though, attention has shifted to those accounts that emphasise the spaces and sociability of Enlightenment.[1] Despite this critical turn, the theatre historian is likely to remain disconsolate at the elision of theatre from many of these general studies, past and present. Theatre is certainly nodded to on occasion and listed as a metropolitan space where an expanding public sphere could assimilate and practise Enlightenment, but the treatment is typically superficial. One is left with the impression that theatre functions as a largely passive space for the circulation of externally sourced Enlightenment ideas and principles, with rather less attention paid to the notion that the theatre is also an agent of Enlightenment and that the actors, playwrights, managers and other associated people – hereafter collectively referred to as theatre practitioners – were fundamental to the generation of such ideas and principles.[2]

[1] Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951) and Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Rise of Modern Paganism* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967). But see also, for a more recent emphasis on Enlightenment thinkers, Anthony Gottlieb, *The Dream of Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Philosophy* (London: Allen Lane, 2016). For more diffused accounts of Enlightenment with emphases on its spaces and places, see, for example, Peter Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Jon Mee, *Conversable Worlds: Literature, Contention, and Community, 1762–1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2000); Gillian Russell, *Women, Sociability and Theatre in Georgian London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Chad Wellmon, *Organizing Enlightenment: Information Overload and the Invention of the Modern Research University* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

[2] See, for instance, Porter's *Enlightenment* where theatre barely registers. A glance at the index is revealing. Significant eighteenth-century playwrights – Goldsmith, Holcroft, Inchbald, Steele – are listed but all citations relate to non-dramatic works. The Licensing Act 1695 appears a few times, but there is no mention of the 1737 Stage Licensing Act, a rather important piece of legislation that would persist in one form or other until 1968.

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Theatre was a focal point in Georgian life. The playhouses of London and beyond were among the few spaces where people from almost all walks of life could gather together to engage with literary and performance culture. Theatre was central to political life and the display of – as well as resistance to – monarchical and aristocratic power; newspapers were heavily indebted to theatrical stories for the growth of their readership; the parliamentary and legal worlds aped its tropes and affective strategies in the pursuit of British liberty and justice; and it was the only literary sphere of Georgian life deemed sufficiently dangerous to be muzzled by state censorship due to its capacity to disseminate critique and channel ideas of societal change in a live participative environment. The political philosopher William Godwin, the leading reforming intellectual voice of the 1790s, believed strongly that theatre was pivotal to the mediation of Enlightenment ideas from educated persons (like himself) to others less privileged: theatre formed 'the link between the literary class of mankind & the uninstructed, the bridge by which the latter may pass over into the domains of the former'.[3] In short, theatre was a powerful, active cultural force in the eighteenth century, but it has been largely sidelined in the field of Enlightenment studies.[4]

This volume takes the case of Ireland's theatrical exports to Britain to showcase the possibilities of using an Enlightenment framework to bring together and interrogate a substantial body of staged cultural production.[5] The volume identifies London as a site of regional Irish Enlightenment activity; it treats this region as having commonalities and connections with the island of Ireland but also distinctive features; it argues that theatre has a particular force at this time for the eighteenth-century London Irish; and it adumbrates certain conditions of singularity that make this cultural output and its producers especially noteworthy. In brief, it suggests that

[3] Bodleian Library, Oxford. Abinger MS, c. 21, f. 57v. The manuscript is undated but probably dates from the mid-1790s.

[4] It is difficult to think of any English language general survey of the Enlightenment that engages properly with the theatre. Essay collections do occasionally make an effort although they have limited scope. See, for example, E. M. Dadlez, 'The Pleasures of Tragedy' in *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. James Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 450–67; and Peter Jones, 'Italian Operas and Their Audiences' in *The Enlightenment World*, ed. Martin Fitzpatrick, Peter Jones, Christa Knellwolf and Iain McCalman (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 323–36.

[5] 'Theatre is a crucial medial hinge that provides a vantage point for considering a wide array of under-analyzed cultural and social phenomena', such as, for instance, the Irish Enlightenment. Daniel O'Quinn and Gillian Russell, 'Introduction' in 'Georgian Theatre in an Information Age: Media, Performance, Sociability', ed. O'Quinn and Russell. Special issue, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 27.3–4 (2015): 337.

