Private theatricals in Irish houses, 1730 to 1815

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While Irish professional theatre enjoyed immense successes in both Dublin and London during the eighteenth century, what is less known is the simultaneous rise throughout Ireland of amateur theatrical productions among the upper classes. These took place not in local theatres, but in private houses and demesnes, prompting one writer to describe how it was 'impossible to peep into any social corner of Irish life without getting a glimpse of the amateur stage with lamps lit and noble ladies and noble gentlemen in rich dresses playing their parts'.[1] These performances occurred on a fairly regular basis from the middle of the century, reaching their height of popularity in the 1770s and 1780s. Private theatricals can be defined as performances of plays acted and produced by amateurs for their enjoyment and that of their friends. They took place in a house or a garden, in a specially built theatre adjacent to or adjoining the house, in a barn, or sometimes in a theatre, rented for the occasion, to which they would invite friends. Now and again the actors would perform in aid of a charity, when tickets were sold to the public in advance of the performance. This upper-class activity has been largely neglected in histories of life in the Irish house, and this essay is an effort to redress that lacuna.

In *Temples of Thespis: some private theatricals in England and Wales, 1700-1820* (1978), Sybil Rosenfeld records 120 locations at which private theatricals were held between 1700 and 1820.[2] For Ireland, it is possible to point to at least thirty-six houses which hosted plays either in their garden, in the house itself or in a theatre within their estate. Added to this are five other private houses where theatres were either built or fitted up, but for which no evidence of any productions has yet come to light.[3] While it will be seen that a number of these are located in the Kilkenny region, there is a fairly broad geographical spread throughout Ireland.

This essay will look at the rise and the gradual decline of private theatricals dur-

1 – Irish School (or John Trotter?), detail of The Leslie Conversation Piece (A Musical Rivalry) c.1760-65, oil on canvas, 77.5 x 104 cm (reproduced with the permission of Lord Belmore; see page 21 for full image)

ing the 'long' eighteenth century in Ireland. It will begin with the viceregal court at Dublin Castle, whose support for the theatre in Dublin was essential, while the Castle itself was the location for some of the earliest theatrical performances by members of the court – that is, non-professional actors. Indeed, one of the reasons for the rise in private rather than public performances (which is dealt with in section II) relates to the infrequency of viceregal attendance at the public theatres. Here, too, the experience and effect of acting in school plays will be examined, as will the links between theatre and political life. An account of private theatricals – where they were held and who participated in them – will be documented in section III. The question of whether the theatre spaces described were makeshift affairs – fit-ups or purpose-built spaces – will be examined in section IV.

I – DUBLIN CASTLE AND PUBLIC THEATRES IN DUBLIN

Throughout the eighteenth century, Dubliners were enthusiastic and consistent supporters of musical recitals and concerts (usually in aid of charity) at performances in Christ Church and St Patrick's cathedrals, and at Dublin Castle. As the century progressed, the Castle became the scene of many a theatrical performance,[4] including, in 1709, at the instigation of the lord lieutenant, the 1st Earl of Wharton (1709-11), Joseph Addison's musical play *Rosamund* (1707). There too, in 1727, the 'first fully staged musical entertainment produced in Dublin' took place, when a 'Serenata Theatrale' was performed.[5] The earliest play in the Castle for which details of the cast and the setting exist was Ambrose Philips' *The Distressed Mother* (1712), an adaptation of Jean Racine's play *Andromache*, acted by amateurs in January 1732-33 under the patronage of the lord lieutenant, Lionel Sackville, 1st Duke of Dorset (1730-37), himself an active supporter of the theatre in Dublin.[6] The performance took place in the council chamber. William Stewart, Viscount Mountjoy (1675-1728), who played the part of Pyrrhus, invited Mrs Mary Pendarves (later Delany)[7] to join his party of twelve, the number of tickets each performer had to dispose of. In a letter dated 4th January, she wrote that 'all the Bishops, Judges and Privy Counsellors are to be there'.[8] Robert Hitchcock, author of *An historical view of the Irish stage* (1788), describes the scene:

> The room was fitted up in the most elegant stile. All the chambers and passages were illuminated with wax. There was a crowded audience of persons of the first rank in the kingdom, and the whole was conducted with the greatest regularity and decorum.[9]

A continuation of the trend for amateur performances at the Castle was probably ensured by the appointment in 1741 of the painter James Worsdale, author of the ballad opera *A Cure for a Scold* (1735), as deputy to Luke Gardiner, who was master of the revels at the Castle.[10]

Dublin boasted a number of public theatres at this time. Among the most popular

were Smock Alley Theatre, near Dublin Castle (on whose patronage it relied), which had been substantially rebuilt since its foundation in 1662 and had reopened in 1735; the Theatre Royal on Aungier Street, designed by Sir Edward Lovett Pearce, which had opened in 1733; and Fishamble Street Musick Hall, which opened originally in 1741 and operated as a theatre from 1777.[11] The popularity of the theatre among the leisured classes may be determined by reference to the diary of Mary Mathew, a relative of William Brownlow, MP for county Armagh and, as will be seen, a keen amateur actor. Between January and April 1761, Mathew attended at least sixteen plays, generally taking a box seat at a cost of 6s 6d; in May she gave money to her servants to attend the theatre.[12] The ability to discern the merits of one actor or one production over another was regarded as an essential aspect of genteel sociability. Regular theatregoers like the FitzGerald and Conolly families from Carton and Castletown frequently exchanged details of plays and actors with one another and with their relatives in London. Almost all of the London successes came to Dublin, although John Greene concludes that the Dublin managers did not slavishly follow that lead, and that while they 'shared London tastes ... [they] were very selective'.[13]

The theatre was of course recognized and valued by those involved as the setting where, as Gillian Russell puts it, 'performance, display, and spectatorship were essential components of the social mechanism'.[14] The nexus of the political and cultural life of the city, it was a place where all classes of society were to be found and where it was possible to mix even with the viceroyalty. When it was known that those arbiters of fashion, the FitzGeralds and Conollys, or the viceroy, were to attend a performance, people went early to ensure a good view not only of the stage, but of the spectators. Just as the popularity of the royal family in England was gauged by the warmth of their reception in London's theatres, so too could their representatives in Ireland judge their reputation among Dublin's theatre audiences. In 1763, the Countess of Northumberland, wife of the lord lieutenant, took note of the reaction of Dublin audiences in her diary: on 8th September she wrote, 'Went to ye Play for the first time, very much applauded and as much frighten'd'. Weeks later, on 22nd October, she was pleased to write:

> I went in the Evening to Othello and was so much Clapp'd that I was heartily confounded, tho' much pleas'd as the Dutchess of Bedford my predecessor was frequently received with groans.[15]

But the elite's partial rejection of the Dublin theatre was only a shift in the locus operandi. The news media were only too happy to report accounts of private theatricals and the accompanying festivities at the various houses of the fashionable and the politically active. In fact they received as much, if not more, publicity for these supposedly 'private' events than for their appearance at the public theatres.[16] It may be deduced from the amount of reportage that the public avidly followed details of the plays, the performers, the dresses, the houses and the food. However, neither the FitzGeralds nor the Conollys desired or required publicity for their theatricals, which were purely family affairs with

close friends, some details of which can be gleaned from correspondence between the families (as will be seen), and not from the print media.

II – AMATEUR THEATRICALS AT HOME

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, it appears that the upper classes in Dublin began to desert the theatre.[17] A number of reasons may have contributed to this. One writer suggests antipathy in patriot circles to Italian burlettas, which 'almost triumphed over the best productions of our language';[18] another reason may have been a reaction to the rowdiness of the audiences, sections of which were not slow about voicing their opinions of the actors during the performances. Only in 1762 were spectators removed from the stage, where they had up to this point been allowed to stand, and it and the orchestra were railed off. According to the author Laetitia Pilkington (*c*.1709-1750), 'the men in the pit had the habit of standing on their benches between the acts, apparently to peer into the boxes which surrounded them on the orchestra floor.'[19] A Dublin newspaper of 1748 reported that those in the pit laughed aloud at their own jokes, 'censor'd the Dress and Beauty of all the Ladies in the Boxes; and in short Minded everything but the Representation that brought them thither'.[20] Attending the theatre in eighteenth-century Dublin was, according to Christopher Morash, 'a noisy, boisterous, contact sport, a public bearpit in which servants, parliamentarians, butchers, Trinity students, haberdashers and "ladies of quality" debated art, sex, politics and fashion'.[21] Most importantly, and, under these circumstances, perhaps not surprisingly, was the fact that the lords lieutenant had largely ceased attending by this time. Formerly, when a theatrical production was being advertised as being 'by command of the Lord Lieutenant', his presence was implied. But this was no longer assumed.[22] For those who preferred the drama on-stage rather than off it, the actor John O'Keeffe describes audience reactions to the death of a hero: 'It was the invariable custom among the Dublin audience, when the hero died, to bring down the curtain by applause, and hear no more; such was the compliment paid to their favourite ... by this practice the end of the play was lost to them.[23]

With this in mind, the preparation and production of a private play to while away the long winter evenings in the country could provide much enjoyment and would be played to a more appreciative audience, composed of family, friends, tenants and servants (Plate 2). In England there was a similar pattern, but the catalyst there, according to one newspaper in 1776, was the resignation from the theatre of the actor David Garrick (1717-1779), after which 'the rage for dramatic entertainments in private families has increased astonishingly; scarce a man of rank but either has or pretends to have his petit théâtre, in the decoration of which the utmost taste and expense are lavished.'[24] The rage for theatricals in Ireland coincided with that in England, but the period leading up to the 1798 Rebellion and following the union with Great Britain in 1800 was a rather fallow one for Ireland in this context. The fashion was revived somewhat from about 1805, but

2 – After John Nixon, A PRIVATE REHEARSAL OF JANE SHORE
1790, hand-coloured print on paper, 32.4 x 44.4 cm (© Trustees of the British Museum)

not with the same enthusiasm.

Another reason that contributed to the rise in popularity of private theatricals in mid-century Ireland had its roots in the experiences of many gentlemen who had acted in plays while at school. Dr Thomas Sheridan (1687-1738), grandfather of Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816), the playwright, theatre manager and politician, was, according to his grandson's biographer, 'the head of Dublin's leading school', and was, in Swift's opinion, 'doubtless the best instructor of youth in these kingdoms and perhaps in Europe and as great a master of the Greek and Roman languages'.[25] His final-year students performed Greek dramas – in Greek – that were frequently attended by the lords lieutenant, and were so popular it was claimed that they threatened the attendance at the Dublin theatres.[26] It was in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* that his son Thomas (1719-88), later manager of Smock Alley Theatre and father of Richard Brinsley, made his debut as an actor, aged thirteen.[27] This occurred just months before the young man's departure to 'the nursery of many gentleman actors', Westminster School in London,[28] where, years later, Charles Lennox, 3rd Duke of Richmond and brother of Emily, Duchess of Leinster and Lady Louisa Conolly, was 'trained in acting'.[29]

Apart from Sheridan's school (which was also his home) in Capel Street, there were, later, at least two schools in Dublin that presented plays as part of the study of English language and literature. Some of the pupils in later life applied their dramatic

skills to play-acting as amateurs or became involved in the professional theatre. In Molesworth Street, the Rev Roger Ford ran a highly reputable school up until his death in 1756, where Robert Jephson (1736-1803), younger son of John Jephson, Archdeacon of Cloyne, joined his brother William in 1747.[30] Robert later became a poet and playwright, and was much involved (as will be seen) in both amateur and professional theatre in Ireland and in London. Another pupil at the time was Edmund Malone (1741-1812), who became a renowned Shakespearian scholar, and whose twenty-one-volume edition of Shakespeare's plays appeared posthumously.[31] With valued assistance from the well-known actor and dramatist, Charles Macklin (1690-1797), Shakespeare's plays were performed regularly in the school and 'attended by the rank and fashion' of Dublin.[32] In 1749, *Julius Caesar* was staged, with Robert Jephson as Cassius, his brother William as Brutus, and Portia played by Richard Malone, Edmund's older brother.[33]

In 1758, two years after the closure of Ford's establishment, the schoolmaster and poet Samuel Whyte (1733-1811) opened his 'English grammar school' at 75 Grafton Street. This was described by the actor and dramatist John O'Keeffe (or O'Keefe) (1747-1833) as 'a most eminent classical school',[34] which was attended by many of the 'sons and daughters of the principal families in Ireland'.[35] Whyte's classes for young ladies took place at his school or in their homes, where he gave lessons in elocution.[36] Among his first pupils were the children of his cousin, the novelist and dramatist Frances Sheridan (1724-1766) and her husband Thomas, the parents of Richard Brinsley. Like Sheridan, Whyte wrote on education and rhetoric, and encouraged his students to write poetry, some of which was published with his own work in *The Shamrock* (1772).[37] Another pupil of Whyte's, the poet and songwriter Thomas Moore (1779-1852), said of him, 'The talent for recitation and acting which I had so very early manifested was the talent of all others which my new schoolmaster was most inclined to encourage.'[38] O'Keeffe described how Whyte 'permitted and encouraged his boys to act the First Part of Shakespeare's Henry IV. The schoolroom was fitted up as a theatre in very good style – parents and friends were invited.'[39] On Christmas Eve, 1771, Joseph Addison's tragedy *Cato* (1712) was performed to an invited audience by Whyte's students in what Hitchcock describes as 'the little theatre in Capel Street'.[40] They performed 'with a propriety and strength of genius, that would have reflected credit on the first actors on the stage',[41] and so impressed was the audience that, on their behalf, James FitzGerald, 20th Earl of Kildare, later 1st Duke of Leinster, suggested that the boys repeat it for members of the public and that the money taken at the door be donated to a charity. This was held at the Theatre Royal, Crow Street, on 2nd January 1772 'for the relief of the confined debtors in the Marshalsea'. Lords Kildare, Bellamont and Dunluce 'condescended' to act as stewards for the occasion, and Garret Wesley, 2nd Baron Mornington, conducted his amateur band.[42] The famous Montgomery sisters, Barbara, Elizabeth and Anne (Plate 3),[43] who were also students of Whyte's, decorated the theatre for the occasion, transforming it into 'a bower of roses'. To guarantee the success of the evening, Anne persuaded her admirer and future husband, George, Lord Townshend, then lord lieutenant (1767-72), to attend.[44] It was as a result of

3 – After Sir Joshua Reynolds, Portraits of Three Ladies adorning the Altar of Hymen from left: Barbara, Elizabeth and Anne
1836, print by Benjamin (Henry B.) Holl, 27.2 x 21.5 cm (© Trustees of the British Museum)

this production, according to O'Keeffe, that army officers took up the idea of acting for charity in hospitals and infirmaries: actresses played gratis and gentlemen became door-keepers.[45]

There is not much evidence to support the idea that many made professions out of the stage as a result of this type of education, but some saw certain advantages. Apart from being a good winter pastime, it taught young men how to deport themselves, and, importantly, the voice-training helped the budding politicians in the school. An aspect of amateur theatricals in Ireland that stands out is that many members of parliament were to be found acting in private plays.[46] A trained voice, hints on delivery, being able to put a point across persuasively – even dramatically – were important qualities for those in politics. Performance on the stage and performance in the House were not miles apart. Henry Flood (1732-91) and Henry Grattan (1746-1820), two of the most important parliamentarians of the time, with distinguished reputations as debaters and orators, were avid participants in amateur theatricals, as were a number of other MPs.

III – LOCATIONS, PLAYS AND PARTICIPANTS

THE EARLIEST REFERENCE TO PRIVATE THEATRICALS IN IRELAND – THAT IS, THOSE HELD on private estates or in private houses – date to the 1740s and the early 1750s at Quilca, county Cavan, where Richard Brinsley Sheridan's father, Thomas, boarded over the top of a grassy mound in his garden to provide a *mise en scène* for his productions with family and friends.[47] Also out of doors, where 'the stage was the green sward, the scenery the leafy woods', a performance of John Milton's *The Masque of Comus* (1634) was staged at Rathfarnham Castle before an audience that included the viceroy, Lord Townshend. Here, Samuel Whyte had trained the all-children cast that included thirteen-year-old Elizabeth La Touche, daughter of the banker David La Touche III,[48] and the music was provided by Lord Mornington's amateur band.[49] Apart from Quilca, there is little information about plays performed by amateurs before 1760. In 1752, Bishop Richard Marlay wrote to James Caulfeild, 1st Earl of Charlemont (1728-1799), that Joseph Leeson, 1st Earl of Milltown (1701-1783), was to play the part of the unprincipled Lothario in Nicholas Rowe's *The Fair Penitent* (1703), which was to be 'acted in town by some ladies and gentlemen', but the location is not given.[50] In 1759, at Lurgan, county Armagh,[51] the seat of William Brownlow MP, *Midas*, by the Irish playwright Kane O'Hara, was performed (Plates 1, 4). Members of the Brownlow family played the parts, with the role of Pan reserved for the author, who was one of the houseguests.[52] According to Grattan Flood, the performance took place in 'the private theatre attached to the [Brownlow] residence'.[53]

Later in the century, at Killruddery, county Wicklow, seat of the Earls of Meath, the 'Sylvan Theatre' comprised grassy banks on which performances took place, with, as a backdrop, a high bay hedge. Lady Katherine Brabazon remembered that 'acting had constantly taken place [there], private theatricals being then much in vogue; dramatic parties were made up, & then invited from one country house to another.'[54] While there is no evidence that plays took place out of doors in either Castletown or Carton, Louisa Conolly sometimes held dumbshows and masques[55] in the grounds of her home, often illuminating parts of the woods for added effect.[56]

Despite the fact that the FitzGeralds and the Conollys were popular figures in society and continued to attend performances in Dublin's theatres, from at least 1760 plays were being produced in their homes in which family, friends (among them many members of parliament) and even servants took part. As arguably the two 'first' families in the land, it is not surprising that their theatricals began a trend that gathered momentum into the mid-1770s, by which time it had spread to other parts of Ireland. Because the theatre was very much part of their lives – their copious correspondence is littered with references to it – it is worthwhile to look in some detail at their private theatricals. It is also noteworthy that Emily FitzGerald (Countess of Kildare, later Duchess of Leinster) and her sisters, Lady Louisa Conolly and Lady Caroline Fox, did not hesitate to befriend members of the acting profession and invite them to their houses. Indeed, this was something that

4 – Irish School (or John Trotter?), THE LESLIE CONVERSATION PIECE (A MUSICAL RIVALRY)
c.1760-65, oil on canvas, 77.5 x 104 cm (reproduced with the permission of Lord Belmore)
According to the label, the caricature features a number of participants in domestic theatricals – from left: Kane O'Hara (holding a sheet of music), General William Gardiner, the [1st] Earl of Mornington (at the harpsichord), Mr Meredyth, [John] Prendergast Smyth [later Viscount Gort], Mr Fortescue, Richard Townsend (wearing a great floral favour in his lapel), Sackville Gardiner, and Charles Powell Leslie (being restrained by Gardiner)

Louisa was criticised for in 1778,[57] due to a puritan prejudice that prevailed against the theatre, which was considered 'the favourite resort of the irreligious'.[58]

Castletown and Carton

The earliest plays staged at Carton and Castletown took place in the latter part of 1760 when *Henry IV Part One* was performed in, according to Brian FitzGerald, the gallery at Castletown.[59] At Carton, *The Devil to pay* was performed shortly afterwards, on 29th December, and the cast consisted of their houseguests, 'none of us knowing any of our parts which we had been studying all morning'. Lady Louisa played the part of Lady Loverule:

> Mr Coote Sir John, Mr Conolly the Cobbler, Lord Kerry the Butler, my Sister and Fanny [Conolly, her sister-in-law] the two Maids, Lord Inchiquin the Footman, Lord Kildare the Coachman, Mr Leeson the Conjuror, Mr Moore the Cook ... We all laughed immensely. We are to act it again next Thursday.[60]

Another distinguished member of the party, Edward Wingfield, 2nd Viscount Powerscourt (1729-1764), is not mentioned as acting a part, but his duties may have been backstage.

The following year (1761), the family at Carton put on John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) with the help of their friends and under the direction of Samuel Whyte.[61] Lord Charlemont played Peachum; Tom Conolly, Filch; Louisa, Lucy; Lady Kildare, Mrs Peachum; Captain Morris, Macheath;[62] Miss Martin (described as a 'belle' of Dublin), Polly; and Miss Vesey, Jenny Diver. Viscount Powerscourt took the part of Mrs Slammeckin, and the Rev Richard Marlay, later bishop of Waterford, who played Lockit, wrote and spoke the prologue,[63] the concluding lines of which are:

> But when this busy mimic scene is o'er,
> All shall resume the worth they had before;
> Lockit himself his knavery shall resign,
> And lose the gaoler in the dull divine.[64]

Louisa and Emily's interest in amateur acting dated back to their childhood at Goodwood, the seat of their father, 2nd Duke of Richmond. As early as 1731, their elder sister Caroline, aged nine, took part in children's theatricals, performing in a version of John Dryden's *The Indian Emperor* (1665).[65] Nine years later, Caroline and Emily, with their five-year-old brother Charles, performed a dramatic piece in French before a 'small but noble audience' at their home.[66] It is no surprise, therefore, to find amateur theatricals performed later by both generations of the extended family, not only at Carton and Castletown, but also at Holland House in London, the home of Caroline and her husband the Rt. Hon. Henry Fox (later 1st Lord Holland), and at Richmond House, also in London, the home of Charles, by then 3rd Duke of Richmond.[67] In about 1787, the Duke bought

an adjoining house and commissioned the architect James Wyatt (1746-1813) to design a private theatre there, with the stage on the middle floor, 'the Orchestra sunk into the room below it – and so, in the same manner is the Pit' (Plate 4).[68] The Duke's cousin Stephen Fox, Caroline's son, indulged his enjoyment of amateur acting by providing his own theatre in 1768 in a barn in the grounds of his home, Winterslow House, in Wiltshire, where he and his wife often took leading roles.[69]

Lord and Lady Kildare and Lady Louisa were avid theatregoers in London as well as in Dublin. The Fox children were taken to the theatre from the time they were five or six years old.[70] The families followed the careers of the celebrated English actors David Garrick and Sarah Siddons (1755-1831), and sent each other critiques of plays and performers. In April 1759, the Earl of Kildare wrote to his wife from London to tell her that he had been to see Arthur Murphy's play *The Orphan of China* (1759) in which Garrick acted 'extremely well'.[71] Emily was delighted to see Mrs Siddons perform in Dublin in 1783, where she was entertained by 'all the first families'.[72] Emily's daughter, Sophia, was one of a party from Castletown who went to see the actress playing Lady Macbeth in Dublin in 1794. She expressed the opinion that Mrs Siddons was 'uncommonly fine in the last scene', but for the rest of the play 'she by no means exerted herself', her voice being barely audible, 'so I am not surprised to find everybody says she is so fallen off in her acting since she was here before'.[73]

The FitzGerald children put on plays on summer evenings for their own amusement at their county Dublin villa, Frescati in Blackrock (Plate 5), as their Fox cousins did at Holland House.[74] There (at Holland House), between January and April 1762, William Whitehead's *Creusa Queen of Athens* (1754) and Henry Fielding's *Tom Thumb* (1730) were performed.[75] These were more formal affairs than at Frescati. In April, Caroline wrote to Emily that her own son (Charles Fox) acted 'most astonishingly well; there never was a play better acted', while the role of Emily's son George as the father was 'perfection; the audience were numerous, and the applause they met with very great.'[76] Lord

5 – Frescati House, Blackrock, county Dublin (demolished 1983) (Lawrence Photograph Collection, courtesy National Library of Ireland)

opposite

4 – Unknown artist, THE WAY TO KEEP HIM, AS PERFORM'D AT THE RICHMOND THEATRE published 1787, coloured print on paper, 27.6 x 20.8 cm (H. Beard Print Collection, © Victoria & Albert Museum)

Kildare, George's father, also attended these performances in which two of his sons took part. He wrote to his wife that they 'did extremely well ... George did much better than I expected; William did the Princess Hurchquamurka, and made a fine jolly, bold-looking girl'.[77]