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the presentation of Irish civility – understood in its broadest sense as being related more to civilisation than politeness – was a common desideratum of Irish theatre practitioners and one that was linked to new understandings of Irish history and culture emerging at this time.

These chapters will challenge Roy Porter's view that it was not until the 1790s that Irish grievances were 'directly coloured by enlightened (by then, also revolutionary) claims'.[6] Their publication is timely, coming in the wake of important reflections on Ireland and its Enlightenment, notably Michael Brown's door-stopping *The Irish Enlightenment* (2016).[7] Moreover, it responds to recent recognition from Irish historians, both social and intellectual, that theatre was a key facet of the Irish Enlightenment and more effort was required to determine its full importance.[8] On the British theatre history side, while work on the eighteenth century has been flourishing over the past couple of decades, the considerable Irish contribution made to the Georgian theatre, *pace* the notable exceptions of Helen Burke and Michael Ragussis, has not been adequately considered from an ethnic perspective.[9]

We will begin with a brief survey of the pervasive and sustained Irish theatrical activity in Britain of the long eighteenth century; this body of empirical evidence will establish a *prima facie* case for a study of this cultural phenomenon.[10] This introduction uses the remarkably successful

[6] Porter, *Enlightenment*, 241.

[7] See also the various volumes in the *Early Irish Fiction, c. 1680–1820* series, gen. ed. Aileen Douglas, Moyra Haslett and Ian Campbell Ross (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010–); Graham Gargett and Geraldine Sheridan, eds., *Ireland and the French Enlightenment, 1700–1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999); Michael Griffin, *Enlightenment in Ruins: The Geographies of Oliver Goldsmith* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013); *The Letters of Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Michael Griffin and David O'Shaughnessy (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Máire Kennedy, *French Books in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2001); Ian McBride, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2009); Sean D. Moore, ed., 'Ireland and Enlightenment'. Special issue, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45.3 (2012); David O'Shaughnessy, ed., 'Networks of Aspiration: The London Irish of the Eighteenth-Century'. Special issue, *Eighteenth-Century Life* 39.1 (2015); and, Amy Prendergast, *Literary Salons across Britain and Ireland in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015).

[8] Craig Bailey, *Irish London: Middle-Class Migration in the Global Eighteenth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 219; and Ian McBride, 'The Edge of Enlightenment: Ireland and Scotland in the Eighteenth Century', *Modern Intellectual History* 10.1 (2013): 135–51; 148.

[9] See Michael Ragussis, *Theatrical Nation: Jews and Other Outlandish Englishmen in Georgian Britain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010) and a number of essays by Helen Burke (see Select Bibliography). The remarkable upsurge in work on Georgian theatre might be best summarised by pointing at Julia Swindells and David Taylor's excellent *Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1737–1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[10] Many important eighteenth-century figures will be outside the chronological remit of this volume, although they certainly merit further critical attention: playwright George Farquhar (Derry; 1676/

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level of intense Irish activity in the London theatres at this time of relatively benign political conditions in London to argue that, seen in the context of patriotism and revisionist historiography, this activity can be usefully categorised as a regional strand of the Irish Enlightenment. The regional distinction is important as it allows us to connect these activities with the island of Ireland while allowing London some distinctive features and avoiding any totalising claims. The survey will be necessarily succinct and far from comprehensive, but the breadth and depth of the Irish theatrical community in London – the focus of our interest – across all dimensions of the theatrical public sphere will become apparent.[11] To be blunt, in this writer's experience, it is not unknown for eighteenth-century scholars to start in mild surprise when they learn that such and such a person was Irish, so the exercise seems worthwhile from that perspective as well. We will come to the question of the relevance of national identity for these practitioners shortly, but their previous assimilation as British or English writers has, at the very least, masked an important facet of their formative makeup.[12] I also note the county of origin when known to remind readers that Ireland, small country though it is, has its own regional diversity; having some sense of the geography of theatrical talent in Ireland opens up potential avenues of future scholarly enquiry.[13]

7–1707), playwright and novelist Mary Davys (Dublin?; 1674–1732), Richard Steele (Dublin; *bap.* 1672, *d.* 1729) and actor and playwright John Leigh (Dublin?; *c.* 1689–1726?) are only some examples. Helen Burke has also shown the forceful impact of visiting Irish actors in late seventeenth-century Oxford. Helen Burke, 'The Irish Joke, Migrant Networks, and the London Irish in the 1680s', *Eighteenth-Century Life* 39.1 (2015): 41–65.