Lord Kildare had, however, some misgivings about the propriety of his children taking part in these events, and perhaps worried about what Finola O'Kane has described as 'the political judiciousness of Irish noble families indulging in such play-acting'.[78] In September 1771, Louisa wrote to her sister Lady Sarah Bunbury (*née* Lennox) that 'The Duke of Leinster ... does not approve of his Children's acting therefore only indulged my sister with these plays for her own amusement provided there was to be no company therefore the audience consisted only of the Servants, and ourselves.'[79] Lady Sarah (1745-1826) was a frequent participant in the plays in both Ireland and England. Later, Lord Henry FitzGerald (1761-1829) was recognised as a particularly fine actor; in 1787, his sister Sophia described one of his well-received performances at the theatre in Richmond House:

> Everybody that had seen Garrick thought Henry equal to him, some parts beyond him ... Walpole described him as 'a prodigy, a perfection, all passion, nature and ease. You never saw so genuine a lover. Garrick was a monkey to him'. As for Mrs Siddons, people said she was 'quite jealous of him'.[80]

As a ten-year-old in September 1771, Henry had acted Lucia in *Cato* at Carton, and William Ogilvie, the children's tutor and future husband of the duchess, played Portius. Not alone did the servants play the part of audience for these productions, but they too acted. The minor parts in *Cato* were 'done by the Servants among whom we have some good ones'. A month before, the footmen and postillions at Carton had acted in a performance of George Farquhar's *The Beaux Stratagem* (1707), and it appears to have been an annual event as 'they acted last year very tolerably and are improved this year'.[81]

The late evidence of theatricals among the FitzGerald and Conolly families is in a letter of Louisa's dated January 1775 in which she outlines the plot of a play by Robert Jephson, *The Humours of the Gallery*, and where she lists the members of the cast as William FitzGerald, who succeeded his father two years previously as 2nd Duke of Leinster, his wife Emily Olivia, Louisa and her husband Tom Conolly, and Richard Wingfield, 3rd Viscount Powerscourt.[82] It may have been one of the plays referred to by Louisa as 'the prettiest things I ever saw, and incomparably well acted', put on by members of the large party she entertained at Castletown over that Christmas. Her guests included Luke Gardiner, his wife and family, Edmund Malone and Robert Jephson, and she singled out 'Mr Jephson and Mrs Gardiner' as being 'equal to any actors (Garrick excepted) I ever saw'[83] – praise indeed for the actors, and so, perhaps, not surprising to learn that in 1778 the Gardiners built a theatre at their home, the Ranger's House in the Phoenix Park, where they, together with friends such as the Jephsons, took part in dramatic productions.[84]

The Jephsons and the Gardiners

In 1769, Robert Jephson, Master of the Horse at Dublin Castle since 1767,[85] took part in *The Fair Penitent* at Leixlip Castle, a house owned by Thomas Conolly and let to the viceroy, Lord Townshend.[86] The play was performed twice during Dean Richard Marlay's visit there in August of that year, who, in a letter to his nephew Henry Grattan (1746-1820), another amateur actor, describes the parts acted by Townshend's two sons: 'Jephson performed the part of Altamont justly, but in a subdued manner I suppose to make the Townshends appear in a more conspicuous point of view.'[87] According to another writer, the play *Tamerlane* was also acted at Leixlip during that summer, probably with *The Fair Penitent* as part of the double bill. Together with the Townshend boys and Jephson, the Montgomery sisters took part, as did Lords Kildare and Mountmorres, and William Brownlow.[88] In February 1770, both plays were performed by the same cast in Dublin for the benefit of the prisoners in the Marshalsea.[89] Grattan regretted that he was 'so stupid as to refuse a ticket [for this performance], and lost a most magnificent spectacle, and in the instance of Miss Montgomery and Jephson, a fine performance; the former an accomplished actress, the latter a formed actor.'[90]

Jephson and his wife took part in *Macbeth*, part of the double bill with Arthur Murphy's *The Citizen* (1761), at the Gardiner's theatre in the Phoenix Park on 19th and 21st January 1778. According to a newspaper report, the vicereine was present on the first night and the viceroy on the second; on both evenings, they were joined by a 'brilliant assemblage of the first people in Ireland ... all vying with each other in magnifi-

6 – 'Robert Jephson, Esq. in the character of Macbeth'
7 – 'Luke Gardiner, Esq., Representative for the County of Dublin'
8 – 'Mrs Gardiner in the Tragedy of Macbeth, Performed by Ladies & Gentlemen'
(all from WALKER'S HIBERNIAN MAGAZINE, April 1778)

cence'.[91] Jephson played Macbeth (Plate 6), Luke Gardiner (Plate 7) was Macduff, his wife Elizabeth (Montgomery, a former student of Samuel Whyte's) played Lady Macbeth (Plate 8), and Mrs Jephson took the very minor role of the 'Gentlewoman'. Others taking part in one or both plays were Sir Alexander Schomberg, who was the commander of the viceregal yacht, members of the St Leger family of Doneraile Court in county Cork, and younger members of the Gardiner and Montgomery families.[92] The reporting of such an event provided the newspapers and magazines with great excuses to exercise their powers of description. The *Hibernian Magazine*'s report from 'a gentleman present' is typical. It was effusive in its description of the event, particularly of Mrs Gardiner who was described as:

> Enriched by nature with uncommon endowments, graced by fashionable elegance, in the full possession of all that beauty can give, and perfectly mistress of every power which genius inspires, Lady Macbeth appeared on those nights as Shakespeare drew her.[93]

The four different dresses worn by her were, as Gerard describes them, 'dreams of beauty', worn with diamonds 'valued at one hundred thousand pounds'.[94] The report continued, 'the beauty of the theatre, its superb decorations, and the inimitable taste displayed therein by the elegant master of the whole, rendered the entertainment one continued scene of delight.' The management of the production was also admired:

> the stage etiquette, the prompting, and the management of the scenery, were so correct, so easy and altogether so excellently executed, that Mr Gardiner's judgement conspicuously appealed in the choice of a favourite public comedian, under whose directions those particular matters were placed.

The 'favourite public comedian' is not named, but Samuel Whyte, who was 'never so happy as when getting up a play, writing prologues or instructing the performers',[95] supervised most of the performances put on by the Gardiners at the Phoenix Park.[96] The theatre space, a tall three-bay room, still survives (though partitioned). It has a coffered apse set into a canted bow at one end, and a shallow barrel-vaulted coffered bay at the other. The ceiling, now flat, installed by the Ordnance Survey to create an attic storey, may have been originally vaulted and coffered.[97]

Kilkenny[98]

In the early 1770s in county Kilkenny, a group of gentlemen, Sir Hercules Langrishe, MP for Knocktopher, Gervais Parker Bushe of Kilfane, Francis Flood of Flood Hall, and Henry Flood, MP for Farmley, got together to put on plays in their houses. They were joined in this endeavour by Bushe's brother-in-law Henry Grattan, who took a seat in parliament in 1775. Henry Flood's biographer states that the plays performed 'ranged from quality Shakespearean drama, through Goldsmith and Gay to ephemeral pieces of

little substance'.[99] Close friends and voracious readers, they were an erudite group, with a shared interest in politics as well as literature. Henry Flood studied public speaking, partly by scrutinising 'the expressions and delivery of the best actors', and, like Grattan, he memorised all his speeches to the House of Commons in advance.[100] As a result, he gained a reputation as an exceptional orator and debater at Westminster. As an amateur actor, his ability not only to act a range of parts, but also to extemporise, ensured his place in dramatic circles.[101]

The group resembled a company of strolling players going from house to house to perform. No indication is given as to what space in any house was used for these events. Though it seems they performed a substantial number and range of plays, the only ones documented are Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* and *Macbeth* in 1774.[102] Thomas Moore observed that 'the two celebrated orators, Grattan and Flood, appeared together on the stage, and, in personating the two contending chieftains, Macbeth and Macduff, had a sort of poetical foretaste of their own future rivalry.'[103] At one of the performances, as Flood, playing the slain Macbeth, lay stretched out on the stage, Langrishe began to recite the epilogue that he had composed in which he made humorous remarks about Flood's political conduct; while this amused the audience, it infuriated Flood, who was obliged to remain still.[104] Flood later reciprocated in the prologue of another play, criticising Langrishe, but according to reports it proved more embarrassing than entertaining for the audience.

Although nothing more is known about Henry Flood's venture into amateur theatricals, Henry Grattan took part in a performance of *The Masque of Comus* in 1776 at Marlay, county Dublin, the home of David La Touche MP. Marlay had its own theatre, 'The Mignonette Theatre, Fairyland', where it would appear that two performances of *Comus* were held, one with adults and the other with the many La Touche children. On 30th September, at least eleven members of the family (including Mrs La Touche, the only adult) are listed as comprising the cast, with a Miss Dunn and a Miss Maria Munro joining them, and the ubiquitous Samuel Whyte playing Comus.[105] In the adult version, Grattan, together with the MPs Walter Hussey Burgh and Bushe, performed 'along with 17 of the La Touche family'. Grattan wrote the epilogue, which was spoken by young Elizabeth La Touche.[106]

Shane's Castle

An impressive theatre-cum-ballroom was built in 1779 by John O'Neill MP, later 1st Viscount O'Neill, at Edenduffcarrick, known as Shane's Castle, in county Antrim.[107] The original seventeenth-century castle had grown during the following century into a large castellated house, with projecting end bays and curved bows.[108] O'Neill and his wife, Henrietta Frances Boyle (daughter of Lord Orrery), added a conservatory or orangery to one side of the ancestral seat, described by D.A. Beaufort in 1787 as 'a fine apartment along the lough [Neagh] ... at the end is an alcove where they frequently have their meals'.

On the other side of the house, he writes, 'there is a very pretty and large theatre and a magnificent ballroom 60 x 30, all of wood and canvas painted, and so sent ready made from London.'[109] In 1791, C.T. Bowden described this space as 'in a style of great elegance, which may be converted instantaneously into a ball-room or supper-room'. He says of the O'Neills that they were 'amateurs of all the fine arts, and give every encouragement to the professors of poetry, painting, music, sculpture &c'.[110] They loved the theatre and had regularly invited players to act at their house, which encouraged them to build their own theatre and to act themselves. Mrs O'Neill was a patron and friend of the actress Mrs Siddons, who performed and was a guest at Shane's Castle in 1784 and wrote a rather poetic, but not illuminating, account of her visit there.

In January 1780, the O'Neills opened their theatre with a double bill of Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* and *All the World's a Stage*. Mr O'Neill read the prologue (written by his wife), while his wife played the Shakespearean female lead and recited a self-penned epilogue. Newspaper reports provide glimpses of the event: the *Dublin Evening Pos*t reported that there was a 'numerous and polite audience',[111] while the *Belfast Telegraph* raved of Mrs O'Neill that 'to the improved possession of hereditary genius, she had combined the power of critical erudition'.[112] After the plays, a magnificent supper was provided for all.[113]

Nothing more came to light about plays at Shane's Castle until 1785 when they held what Clark calls 'a theatrical fete' – that is, an evening programme of plays followed by a ball and supper. Invitations were sent out 'to the elite of Belfast and vicinity' to attend on Monday, 28th November. A neighbour, Dr Haliday, reported that on the day before, the guests were 'pouring in from all parts ... to be at hand, and my own house is filling fast with Sabbath-breakers – for the hairdressers are at work'. The plays, Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* and Arthur Murphy's farce *The Upholsterer*, concluded before midnight when the theatre became a ballroom and there was dancing until 6am. A 'sumptuous' breakfast followed in the conservatory amid 'a profusion of flowering shrubbery', including a rose bush filled with lights as a centrepiece.[114] Mrs O'Neill acted in both plays, although while the press was as usual effusive in their praise, one member of the audience, Dr William Drennan, was unimpressed: 'It is really singular that she should like playing when she is so totally devoid of all theatrical power ... Her manners are those of a finished Courtesan.'[115]

One of the actors in *Cymbeline* was Lord Edward FitzGerald (1763-98), the United Irishman and son of the 1st Duke of Leinster. The others included Isaac Corry, who had played in *Macbeth* at Luke Gardiner's theatre in 1778, Charles Powell Leslie, MP for county Monaghan, Cromwell Price, MP for Downpatrick, and his wife, and Mrs St Leger. These seemed to have been the core members of what became known as the 'Shane's Castle Association',[116] and, as in Kilkenny, they brought their productions to other houses. William Drennan, in a letter written at this time, mentions theatricals 'at Carlingford by the Corry family with Mrs O'Neill, Mrs Marston, Mrs St Leger, Colonel Browne',[117] and the company appeared in May of the following year at a little theatre fitted up in Shaw's

Court, Dame Street, Dublin. Together with Lord Henry FitzGerald, they brought their combined talents and a play, John Dent's *The Force of Love* (1785), to the capital. Because most of the males in the company were members of parliament, they deferred their first night until parliament was prorogued, when the lord lieutenant, the Duke of Rutland, and his wife attended.[118] Together with the Duke of Leinster and an invited audience, they were afterwards entertained at supper in a most sumptuous manner by the Attorney-General John Fitzgibbon, later 1st Earl of Clare, at his home in Ely Place.[119]

The Shane's Castle theatricals give the impression of being semi-professional productions. Perhaps the fact that they built a theatre reinforced that effort, as it may have done at the Ranger's Lodge in Dublin. The driving force behind this enterprise seems to have been Mrs O'Neill, who was not shy about acting or performing and who seemed to go to immense trouble regarding costumes. The difficulty of getting the company together for rehearsals and discussions in Antrim should not be underestimated, nor the effort of taking a production to Dublin. However, as many of the actors were playing at Ely House at about the same time, enjoyment must have prevailed over the effort.

Attic Theatre, Ely House, Dublin

In April 1786, members of the Shane's Castle Association performed at the Countess of Ely's Attic Theatre at Ely House, Dublin. This was located in 'the upper part of the house', which, according to a description in the *Freeman's Journal*,

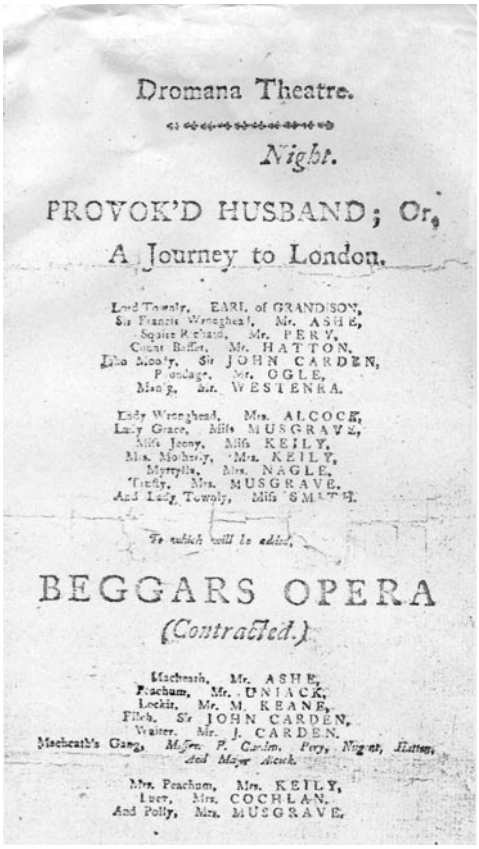
> forms a suit[e] of apartments of distinct dressing rooms for the ladies and gentlemen, with a very neat green room immediately connected with the theatre, which has the advantage of an excellent stage and very ample space for the performers behind the wings, these are painted in a neat and expressive stile that combines utility and simple elegance. The company are seated on benches covered with Aurora-coloured silk which when the room is light up with a brilliant display of patent lamps, has a most enchanting effect.[120]

In this 'large square room' on the second storey, there was seating for sixty persons.[121] The tragedies of *The Distressed Mother* and *Lear*, and the farce *All the World's a Stage* were performed there in April 1786 by a group that included Charles Powell Leslie (whose performance in the former was pronounced 'a most exquisite piece of acting' by the *Journal*), Cromwell Price and his wife, and Mrs St Leger. The following year, 1787, there were performances of *Lear* and John Home's tragedy *Douglas* (1756). In 1789, a double bill of Ben Jonson's *Every man in his humour* (1598) and David Garrick's satire *Lethe* (1740) was performed, followed, a few nights later, by Shakespeare's tragedy, *King John*. The lord lieutenant, George Nugent Temple Grenville, 1st Marquess of Buckingham (1787-89), together with 'all his Court', attended on both occasions, and on the latter night the prologue was spoken by Lord Mountjoy.[122] No cast lists have come to light for those.

The description of the performance at Ely House in the *Freeman's Journal* of April

1786 (above) reminds us of the important role that music played at these events in Irish houses.[123] While some playbills mention an 'orchestra', and music would certainly have been required for dancing, it is not clear what its function was at a purely theatrical performance. The account of events at Ely House,[124] where 'a very neat orchestra' was 'allotted for gentlemen who entertain the company between the acts', clarifies the situation somewhat.[125]

At Shane's Castle, the O'Neills 'secured a band, which was always ready either for orchestra or pleasure-boat, by making it a *sine qua non* in the engaging of a servant, that he should play on an instrument.'[126] With this in mind it seems that 'orchestra' refers to the orchestra pit, a location rather than a group of musicians; a 'band' therefore played in the 'orchestra'.[127] Lord Mornington's amateur band has already been mentioned in connection with Samuel Whyte's students' performance in 1772 at the Theatre Royal, Crow Street. Mornington, it seems, could play any instrument.[128] William Brownlow was considered by John O'Keeffe, the actor, to be a 'fine player on harpsichord',[129] and another MP, Sackville Hamilton, played the violin.[130]



Dromana Theatre.

Night.

PROVOK'D HUSBAND; Or,

A Journey to London.

Lord Townly, EARL of GRANDISON,
Sir Francis Wrongheat, Mr. ASHE,
Squire Richard, Mr. PERY,
Count Baffet, Mr. HATTON,
Lord Moody, Sir JOHN CARDEN,
Footmen, Mr. OGLE,
Manly, Mr. WESTENRA.

Lady Wrongheat, Mrs. ALCOCK,
Lady Grace, Miss MUSGRAVE,
Miss Jenny, Miss KEILY,
Mrs. Motley, Mrs. KEILY,
Myrtylla, Mrs. NAGLE,
Trusty, Mrs. MUSGRAVE,
And Lady Townly, Miss SMITH.

To which will be added,

BEGGARS OPERA

(Contracted.)

Macheath, Mr. ASHE,
Peachum, Mr. UNIACK,
Lockit, Mr. M. KEANE,
Filch, Sir JOHN CARDEN,
Waiter, Mr. J. CARDEN.
Macheath's Gang, *Messrs. P. Cardin, Pery, Nugent, Hatton, and Major Meek.*

Mrs. Peachum, Mrs. KEILY,
Lucy, Mrs. COCHLAN,
And Polly, Mrs. MUSGRAVE.

9 – Playbill for Lord Grandison's theatre at Dromana, 17th December 1787

10 – Admission ticket for the 'First night, Decemr 14' at Dromana Theatre, signed by Lord Grandison

(both courtesy Public Record Office of Northern Ireland)

Dromana, county Waterford

In August 1787, the *Dublin Evening Post* reported that 'a very beautiful theatre is now erecting' at Dromana, the Earl of Grandison's seat in Waterford, remarking that the 'rage for private dramatic exhibitions appears to spread to the furthest parts of the Kingdom'.[131] By October, a London newspaper was able to report that Lord

Grandison's theatre, 'in the county of Waterford ... is by far the finest establishment of the kind: in every point of dimensions of the Theatre (56 feet by 24), above ten changes of scenery, and, what is better than all, the perfection of his Company'.[132] Later that year, on 14th December, the band in the theatre in Dromana saluted the arrival of a very distinguished guest, Prince William Henry, later Duke of Clarence (1765-1837).[133] The prince's arrival was greeted with a rendition of 'God Save the King', and, at the conclusion of the play, accompanied by the audience 'in full chorus', they played 'Rule Britannia'.[134] A ball and supper followed. The plays performed that evening were Thomas Otway's *Venice Preserved* (1682) and Frances Brooke's *Rosina* (1783) (Plate 10). The Earl of Grandison, presumably out of deference to the Prince to whom he was host, did not take part himself, but appeared three days later in another double bill, Sir John Vanbrugh and Cibber Colley's *The Provok'd Husband* (1728) and John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (Plate 9). Most of the same people performed in the two evenings' productions. Among them were John Crosbie, 2nd Earl of Glandore, Edmond H Pery, later 1st Earl of Limerick, and George Ogle, MP for county Wexford.

Theatricals in other houses

Plays were performed in houses around the country. In all cases they were for entertainment, but productions varied in the degree of sophistication achieved. Little is known of those at Sir Vere Hunt's seat, Curragh Chase in county Limerick, at which the 23rd Knight of Glin, John Bateman FitzGerald, took part.[135] Dorothea Herbert describes the 'fun and merry house' at Castle Blunden in Kilkenny in the 1780s, where, besides 'boating, card playing, music, dancing or romping' in the evenings, the young people put on 'small plays'.[136] In 1780, she, with her family and friends, also used 'Mrs Jephson's large parlour' as a makeshift theatre for a play by Charles Dibdin called *The Padlock* (1768): 'we made a real farce of it – we had only some old Bed Curtains for scenery and everything else suitable to them.' Their audience consisted of their 'friend Mr Billy Galwey and Mr Roukee our drawing Master'.[137] Herbert also provides an entertaining description of a production in her parent's home in Carrick-on-Suir in the early 1780s, where the 'theatre' was in the garret; her job was to paint the scenes:

> all the money we could rap or run was expended in Canvas, Whiting, Gambouge, Stone Blue and Oil for the Painter – and many a time the poor Boys denied themselves a halfpennyworth of ... Gingerbread to devote their little pocket Money to the Theatre – We got a friend to dig up a skull in the Church Yard ... My Father's old black Cassocks served for hangings ... We had the whole stage decorated with Pictures, flower pots Ribbons Shells Moss and Lobster Claws ... we Limited our Audience to the Carshores, Jephsons, Mr Rankin and ... others ... Our Prompter not yet out of his spelling Book miscalled his Words or lost his place – The gallant gay Lothario grew sulky and refused to act his Part when the brave Horatio tilted him

> too roughly – The venerable Sciolto burst out laughing just in the act of introducing the lost Calista to the dead Body of her Lover - Calista and Lavinia fought desperately behind the scenes about change of Dresses – and finally the Candle snuffers set the Stage on fire.[138]

A less primitive production was called for to celebrate the completion of work by the architect James Wyatt at Westport House, county Mayo, in 1783, when John Denis Browne, 3rd Earl of Altamont, invited Richard and Elizabeth Martin of Dangan, county Galway, to take part in a round of festivities and put on a play. A large room was converted into a theatre with 'a raised stage, gallery, scenery and magnificent chandeliers', where *Douglas* was performed with the Martins taking part. Richard Martin, MP and High Sheriff of Galway, opened his own theatre, Kirwan's Lane Theatre, later that year in August, with productions of *Douglas* and *All the world's a stage*. The celebrated United Irishman Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-1798), who shared the Martins' passion for amateur dramatics, and who was at the time tutor to Martin's younger brothers, made his public debut as an actor in this double bill. It is not clear whether he also took part in the play at Westport House.[139]

The entertainment ordered by Edward Stratford, 2nd Earl of Aldborough, at Belan House, Ballitore, county Kildare, to celebrate his homecoming with his new wife in about 1788, was a rather serious affair. Writing to his agent at Belan, he wished the bridal party to be

> received at Ballitore by a small corps of Light Horse, at Stratford by a ditto of Light Foot, at Baltinglass, by a ditto of Artillery, and escorted from thence to Belan by a ditto of Grenadiers and Light Horse ... I also wish to entertain them while at Belan with two Tragedies,[140] two Comedies, two Musical and two other farces, the choice I leave to yourselves, but beg you'll all be up in your parts, and no disappointment.[141]