[11] The conflation of Britain with London is, of course, problematic; it is freely conceded that the interplay between metropolis and centre should receive more attention as indeed the survey of Irish theatrical migrants to follow suggests. Declan McCormack's chapter is a substantive corrective to the volume's London-centrism and shows the rich possibilities of such work. Jane Moody has also shown that regional theatre had its own distinctive rhythms and idiosyncrasies. Nonetheless, it is fair to say, I think, that London theatre generally set the tone and repertoire even if the regions mediated and responded to those plays in distinctive fashions. Jane Moody, 'Dictating to the Empire: Performance and Theatrical Geography in Eighteenth-Century Britain', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730–1830*, ed. Moody and Daniel O'Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[12] There has been some important work on 'Irishing', to use James Chandler's term, some significant figures include Edmund Burke, Catherine Clive, Oliver Goldsmith, the Sheridan family and Margaret Woffington. But Chandler also warns of the dangers of narrow one-dimensional readings. See his discussion of Edgeworth in 'A Discipline in Shifting Perspectives: Why We Need Irish Studies', *Field Day Review* 2 (2006): 19–39; 30–39.

[13] On Irish regional theatre of the period, see Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601–2000* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 30–66.

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Catherine Clive (?; 1711–85) and Margaret Woffington (Dublin; 1720?–60) were two of the leading female actors of our period.[14] Clive became the 'Darling of the Age' after being gifted the role of Polly in John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* in 1732. Woffington's debut at Covent Garden was a royal command performance of Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* and made her an instant star. Both women would be at the centre of the Covent Garden and Drury Lane companies throughout the mid-century. Less familiar but substantial female actors include George Anne Bellamy (Dublin; 1731?–88), who had considerable success in the 1740s and 1750s, and Margaret Farren (Cork?; *d.* 1804) who started her career in London but who flourished in York. Eliza O'Neill (Louth; 1791–1872), admired by Hazlitt and Percy Shelley amongst others, was an extraordinary and immediate success at Covent Garden, hailed as the new Siddons.

Insofar as male actors go, James Quin (London; 1693–1766), Charles Macklin (Donegal; 1697?–1799) and John Henry Johnstone (Kilkenny; 1749–1828) are likely the most well-known names.[15] But we also have Spranger Barry (Dublin; *bap.* 1717, *d.* 1777), whose abilities, particularly in Shakespearean parts, made the handsome actor a bona fide star: Garrick never played Othello again after Barry's triumph in the role and their rival Romeos lit up the 1749–50 season. George Cooke (Dublin?; 1756?–1812) made his career as a provincial actor in the north of England before cracking London in 1800 with his Richard III. These names are known to theatre historians of the period, but there are others, much less well known, whose very longevity demands greater familiarity. William Havard (Dublin; 1710–78), for instance, acted for more than forty years in London; he was also author of the contentious tragedy *King Charles I* which drew big crowds at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1737 and was identified by Lord Chesterfield, in his famous condemnation of the Stage Licensing Act, as a play that *should* be censored.[16] Alexander Pope (Cork; 1763–1835), no

[14] Much of the information that follows is readily available in various *ODNB* entries so I have eschewed individual references. The Select Bibliography will contain more detailed work on individuals where appropriate.

[15] Although Quin was born in London, he had considerable and heartfelt Irish roots. His grandfather was lord mayor of Dublin, and his father was educated at Trinity College Dublin. Quin himself went to school in Dublin from about 1700, he may also have attended Trinity, and it was in that city he began his acting career. Quin's Irish connections are manifold and his half-brother, Thomas Grinsell, was involved in the establishment of Irish freemasonry in London in the 1750s. Laurence Dermott, *Ahiman Rezon: Or A Help to All that Are, or Would Be Free and Accepted Masons*, 3rd edition (London: n.p., 1778), xxxv.

[16] Vincent J. Liesenfeld, *The Licensing Act of 1737* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 83.

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relation, acted at both Covent Garden and Drury Lane over five decades from 1786 to 1827: Ireland produced not only stars but many of the supporting cast that made up the human infrastructure of the London theatrical world.[17] As our knowledge of Georgian performance culture advances, we need to better assess the interactions, collaborations and interventions of this ensemble backdrop with Georgian stars to understand how celebrity was fashioned and cultural capital accrued.

Authoring plays was also an area of considerable strength. The comedies of Oliver Goldsmith (Westmeath; 1728–74), Richard Brinsley Sheridan (Dublin; 1751–1816) and 'the English Moliere' (according to Hazlitt) John O'Keeffe (Dublin; 1747–1833) are regularly anthologised and staged today. But there are a host of writers of considerable achievement: Isaac Bickerstaff (Dublin; *b.* 1733 – *d.* after 1808), Arthur Murphy (Roscommon; 1727–1805), Hugh Kelly (Kerry; 1739–77), Elizabeth Griffith (Glamorgan; 1727–93) and Frances Sheridan (Dublin; 1724–66) all achieved acclaim in the mid-century period. Indeed, a gnashing William Kenrick was so incensed by seemingly endless Irish theatrical success in the 1760s that he penned a mocking parody of Dryden's 'Epigram on Milton':

> What are your Britons, Romans, Grecians,
> Compar'd with thorough-bred Milesians?
> Step into G–ff-n's shop, he'll tell ye
> Of G–ds–th, B–k-rs–ff, and K-ll-:
> Three poets of one age and nation,
> Whose more than mortal reputation,
> Mounting in trio to the skies,
> O'er Milton's fame and Virgil's flies.[18]

Kenrick's disappointment in the wake of the failure of his own *The Widowed Wife* appears to have provoked this ethnic barb at Goldsmith, Bickerstaff and Kelly, all of whom were being published by the important London-based Irish publisher William Griffin. The 1770s and 1780s were also a period of remarkable Irish dominance in London's dramatic authorship: as well as Sheridan, Macklin and O'Keeffe, these decades saw considerable success for Leonard MacNally (Dublin; 1752–1820), Frederick Pilon (Cork; 1750–88) and Robert Jephson (Dublin; 1736/7–1803). MacNally had a number of Covent Garden

[17] More could also be said about Irish musicians and singers, scenographers and prompters based in Britain.
[18] William Kenrick, 'The Poetical Triumvirate. Written in the Year MDCCLXVII' in *Poems; Ludicrous, Satirical and Moral* (London: Printed for J. Fletcher [1768]), 269.

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successes in the early 1780s such as *Robin Hood, or Sherwood Forest* (1784) and *Richard Coeur de Lion* (1786). Jephson's tragedy *Braganza* (1775) impressed the audience so much that it 'clapped, shouted, huzzaed, cried bravo, and thundered out applause'.[19] His *Count of Narbonne* (1781) was a dramatisation of Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* and also won much acclaim. Pilon's comedies were written rapidly to respond to the issues of the day, and he had a considerable reputation on this front: 'Mr. Pilon, in [*Aerostation* (1784)], has seized upon the subject uppermost in the public mind, and has introduced all the collateral topics of the day.'[20] One newspaper noted that Pilon and O'Keeffe received cash up front for their plays, while Richard Cumberland, an eminent playwright in his own right, had to make do with the uncertainty of a benefit night (*Morning Post and Daily Advertiser,* 18 November 1784). Irish playwrights in the 1780s then had a certain cultural force founded on their critical and commercial success which was, in turn, a function of a more general zeitgeist of Irish brio in late eighteenth-century London.

After the turn of the century, Irish playwrights continued to offer their wares to the British public with marked appreciation. James Kenney's (Limerick; 1780–1849) 1803 debut *Raising the Wind* had thirty-eight nights in its first season at Covent Garden. James Sheridan Knowles (Cork; 1784–1862) wrote a number of tragedies of sufficient quality that he was included in Hazlitt's *Spirit of the Age* (1825), *Virginius* (1820) probably considered his finest achievement. No less an ambition than a desire to 'do away any lingering prejudice that may still exist in England against the people of Ireland' was the objective of *The Sons of Erin*, a comedy by Alicia Le Fanu (Dublin; 1753–1817) which was staged to great applause in 1812.[21] Better known as a novelist today, Charles Maturin (Dublin; 1780–1824) captivated Byron with his tragedy *Bertram* (1816) which went through seven editions in the year after its tumultuous reception at Drury Lane. Before he became embroiled in the O'Connellite movement for Catholic Emancipation, Richard Lalor Sheil (Kilkenny; 1791–1851) wrote *Evadne, or, The Statue* (1819) which notched up thirty performances at Covent Garden. Although much lamented by many in the republic of letters, the Union does not appear to have impeded the persistent eastward flow of talent across the Irish Sea.