Undoubtedly, theatricals in many other houses were taken just as seriously. A 'splendid and plentiful' supper was served at 'Counsellor Lyster's on Summer-hill' in June 1789, after performances of Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775), and James Townley's *High Life below Stairs* (1759), put on by 'a select party of ladies and gentlemen' that included members of the Lyster family. Counsellor Lyster played his part 'in good stile ... energy and force without extravagance' according to a magazine report of the occasion.[142] The poet Thomas Moore remembers that Alicia Le Fanu, sister of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, played the part of Nicholas Rowe's eponymous heroine in his play, Jane Shore, 'with considerable success' at the 'private theatre' in Lady Borrowes' house, Kildare Street, Dublin.[143] At the same theatre, in a repeat performance of the play in March 1790, the heroine was played by Samuel Whyte's daughter, who was, as Moore recalls, 'a very handsome and well-educated young person, while I myself – at that time about 11 years of age – recited the epilogue.'[144]

At Roebuck Castle, Lord Trimleston's seat in Dundrum, county Dublin, a French play, Alexis Piron's *La Metromanie* (1738), was performed in 1795 in which his lordship, together with some friends, played.[145] It appears that it took place in a room in the castle where 'a neat and commodious theatre was fitted up ... for the reception of about a hundred friends'.[146]

By the end of the eighteenth century, some of the foremost figures involved in staging private theatricals were caught up in the unfolding political events that led to the Rebellion of 1798, and, ultimately, to the Act of Union in 1800. Theobald Wolfe Tone, Lord Edward FitzGerald, Viscount O'Neill of Shane's Castle and Luke Gardiner were among those who lost their lives at this time. In spite of this, and in the best tradition of the theatrical maxim that 'the show must go on', Maria Edgeworth wrote to her cousin in November 1798 from Edgeworthstown that she and her father were writing a comedy, called *Whim for Whim*, and that her father was 'making a charming theatre in the room over his study – it will be twice as large as old Poz's little theatre in the dining room.' The play was performed twice in January 1799 to 'great applause'. Her stepmother painted the scenery and her father's mechanism for it was described as 'most ingenious'.[147] It is from Maria's letters that we also learn of the theatrical productions at Castle Forbes in 1805, when the Edgeworth family saw a play in which the Ladies Elizabeth and Adelaide Forbes and Lord Rancliffe (who married Lady Elizabeth in 1807), acted, and again, in November 1813, when Maria noted that Lord Rancliffe acted 'admirably'.[148]

The rather heady days of domestic theatricals were drawing to a close, and after the Act of Union in 1800 the excitement waned. But there was a swansong – the extravagant theatricals held at Mountjoy Forest, county Tyrone, between 1808 and 1812. But before looking at these, there are two other domestic locations in which performances were held in the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century that are worth a glance. A dramatic reading, followed by a little game-playing, was held in 1810 at Killinure, county Westmeath,[149] 'the seat of Major Murray, a Scotchman of large fortune, who made his house the most pleasant in the neighbourhood'. Here,

> a party of dramatic amateurs assembled to *read* Colman's 'Jealous Wife'. The principal characters were sustained by Lord and Lady Castlemain, Lady Ann Gregory, Mrs Murray, Counsellor Hogan ... We retained our theatrical names after the reading was concluded, and any one of the party addressing his friends by their real title was subject to fine.[150]

A playbill for the 'Turf-house Theatre', Bessborough, county Kilkenny, informed members of the public that 'Rustic's Plays' would be performed there on 2nd May 1815. 'The comic opera of the Review or Wags of Windsor' was followed by 'a few Comic Songs, to conclude with the farce of the Irishman in London, or the Happy African'. As the evening was open to the public, the playbill notes the time of the performance (7.30, doors open one hour before), where tickets could be purchased, as well as the seat prices: 'Boxes' (5s), 'Pit' (3s 4d), 'Back Pit' (2s 6d) and 'Gallery' (1s 8d). They indicate a fairly

sizeable location, possibly a renovated barn among the outbuildings of the Earl of Bessborough's eponymous house in Piltown.[151]

Rash, county Tyrone

This account of private domestic theatricals in Ireland concludes with a brief look at those held in Mountjoy Forest in the townland of Rash,[152] part of the Mountjoy Estate in county Tyrone, owned by Charles John Gardiner, 2nd Viscount Mountjoy (1782-1829). He was the son of Luke Gardiner, a veteran of the amateur stage, and was created 1st Earl of Blessington in 1816. In the early nineteenth century, his annual income was said to be £30,000.[153] Mountjoy spent a great deal of money at Rash around 1807, when he extended his kitchen and wine cellars and erected a 'spacious and elegantly decorated theatre' for which he provided props 'and a suitable wardrobe of magnificent theatrical dresses for it'; these improvements were described by his tenants in 1855 as 'a terrible waste of money'.[154] The productions were sometimes professional, with actors and actresses brought from Dublin and London, but frequently they were amateur, or rather the gentlemen were, while the ladies were always professional actresses. These women were apparently lodged at the house of the schoolmistress, close to the avenue leading to the house.

The entertainment was held usually in the autumn during the shooting season, and lasted for three or four weeks, during which time no expense was spared, with field sports, parties and theatricals laid on. No details of the plays or the players have come to light except that Lord Mountjoy enjoyed taking part.[155] Another likely performer at theatricals staged in Rash was Mountjoy's friend and neighbour, John James Hamilton, 1st Marquess of Abercorn (1756-1818), who had acted in at least one play at his own seat, Baronscourt, county Tyrone, in 1793.[156] From their correspondence it is evident that they shared this interest.[157] Occasionally the gentlemen brought their wives to Rash, and, for his guests, Mountjoy fitted up and furnished temporary accommodation. For the rest of the year, Rash was, as the Countess of Blessington's biographer describes it, 'a dull, solitary lifeless locality, in the midst of a forest and some fourscore miles from the metropolis'.[158] The joys and excitement of the season at Rash soon bored Mountjoy, and he returned to live in England.[159] The last season was in 1812, after which Mountjoy Forest and the theatre were allowed to go to ruin. Mountjoy did not confine himself to Rash while in Ireland; he apparently liked roles in which he was 'gorgeously apparelled' and took part in a few of the Kilkenny theatricals in which he was able indulge his taste – for example, as the Green Knight in Thomas John Dibdin's romance *Valentine and Orson* (1804).[160]

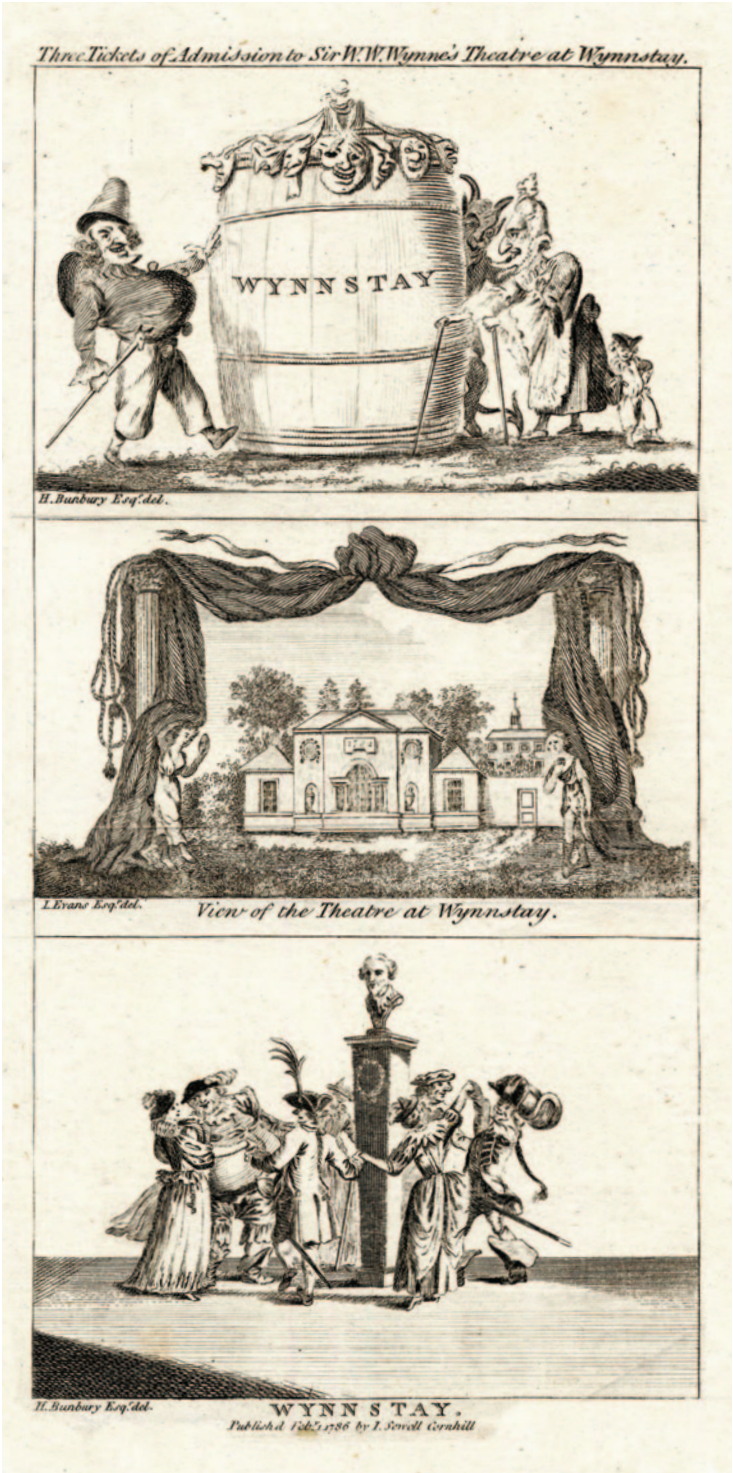
In England and Wales too, the popularity of private theatricals was on the wane. Mountjoy's friend Lord Abercorn's last production at his English seat Bentley Priory, Middlesex, was in 1806;[161] at Wynnstay, near Wrexham, in Wales, they ended in 1810,[162] but at Woburn Abbey, Bedfordshire, seat of the Dukes of Bedford, they continued until 1857, when the theatre was dismantled. Including Rash, all of these locations had purpose-built theatres, the subject of the next section.

IV – THEATRE BUILDING OR FIT-UP?

Where possible, mention has been made of where plays took place either within or without the house. It has been noted that they were held in the open air, in a domestic theatre, a converted outbuilding (as suggested at Bessborough), or in a room 'fitted up' for the occasion. The paucity of visual evidence of these locations is frustrating; the tantalising textual descriptions that follow are all that the historian has to work with.

The earliest reference to a built theatre is at Stillorgan House, county Dublin (begun 1695), where one of the pavilions was reputed either to be a 'miniature theatre' or to have one within it.[163] A ground-floor plan of the pavilions provides no such information (one was certainly a stable), but it may have been located on the first floor (a dormered attic).[164] From Rosenfeld's comprehensive account of English and Welsh theatricals, some interesting Irish connections have emerged regarding purpose-built domestic theatres. The most extravagant of these in England was that at Wargrave, Berkshire, where Richard Barry, 7th Earl of Barrymore, whose family seat was at Castle Lyons, county Cork, built 'the most splendid theatre in the kingdom' at a cost of £60,000 (Plate 11). This was reputed to have been an exact model of Sir John Vanbrugh's design for the King's Theatre in the Haymarket, London, and seated 400 people.[165] The English architect James Gandon, best known for his riverside set pieces in Dublin – the Customs House and the Four Courts

11 – Interior of Lord Barrymore's theatre at Wargrave, Berkshire
(from General Magazine & Impartial Review, 1787)