[19] Correspondence of Horace Walpole, cited in Jephson's *ODNB* entry.
[20] *General Evening Post*, 28–30 October 1784.
[21] Alicia Sheridan Le Fanu, *The Sons of Erin, or Modern Sentiment: A Comedy, in Five Acts Performed at the Lyceum Theatre* (London: J. Ridgway, 1812), iii.

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Acting and playwriting are the most public of activities associated with the theatre – and are the focus of this volume – but the Irish theatrical contribution is not limited to these domains. David Taylor has reminded us that theatre managers are all too often elided from their proper place at the forefront of theatre history and how much we have to gain from paying proper attention to this instrumental figure.[22] In the Irish case, Richard Brinsley Sheridan leaps to mind, his near three decades in charge of Drury Lane Theatre constituting a substantial reign (although John Kemble did much of the day-to-day work). But Irish involvement in eighteenth-century theatre management was more extensive.

Owen Swiny (Wexford; 1676–1754) and Thomas Doggett (Dublin; *c.* 1670–1721) are notable figures from the early part of the century. Swiny managed the Queen's Theatre at Haymarket from 1706 before ending up managing Drury Lane in a consortium which included Doggett and Robert Wilks (Dublin; *c.* 1665–1732) in 1710. Swiny became an agent for the Italian opera in London and was based in Venice from 1721; he returned to London in the 1730s. Thomas Doggett, keen to make a public expression of his Whiggism, established a race on the Thames on 1 August 1716 to commemorate the second anniversary of George I's accession, a race that was still being run up to the end of the twentieth century. Although Richard Steele did not play much of an active part in the management of the theatre, we should also acknowledge that he held the governorship of Drury Lane from 1714 until his death in 1729. Charles Macklin operated as Charles Fleetwood's acting manager at times at Drury Lane.

But it is outside of London where Irish managers made their most significant mark during our period. Andrew Cherry (Limerick; 1762–1812), author of *The Soldier's Daughter* (1804), which went through more than thirty editions in Britain and America, also managed a theatre company in Wales. Francis Aickin (Dublin; *c.* 1735–1812) managed the Liverpool theatre, initially with John Kemble, before taking over at Edinburgh. The famous manager of Smock Alley Richard Daly (Westmeath; 1758–1813) cut his theatrical teeth on stage in London before turning to management back home. However, it is perhaps the name that is likely least known to theatre history that is the most striking from this list: John Boles Watson (Tipperary; 1748–1813), a friend of Roger Kemble (father of John), was a theatre manager at Cheltenham from 1779. Remarkably, Watson created a circuit of in excess of forty theatres: from

[22] David Francis Taylor, 'Theatre Managers and Theatre History' in *The Oxford Handbook of Georgian Theatre*, ed. Swindells and Taylor, 70–71.

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Bristol it reached northwards to Holywell in Flintshire, and from Leicester it stretched across the midlands into Carmarthen in Wales. Outposts of Watson's empire could be found *inter alia* at Gloucester, Cirencester, Stroud, Hereford, Monmouth, Swansea, Oswestry, Evesham, Wolverhampton, Coventry, Birmingham, Daventry, Walsall and Tamworth.