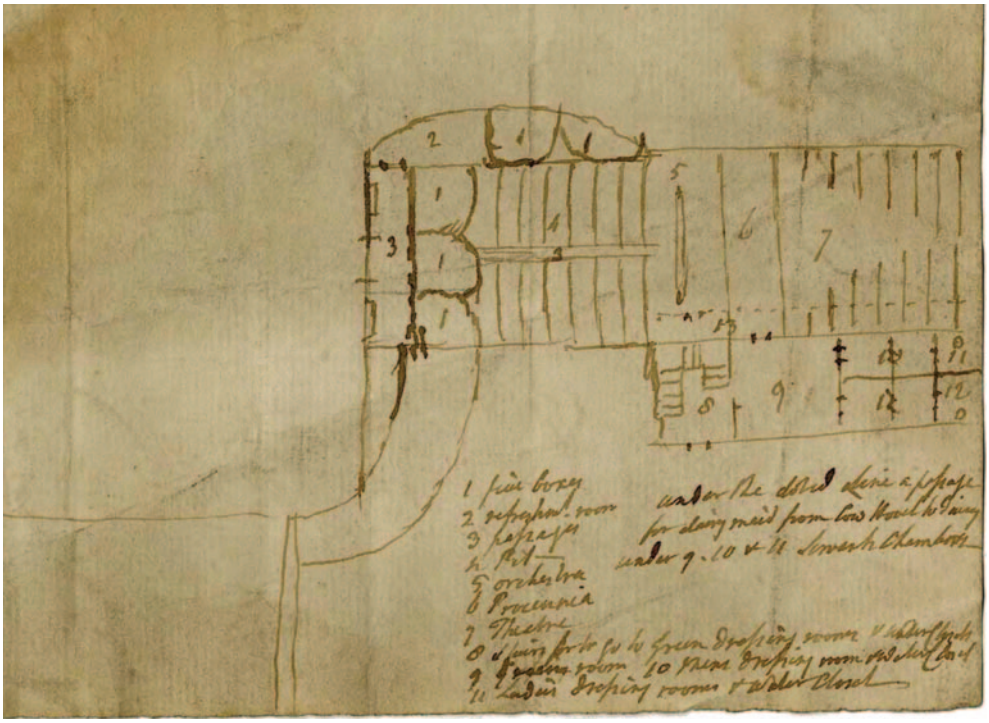
12 – Admission ticket to Wynnstay Theatre, Denbighshire, showing its façade, which was probably designed by the Irish architect James Gandon
(© Trustees of the British Museum)

– was paid in 1772 for 'making a Design of a Theater' at Wynnstay in Denbighshire, the seat of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn (Plate 12).[166] Undoubtedly, there must have been a degree of competitiveness among these builders of theatres: in Lady Morgan's play *O'Donnel* (1814), the character of Lady Lorton is planning theatricals, but 'she had, however a theatre to build, and Lady Llanberis was determined to outdo her and has almost finished her own.'[167] Lord Abercorn's theatricals at Bentley Priory (noted above), were performed in the saloon, which measured fifty by thirty feet and was converted into a theatre, described as 'admirably fitted up ... with boxes appropriately designed ... elegant cut glass chandeliers ... a very complete orchestra and a full band added much to the effect'.[168]

While there is evidence to support the fact that a number of domestic theatres were built in Ireland during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it is not clear that this was their sole purpose. The design of such a space, sometimes referred to as a 'Great Room', came at a time in the second half of the eighteenth century when entertaining large numbers of guests at masquerades, balls and concerts was fashionable, and a marked increase in large extensions to houses in order to facilitate the trend is evident.[169] It was not difficult to transform such a space into a temporary theatre. Shane's Castle was one example. The same might apply to the theatre in Major George Bryan's[170] early nineteenth-century house, Jenkinstown, county Kilkenny, described in 1829 as 'of elegant construction and sufficient magnitude', and where amateur theatricals were held.[171] It is, likely, however, that the building at Rash, though so rarely used, was purpose-built, and it is frustrating that no description of it has come to light.

There is no ambiguity about the theatre at Aldborough House, Dublin (begun 1793), built by Edward Augustus Stratford, 2nd Earl of Aldborough, who also had a theatre at his country seat, Belan. An architectural sketch for his Dublin theatre, in the Earl's hand, is of interest, not least because it is the only known drawing for a domestic theatre in Ireland (Plate 13).[172] Although rudimentary in execution, the sketch provides a great deal of detail, showing five boxes, a refreshment room, the pit, orchestra, proscenium and backstage area, a green room, and two dressing rooms with water closets.[173] As built, the theatre was a scaled-down version of this accomplished design. It formed one of the two pavilions (the other, since demolished, contained the chapel) linked to the house by curved quadrants in the Palladian style.[174] The building still stands, but is now much altered internally.

By far the most popular location for the presentation of a play was in a room converted temporarily for that purpose – a 'fit-up'. In the 1760s, Richard Edgeworth, father of Maria, was asked by Sir Richard Delaval of Seaton Delaval Hall in Northumberland to fit up a theatre in his house at Westminster, London, where the Duke of York acted in amateur theatricals.[175] In Ireland, the actor and portrait painter John Dowling Herbert (1762/3-1837) described an encounter with Colonel Mansergh St George, who invited Herbert to spend a few months at his country seat, where he was 'fitting up a private theatre', in order to paint scenery.[176] In his dual capacity as actor/painter, Herbert was also



13 – Aldborough House, Dublin: plan of theatre in pavilion attached by curved corridor to house, probably in the hand of the Earl of Aldborough

key: (1) five boxes; (2) refreshment room; (3) passages; (4) pit; (5) orchestra; (6) proscenia; (7) theatre; (8) staircase to Green Room (9); (10, 11) ladies' and mens' dressing rooms with WCs
(courtesy Public Record Office of Northern Ireland)

invited by William Smyth MP to his home, Drumcree House, county Westmeath, where he too had fitted up a private theatre. According to Herbert, Smyth 'would feel obliged if I would lend my aid to forward a play then in progress, the parts not quite filled, [and] that if I brought my palette and colours he could promise me some portraits, so that I should not be entirely idle.' Herbert found the theatre 'fitted up with taste; the scenery painted by Miss Smyth, who had been taught to draw by West'.[177]

There was advice – for the rich – on how to transform a hall or saloon into a theatre, such as that offered by the dramatist Richard Cumberland (1732-1811):

> flanked with interior columns and surrounded by galleries [they] would with the aid of proper draperies or scenery in the inter-columniations take a rich and elegant appearance, and at the same time the music might be so disposed in the gallery, as to produce a most animating effect.[178]

For the not-quite-so-rich, there was advice on how to transform a drawing room or library for the same purpose.[179] It seems likely that Lady Borrowes' Kildare Street theatre was a converted space, as was the suite of rooms at Ely House. The 'Mignonette Theatre' at

Marlay, because it was mostly for the amusement of the numerous La Touche children, might have been a converted outbuilding.

V – CRITICISM

In the course of this article, reports on private theatricals quoted from contemporary newspapers and magazines have given a very positive, if rather exaggerated, reaction to the performances. But there were also many critics, not least from the professional theatre managers. They worried that rival, privately staged performances were robbing them of their upper-class audiences. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, writing in 1777, was concerned at 'the number of private Plays at Gentlemen's seats', suggesting that the upper classes felt 'excluded from our Theatres',[180] and that this would generate less income for the individual establishments. In 1792, the *Dublin Evening Post* claimed that private theatricals were injurious 'to the public theatrical entertainments, in which alone the public are interested. Professional merit in that line must suffer, while the attention of those best able to reward it, is thus diverted from its proper channel.' By 1797 they had become so popular that they had 'run away with all the box company' and 'had practically put to rout the performers in the public playhouse'.[181]

The main thrust of these attacks, however, was that private theatricals led to debauchery and immorality, to innocence corrupted and licentiousness, given an opportunity. But these were accusations that had always been levied against the professional theatre. We have also looked at the criticism of young men acting in school plays; similar criticism was directed against adult amateur thespians, women in particular. In 1790, the Public Advertiser reported that Viscount Clonmell, Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench for Ireland (1784-98), remarked that there were

> so many love-scenes realized ... that their comedies generally terminated in a tragedy, in the Court of King's-Bench! The phrase private theatre is very properly applied to those dramatic efforts made in domestic circles, where the performers get such a knack at private acting that they frequently do everything in private.[182]

In 1812, Edward Wakefield fretted about the effect that 'reading loose and licentious plays' might have on a woman, suggesting that it might throw doubt on her ability to 'make such a wife as any man of sense would desire, or be the proper superintendent of a virtuous family'. Noting the enthusiasm for private theatricals, he criticised 'the late Lord O'Neil [*sic*]'for introducing dissipation into the neighbourhood, and praised the action of his heir who 'razed [Shane's Castle theatre] to the ground'. That said, Wakefield had 'little objection to them, could they be confined entirely to the highest classes, as they might divert their attention from unworthy objects, and abstract them from pursuits prejudicial to society'.[183] Singled out for criticism in a 1792 pamphlet, politicians and public representatives who held 'employments of great trust and confidence' might

neglect the business of the nation by acting in plays, 'for it is well known no player could ever yet attend to the Theatre and any serious business at one and the same time.'[184] This may well be a fair criticism, but there was a positive side to the performance of private theatricals that benefited the theatre itself and the public in general.

If the professional theatres in Ireland suffered a loss of income as a result of the upper classes providing their own entertainment at home, there were other gains. Firstly, private theatricals had the effect of improving the status of the actor, many of whom were asked to coach the players, supervise the production, and were invited to take part, as Mrs Siddons did at Shane's Castle. Actors like Sheridan, Macklin and Garrick supported these ventures by their attendance, at the very least, and they in turn were entertained and respected by the elite who vied with each other for their company. Secondly, the private theatre was often a site of technical and artistic innovation: batten lights were first introduced at Wynnstay (described above); a lens-and-reflectors system – described by Rosenfeld as 'placed at the extremity of the boxes on each side of the stage [which] served to illuminate the proscenium' rather than footlights[185] – was first created in the theatre at Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire (built in 1787), while the first effort at historical accuracy in costume was also in the private theatre.[186] Lastly, is the rather important fact that theatre was brought from the metropolis to the provinces, giving a wider audience and developing an appreciation for the dramatic arts. Edith Somerville's eponymous heroine took it upon herself to bring some culture to her village in *Mrs Maloney's amateur theatricals* (1885).[187]

While private theatrical performances were enormously popular in the later decades of the eighteenth century, and rather petered out in the early decades of the following one, they did not die out entirely. Putting on plays in one's home became a Victorian pastime too and evolved into the twentieth-century's penchant for 'party pieces' at family gatherings.[188]

CONCLUSIONS

As in Britain, the spectacle of theatre had its beginnings at the royal court. At the Irish viceregal court there were a number of courtiers, such as Luke Gardiner, his deputy James Worsdale, and Robert Jephson, who were greatly interested in the theatre. Viceroys such as Lord Wharton, the Duke of Dorset and Lord Townshend were also enthusiasts, who encouraged and patronised the theatre in Dublin and whose presence at the patent theatres was of much benefit to their survival.[189] Many of these, as we have seen, had acting ambitions of their own.

One reason for the rise in popularity of private theatricals in Ireland was the raucous behaviour of audiences at the Dublin theatre. This had the effect of discouraging the attendance of the upper classes, who took the opportunity of removing themselves to their homes where they could indulge their own theatrical ambitions. We have also looked

at the important part played by schools in Dublin, where students, as part of the curriculum, put on plays under the direction of people like Thomas Sheridan and Samuel Whyte. Sheridan and Whyte, in turn, greatly assisted the theatricals performed at Rathfarnham Castle and at Carton.

Private theatricals were held in gardens, houses and private theatres, and sometimes in purpose-built theatres. The 'golden age' of amateur theatricals in Ireland coincided with that in England and Wales, and there must have been an amount of advice and information moving both ways across the Irish Sea. In this respect, the Conollys and the FitzGeralds led the way, and many of their friends, as we have seen, were participants in their productions and in others. Not many built theatres, but rather 'fitted-up' a suitable room, and the Countess of Ely seems to have given over an entire floor in her town house for that purpose. Undoubtedly, many more houses or estates dabbled in the art, which have yet to come to light, but we can be certain that the fashion spread all over the country, emanating from Dublin Castle and the viceregal court. Many of the productions were highly sophisticated, such as those at Phoenix Park, at Shane's Castle and at Rash, but for all of these there were probably a great number of less urbane presentations.

For those involved, particularly young women like Maria Edgeworth and Dorothea Herbert, it was fun. Putting on plays occupied the participants for weeks, ideal for long winter's days and evenings in the country. They were social events, usually accompanied by a supper and/or a ball, creating an evening that lasted up to twelve hours long and making the sometimes long and hazardous journey to attend them worth the effort. In bringing people together, they had the effect of stimulating artistic endeavours and cultivating the various arts of the theatre.[190]

A great deal of work went into the venture – arranging a venue, choosing a play and players, painting scenery, organising props and rehearsals, all so well described in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814). Then there was the making or putting together of costumes which, for Edgeworth and Herbert, was a most entertaining activity. Many plays were edited with impunity: the Margravine of Anspach, who wrote and acted in plays at her theatre in Brandenburgh House, London, 'reduced The Provok'd Wife to three acts with cuts that ensured that her role of Lady Brute should be the principal one', and when *Douglas* was performed in Camberwell, London, the lady of the house provided that tragedy with a happy ending.[191]

Finally, just how good were these performances? It is very difficult to get an even-handed view of them. Lord Henry FitzGerald was generally accepted as being a very good actor, and if we accept the word of the experienced theatregoer Louisa Conolly, Robert Jephson and Mrs Elizabeth Gardiner were creditable performers. It would be fair to say that the main faults would have been 'inaudibility, rapidity of speech, self-consciousness and awkwardness'.[192] As a spectacle it must have been worth seeing, as no expense was spared regarding the accoutrements; they had the advantage of a respectful audience, and unlike the actors in public theatres, did not have to almost shout to make themselves heard above a din. Added to that was the prospect of further entertainment

when the plays were over. In Joseph Farington's diary, a comment on Lady Caher's performance at Lord Abercorn's private theatre in 1803, where she played opposite the portrait painter Thomas (later Sir Thomas) Lawrence, might sum up the attitude of these elite amateurs. She was 'very imperfect in her part, which was a disadvantage to Lawrence, who assisted her as well as he could. Her Ladyship, however, did not seem embarrassed by her difficulties, but went on with perfect self possession.'[193]

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to David White and to Charles Benson who have probably forgotten how helpful they were when, some years ago, I expressed my interest in private or domestic theatricals that had come about through my study of the Irish country house. David's recommendation of John Dowling Herbert's book, *Irish varieties for the last fifty years*, and Charles' list of references that he had compiled on the subject led me to further research on this enjoyable subject. I also wish to thank A.C. Elias, Livia Hurley, the late Knight of Glin, Ross McCarthy, Edward McParland and Aidan O'Boyle.

ENDNOTES

1 Quoted in Frances Gerard, *Some celebrated Irish beauties of the last century* (London, 1895) xix.
2 Sybil Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis* (London, 1978) 7. Included are small, privately owned theatres.
3 Stillorgan House, county Dublin; Aldborough House, Dublin; Jenkinstown, county Kilkenny; Altamont, county Carlow; and Drumcree House, county Westmeath.
4 At this time the only venues large enough for concerts in the first quarter of the century were Dublin Castle, the cathedrals and Smock Alley Theatre. Brian Boydell, 'Music 1700-1850', in T.W. Moody and W.E. Vaughan (eds), *A New History of Ireland*, 9 vols (Oxford, 1986-2005) IV, 568-628.
5 Edward McParland, *Public Architecture in Ireland 1680-1760* (New Haven and London, 2001) 102.
6 *ibid*., 101.
7 Mrs Mary Pendarves later married the Dean of Down, Dr Patrick Delany, in 1743. A highly intelligent and talented woman, she became a chronicler of eighteenth-century social life in Ireland and England through her autobiography, Lady Llanover (ed.), *The autobiography and correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany*, 3 vols (London, 1861).
8 The cast included Mary, daughter of Lord Molesworth, who later became the countess of Belvedere, and Lord Kingsland. Angelique Day (ed.), *Letters from Georgian Ireland* (Belfast, 1991) 255.
9 Robert Hitchcock, *An historical view of the Irish stage from the earliest period down to the close of the season 1788*, 2 vols (Dublin, 1788) I, 75.
10 Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, *Ireland's Painters 1600-1940* (New Haven and London, 2002) 48; William H. Grattan Flood, *A History of Irish Music* (Dublin, 1905) 273-74.
11 J.T. Gilbert, *A History of the City of Dublin*, 3 vols (Dublin (1861), 1972) I, 72.
12 Maria Luddy (ed.), *The Diary of Mary Mathew* (Tipperary, 1991) 52-53.
13 John Greene, 'The Repertory of The Dublin Theatres, 1720-1745', in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland / Iris an dá chultúr*, 2, 1987, 133-48.
14 Gillian Russell, *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics and Society 1793-1815* (Oxford, 1995) 17.

15 Alnwick Archives, notebook of Lady Northumberland 1763, 121/11, Sept/Oct 1763. I am grateful to Dr Edward McParland for his notes on this.
16 Russell, *The Theatres of War*, 124.
17 Tighearnan Mooney and Fiona White, 'The gentry's winter season', in David Dickson (ed.), *Dublin: The Gorgeous Mask* (Dublin, 1987) 1-16.
18 Quoted in James Kelly, *Henry Flood: patriots and politics in eighteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1998) 177.
19 A.C. Elias Jr (ed.), *Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington*, 2 vols (Athens, GA, 1997) II, 613.
20 *Dublin Weekly Journal*, 3rd December, 1748, quoted in La Tourette Stockwell, *Dublin Theatres and Theatre Customs 1637-1820* (Tennessee, 1938) 197.
21 Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre 1601-2000* (Cambridge, 2002) 58.
22 Mooney and White, 'The gentry's winter season', 1-16.
23 John O'Keeffe, *Recollections of the life of John O'Keefe*, 2 vols (London, 1826) I, 288.
24 *London Post*, 5th November 1776. Quoted in Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis*, 11.
25 Linda Kelly, *Richard Brinsley Sheridan: A Life* (London, 1997) 3.
26 Esther K. Sheldon, *Thomas Sheridan of Smock-Alley* (Princeton, NJ, 1967) 7.
27 Kelly, *Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, 3.
28 Quoted in Sheldon, *Thomas Sheridan of Smock-Alley*, 13.
29 T.H. Vail Motter, 'Garrick and the Private Theatres: With a List of Amateur Performances in the eighteenth Century', *English Literary History*, 11, no. 1, 1994, 63-75.
30 M.D. Jephson, *An Anglo-Irish Miscellany: the Jephsons of Mallo*w (Dublin, 1964) 301.
31 Gilbert, *A History of the City of Dublin*, III, 262; Jephson, A*n Anglo-Irish Miscellany*, 301; Terence Brown's entry on Edmund Malone in Brian Lalor (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Ireland* (Dublin, 2003).
32 Jephson, *An Anglo-Irish Miscellany*, 301.
33 *ibid*.
34 Quoted in Stockwell, *Dublin Theatres*, 353, note 21.
35 Gilbert, *A History of the City of Dublin*, III, 201.
36 Gerard, *Some celebrated Irish beauties*, 165, note 1. Whyte charged three guineas for eight visits to students' homes.
37 Andrew Carpenter's entry on Whyte in Lalor (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Ireland*.
38 Gilbert, *A History of the City of Dublin*, III, 204.
39 Quoted in Stockwell, *Dublin Theatres*, 353, note 21.
40 This may have been Stretche's Theatre, mentioned by Mooney and White, 'The gentry's winter season', 1-16, and described by O'Keeffe as built by 'Stretch' to exhibit his puppet show. O'Keeffe, *Recollections*, I, 165.
41 Hitchcock, *An historical view of the Irish stage*, II, 209.
42 *ibid*. and Gerard, *Some celebrated Irish beauties*, 168.
43 Brought up in Dublin, daughters of Sir William Montgomery of Scotland, Barbara later married the Hon. John Beresford, Elizabeth married Luke Gardiner, and Anne became the wife of Viscount Townshend. They were famously portrayed in a painting of 1773 by Sir Joshua Reynolds, commissioned by Luke Gardiner, entitled *Three ladies adorning a tree of Hymen*.
44 Gerard, *Some celebrated Irish beauties*, 168.
45 O'Keeffe, *Recollections*, I, 304-5.
46 [R Power] (ascribed to), *The private theatre of Kilkenny, with introductory observations on other private theatres in Ireland, before it was opened* (privately pub., 1825) 1.
47 Kelly, *Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, 3.

[48] The banker David La Touche III held amateur theatricals at his town house on St Stephen's Green, Dublin, and at his seat, Marlay, in Rathfarnham, county Dublin. Daniel Beaumont, 'La Touche, David III', in James McGuire, James Quinn (eds) *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009) *http/www.dib.cambridge.org/quicksearch.do,* accessed 16th December 2013.

[49] Gerard, *Some celebrated Irish beauties*, 205.

[50] Letter dated 16th April 1752, quoted in Sergio Benedetti, *The Milltowns: a family reunion* (Dublin, 1997) 4, note 24.

[51] The original house must have been called 'Lurgan'. Brownlow House was built from 1836. Mark Bence-Jones, *A Guide to Irish Country Houses* (London (1978), 1988) 49.

[52] Kane O'Hara (1722-1782) also wrote *The Two Misers*, *Tom Thumb: a burletta* and *Tom the Great*, a burlesque tragedy in two acts, the latter two adaptations. There is a portrait etching of him by Edmund Dorrell dated 1802 in the National Portrait Gallery in London. He was a friend of Garret Wesley, the future Earl of Mornington, with whom he founded the Academy of Music in 1757. Grattan Flood, *A History of Irish Music*, 296.

[53] *ibid*., 299.

[54] Undated quote in Knight of Glin and John Cornforth, 'Killruddery', *Country Life*, 162, no. 4176, 14th July 1977, 146-49. This possibly refers to Lady Catherine Brabazon (1770-1847), daughter of the 8th Earl of Meath, who married Rev. Francis Brownlow in 1799.

[55] Masques were a form of amateur histrionic entertainment, according to the *OED*, popular at Court and amongst the nobility in England during the latter part of the sixteenth century and first half of the seventeenth century. It consisted of dancing and acting in dumbshows, performers being masked and habited in character; later it included dialogue, usually poetical, and song.

[56] Finola O'Kane, *Landscape Design in Eighteenth-Century Ireland* (Cork, 2004) 147.

[57] *ibid*.

[58] Harold V. Routh, 'The Theatre in the Eighteenth Century and its Audiences', in A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller (eds), *The Cambridge History of English and American Literature in 18 Volumes* (New York, 1907-21) XI, ch. xii; http://www.bartleby.com/221/1202.html, accessed 03 August 2013.

[59] Brian FitzGerald, *Lady Louisa Conolly* (London, 1950) 40. However, in a letter to her sister Sarah of 15th December that year, Lady Louisa Conolly states 'our staircase is finished all to putting up the banisters. The Gallery will be done in a fortnight' (Irish Architectural Archive, Bunbury Letters 94/136, Box 1). This would indicate that the decoration of the gallery commenced either towards the end of 1759, by which time Sir William Chambers had submitted designs for 'finishing the Great Room' (see A.M. Keller, 'The Long Gallery of Castletown House', *Bulletin of the Irish Georgian Society*, XXII, 1979, 5), or early 1760. While it does not necessarily preclude it as a location for the play, it seems unlikely.

[60] Irish Architectural Archive, Bunbury Letters 94/136, Box 1. From Louisa Conolly at Carton to her sister Sarah, 30th December 1760.

[61] Gerard, *Some celebrated Irish beauties*, 200-201.

[62] A Captain Morris also took part in the production of *Midas* at William Brownlow's house, 'Lurgan', in 1759 or 1760.

[63] Epilogues and prologues were very much part of private theatricals. These had the effect of giving a 'contemporary resonance' to the occasion, where criticism could be passed on current preoccupations. They gave prospective poets among the party an opportunity to display their skills. Kelly, *Henry Flood*, 177.

[64] Thomas Moore, 'Essay on Private Theatricals' (1827) in R.H. Shepherd (ed.), *Prose and Verse by Thomas Moore* (London, 1878) 173.