The theatre was also central to the rapid growth of the readership of periodicals and newspapers over the century, and Irish writers here made a considerable contribution to 'the thickening traffic of theatrical intelligence' between playhouses and newspapers.[23] Former playwright Charles Molloy (Offaly; *d.* 1767) was editor of *Common-Sense*, the periodical in which the infamous *Vision of the Golden Rump* (the 1737 satiric print that helped provide the pretext for the introduction of the Stage Licensing Act) was published. Arthur Murphy contributed dramatic criticism to the *London Chronicle* from 1758. William Jackson (Dublin; 1737?–95), known as Scrutineer, became editor of the *Public Ledger* in mid-1770s (in whose pages he accused Samuel Foote of homosexuality), and he later acted as editor of the *Morning Post* (1784–86). Lapsed barrister Leonard MacNally also edited the *Public Ledger* for a period in the 1780s, a period in which his dramatic work was flourishing. Isaac Jackman (Dublin; 1752?–1831) edited the *Morning Post* (1791–95), while Frederick Pilon also worked on the *Morning Post* when he first landed in London. A fascinating piece of research awaits to be done on ethnic and political cooperation (collusion?) between the newspapers and theatres given the number of people who had a foot in both camps; certainly, Charles Dibdin, for one, was scathing:

> On the subject of the theatre, indeed, [newspapers] are all agreed; actors, authors, and musicians – though the first imitate, the second steal, and the third compile – are with them arrived to the highest pitch of perfection, when 'tis notorious the theatres have gradually declined for these last fifteen years. . . . But the inducement is evident; and while free admission, and now and then the reception of a farce, can insure the newspapers, trash must go down; and the new school, as it is called, impotent as it is, be palmed on the rising generation, as an improvement of the old one; though, Heaven knows! a spider's web may with as much propriety be instanced as an improvement on the labours of a silkworm.[24]

There is also a considerable body of more formal dramatic criticism. Samuel Derrick (Dublin; 1724–69) published *The Dramatic Censor;*

[23] Stuart Sherman, 'Garrick Among Media: The "*Now* Performer" Navigates the News', *PMLA* 126.4 (2011): 966–82; 970. See also Lucyle Werkmeister, *A Newspaper History of England 1792–1793* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967).

[24] *The Devil* 1 (1786), 8–9.

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Being Remarks upon the Conduct, Characters, and Catastrophe of Our Most Celebrated Plays in 1752.[25]

His friend Goldsmith's *Essay on Theatre* (1773) was a powerful – if self-interested – indictment of sentimental comedy. Goldsmith's rival Hugh Kelly wrote an important imitation of Churchill's *Rosciad* in the narrative poem *Thespis: Or A Critical Examination into the Merits of All the Principal Performers Belonging to Drury-Lane Theatre* (1766–67). Francis Gentleman (Dublin; 1728–84) provided one of the most valuable accounts of Garrick's major roles in his two-volume *The Dramatic Censor* (1770). Edmond Malone (Westmeath; 1741–1812) was the most important eighteenth-century editor of Shakespeare.

Our definition of those Irish impacting the London theatre is capacious and is not confined simply to those born on the island of Ireland but extends to those who – insofar as we can tell – considered themselves to be, or were considered by others to be, Irish and/or were deeply marked by their association with the country and its inhabitants. People such as James Quin and Elizabeth Griffith are thus included. But as we consider this disparate group of people across the century, some questions should be posed: firstly, what difference does it make that they were Irish? How helpful is the marker of Irishness to the theatre historian attempting to recuperate the Georgian theatre scene? And is there any sense in which we can connect such a heterogeneous array of cultural producers, given their differences across gender, religion, politics and class? The claim in these pages is that Irishness mattered a great deal to these men and women as we can observe from their patterns of sociability, so much to the fore of current eighteenth-century studies.[26]

Irish migrants to England, particularly London, of the period found solace, opportunity and conviviality in networks that were sustained and strengthened by national ties.[27] As a large migrant community – and one that would flit regularly between Dublin and London – such links were arguably particularly important for theatre practitioners, a means to find one's bearings within the largest city in the Western world and its most

[25] See Norma Clarke's *Brothers of the Quill: Oliver Goldsmith in Grub Street* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016) for a fascinating account of Goldsmith's circle of Irish writers.

[26] See, for instance, Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*; Jon Mee, ed., 'Networks of Improvement'. Special issue, *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.4 (2015); James Kelly and Martyn Powell, eds., *Clubs and Societies in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2010); Prendergast, *Literary Salons across Britain and Ireland*; and, Russell, *Women, Sociability and the Theatre*.

[27] Bailey, *Irish London*; Clarke, *Brothers of the Quill*; and, David O'Shaughnessy, '"Rip'ning Buds in Freedom's Field": Staging Irish Improvement in the 1780s', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.4 (2015): 541–54.

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