[65] Stella Tillyard, *Aristocrats: Caroline, Emily, Louisa and Sarah Lennox 1740-1832* (London, 1994).
[66] Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis*, 35.
[67] The theatricals at Richmond House were held between April 1787 and June 1788, after which time they were discontinued. M.M. Reese, *Goodwood's Oak* (London, 1987) 215.
[68] Quote from Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis*, 44. The theatre was destroyed by fire in 1791.
[69] Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis*, 124. An image of this, the 'Winterslow House Theatre', appears in Arnold Hare, *The Georgian Theatre in Wessex* (London, 1958).
[70] Tillyard, *Aristocrats*, 182.
[71] Brian FitzGerald (ed.), *Correspondence of Emily Duchess of Leinster 1731-1814*, 3 vols (Dublin, 1949) I, 69.
[72] Brian FitzGerald, *Emily, Duchess of Leinster, 1731-1814: a study of her life and times* (London, 1949) 168.
[73] National Library of Ireland, MS 13,022, Letter from Lady Sophia FitzGerald to her mother, Duchess of Leinster, dated 11th Jan 1794.
[74] FitzGerald, *Emily, Duchess of Leinster*, 138-40.
[75] One of the young actors mentioned by Horace Walpole in a letter to George Montague was sixteen-year-old William Flower, Viscount Ashbrook, Castle Durrow, county Laois. Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis*, 122.
[76] FitzGerald, *Correspondence of Emily Duchess of Leinster*, I, 323.
[77] *ibid*., 120.
[78] O'Kane, *Landscape Design*, 146-47.
[79] Irish Architectural Archive, Bunbury Letters, Louisa to Sarah, 24th September 1771. The Lennox family had no such scruples and the sisters constantly praised and encouraged their childrens' performances.
[80] FitzGerald, Emily, Duchess of Leinster, 183; entry in Sophia's journal in November 1787.
[81] Irish Architectural Archive, Bunbury Letters, Louisa to Sarah, 19th August and 24th September 1771.
[82] O'Kane, *Landscape Design*, 150.
[83] FitzGerald, *Correspondence of Emily Duchess of Leinster*, III, 112.
[84] Gerard, *Some celebrated Irish beauties*, 167. It appears that this large room was built for the purpose of staging private theatre productions. It is mentioned in Henry Grattan, *Memoirs of the life and times of the Rt. Hon. Henry Grattan* (London, 1839) I, 146.
[85] Jephson, *An Anglo-Irish Miscellany*, 304. Jephson was MP for Johnstown 1775-76, Old Leighlin 1777-82 and Granard 1783-88. He was the author of a number of plays performed in Ireland and at Drury Lane Theatre in London, such as *Braganza*, *The Count of Narbonne* and *The Law of Lombardy*.
[86] Leixlip Castle was, at the time, the summer residence of the Irish viceroys.
[87] Grattan, *Memoirs of the life and times*, I, 151.
[88] Gerard, *Some celebrated Irish beauties*, 167.
[89] *ibid*.
[90] Grattan, *Memoirs of the life and times*, I, 154-55.
[91] *Walker's Hibernian Magazine*, January 1778.
[92] [Power], *The private theatre of Kilkenny*, 5-6; *Walker's Hibernian Magazine*, January 1778. The St Legers became familiar names in private theatricals elsewhere, as will be seen.
[93] *Walker's Hibernian Magazine* published an engraving of Mrs Gardiner as Lady Macbeth in their April 1778 issue.
[94] Gerard, *Some celebrated Irish beauties,* 177; *Walker's Hibernian Magazine*, January 1778.
[95] Whyte wrote the epilogue for the performance, spoken by Elizabeth Gardiner. Gerard, *Some cele-*

brated Irish beauties, 178.

96 *ibid*., 167.

97 Christine Casey, *The Buildings of Ireland: Dublin* (New Haven and London, 2005) 301.

98 It is noteworthy that these theatricals in Kilkenny led to the establishment of the Private Theatre of Kilkenny in 1802.

99 Kelly, *Henry Flood*, 177.

100 *ibid*., 438.

101 *ibid*., 177.

102 [Power], *The private theatre of Kilkenny*, 3-4.

103 Moore, 'Essay on Private Theatricals', 173.

104 Grattan, *Memoirs of the life and times*, I, 199-200.

105 [Power], *The private theatre of Kilkenny*, 4.

106 Grattan, *Memoirs of the life and times*, I, 145.

107 Created 1st Viscount O'Neill in October 1795; MP for Randalstown 1760-83 and for county Antrim 1783-93; died June 1798 of wounds during the Rebellion.

108 Bence-Jones, *A Guide to Irish Country Houses*, 257-58.

109 Trinity College Dublin, MS 4026(i), 'Journal of a Tour through part of Ireland begun August 26th 1787'. The wood and canvas refers to the decoration of the room.

110 Charles Topham Bowden, *A Tour through Ireland* (Dublin, 1791) 234.

111 *Dublin Evening Post*, 1st February 1780.

112 *Belfast News Letter*, 8th February 1780, quoted in William Smith Clark, *The Irish Stage in the County Towns 1720 to 1800* (Oxford, 1965) 240-41.

113 Smith Clark, *The Irish Stage*, 240.

114 *ibid*., 258-59.

115 Quoted in Smith Clark, *The Irish Stage*, 258.

116 [Power], *The private theatre of Kilkenny*, 7.

117 Jean Agnew (ed.), *Drennan McTier Letters, 1776-1793*, 3 vols (Dublin 1998) I, letter no. 193, William Drennan, Newry, to Martha McTier, Belfast, January 1786.

118 [Power], *The private theatre of Kilkenny*, 7.

119 *Dublin Evening Post*, 11th May 1786. John Fitzgibbon lived at 6 Ely Place. My thanks to Charles Benson for this reference.

120 *Freeman's Journal*, 20th-22nd April 1786.

121 *Georgian Society Records of Eighteenth-Century Domestic Architecture and Decoration in Dublin*, 5 vols (Dublin, 1909-13) II, 120-21.

122 [Power], *The private theatre of Kilkenny*, 7-8.

123 See Karol Mullaney-Dignam, '"Spacious and splendid": music, dancing and social life at Glin Castle, 1781-1854', *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, XIV, 2011, 16-37.

124 Lord Loftus, created Earl of Ely in 1771, died in 1783, and his widow Anne continued to occupy the house in Ely Place.

125 *Freeman's Journal*, 20th-22nd April 1786.

126 John Bernard, *Retrospections of the Stage*, 2 vols (London, 1830) I, 320.

127 According to the *OED*, the orchestra is defined as 'that part of a theatre ... assigned to the band of performers on musical instruments'.

128 He had founded the Academy of Music in 1757 with the support of Kane O'Hara, author of the play *Midas*.

129 O'Keeffe, *Recollections*, I, 53.

[130] Brownlow and Hamilton were members of Mornington's Musical Academy, and both played in the orchestra at Luke Gardiner's plays in the Ranger's Lodge, Phoenix Park, in 1778. Gilbert, *A History of the City of Dublin*, II, 907.
[131] *Dublin Evening Post*, 21st August 1787.
[132] *London World Fashionable Advertiser*, 2nd and 15th October 1787.
[133] Later still, William IV, 1830-37.
[134] [Power], *The private theatre of Kilkenny*, 7.
[135] Mullaney-Dignam, "Spacious and splendid", 16-37.
[136] *Retrospections of Dorothea Herbert 1770-1806* (Dublin, 1988) 70.
[137] Stockwell, *Dublin Theatres*, 353, note 21.
[138] *Retrospections of Dorothea Herbert*, 170-1.
[139] Shevawn Lynam, H*umanity Dick: a biography of Richard Martin, MP 1754-1834* (London, 1975) 47, 49-50. My thanks to Aidan O'Boyle for this reference.
[140] There is an undated epilogue to the tragedy *Douglas*, held at 'Lord Aldborough's Theatre', in Yale University Library, Folio Pamphlets, 4, 6. It is unclear whether this performance was held at Belan or at Aldborough House in Dublin. Vail Motter, 'Garrick and the Private Theatres', 63-75.
[141] T.U.S. (presumably Sadleir), *Journal of the Kildare Archaeological Society*, VII, 1912-14, 333-34.
[142] *The Gentleman's and London Magazine*, June 1789, 334. My thanks to Charles Benson for this reference.
[143] Lady Borrowes was the widow of Sir Kildare Dixon Borrowes, of Giltown, county Kildare.
[144] Quoted in Gilbert, *History of the City of Dublin*, III, 292.
[145] [Power], *The private theatre of Kilkenny*, 8.
[146] *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, 14th July 1795. My thanks to Charles Benson for this reference.
[147] A.J.C. Hare (ed.), *Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth*, 2 vols (Boston & New York, 1895) I, 65-67.
[148] *ibid*., I, 149, 232-33.
[149] Bence-Jones, *A Guide to Irish Country Houses*, 171. The house was in Athlone, county Westmeath.
[150] Benson Earle Hill, *Recollections of an Artillery Officer*, 2 vols (London 1836) I, 61. My thanks to Rolf Loeber for this reference.
[151] My thanks to Charles Benson for a photocopy of the playbill.
[152] Information on Rash and the theatricals held there is taken from R.R. Madden, *The Literary Life and Correspondence of the Countess of Blessington*, 3 vols (New York, 1855) I.
[153] John Coleman, 'Luke Gardiner 1745-98 an Irish Dilettante', *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, 1999, 161-68.
[154] Madden, *The Literary Life*, I, 54, 55.
[155] *ibid*., 55-57.
[156] Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis*, 154.
[157] PRONI, Abercorn Papers D/623/A/167/9. Letters from Lord Mountjoy to Lord Abercorn, July and August 1811. Lord Abercorn held theatricals at his seat in Middlesex, Bentley Priory, though he did not act in them. Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis*, 154.
[158] Madden, *The Literary Life*, I, 57.
[159] *ibid*., 57-58.
[160] *ibid*., 57.
[161] Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis*, 162.
[162] *ibid*., 93.
[163] Francis Elrington Ball, 'Stillorgan Park and its History', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, Fifth Series, 8, no. 1, 1898, 21-34.

[164] From the Elton Hall Drawings Collection 'Stillorgan Album', Plan of the Principal Floor of Still-Organ House, with the North front, as at present, n.s., n.d. The house, with its steeply pitched roof, tall chimneys and projecting gable fronts, was begun by John Allen MP, afterwards 1st Viscount Allen in 1695. See Elrington Ball, *History of the County of Dublin*, 6 vols (Dublin, 1902) I, 121-22.

[165] Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis*, 18, 24.

[166] McParland notes that this was probably a design for the façade, as the theatre building already existed. Gandon gave lessons in architecture to Sir Watkin between January and May 1771, after which Paul Sandby provided the baronet with lessons in drawing. Edward McParland, *James Gandon: Vitruvius Hibernicus* (London, 1985) 15, note 43.

[167] Lady Morgan (Sydney Owenson), *O'Donnel*, 3 vols (London (1814), 1979) III, 38.

[168] Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis*, 156, 159.

[169] Patricia McCarthy, 'The planning and use of space in Irish houses, 1730-1830', unpublished PhD thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2009.

[170] Bryan's name recurs in the cast lists in [Power], *The private theatre of Kilkenny*.

[171] Bence-Jones, *A Guide to Irish Houses*, 171.

[172] While not a domestic theatre in one sense, there are fascinating drawings executed by the architect James Lewis (*c*.1751-1820) in 1788 for a theatre (unexecuted) in Limerick city, next to the Assembly Rooms on ground donated by John Prendergast Smyth, MP for Limerick (1785-97) and later 1st Viscount Gort. Rather lavish living accommodation was provided within the building for Smyth that included private access to his own box, and while the public gained access to the theatre either from the rear of the building or through the Assembly Rooms, his entrance was from the front. James Lewis, *Original Designs in Architecture consisting of plays, elevations and sections for villas, mansions, town-houses etc. and a new design for a theatre*, 2 vols (London 1780 and 1797) I, pls xxi-xxiv.

[173] Aidan O'Boyle, 'Aldborough House: a construction history', *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, IV, 2001, 102-41.

[174] Ronald W Lightbown, *An Architect Earl: Edward Augustus Stratford (1736-1801), 2nd Earl of Aldborough* (Kilkenny, 2008) 337-39.

[175] Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis*, 100; *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth begun by himself and concluded by his daughter Maria Edgeworth* (London, 1844, 3rd ed.) 76.

[176] Possibly at Altamont, county Carlow. Bence-Jones, *A Guide to Irish Houses*, 3.

[177] John Dowling Herbert, *Irish varieties for the last fifty years* (London, 1836) 38, 145. West was probably Francis Robert West (*c*.1749-1809) who, in 1777, succeeded his father Robert West as Master of the Figure School of the Dublin Society. Crookshank and Glin, *Ireland's Painters*, 90.

[178] Richard Cumberland, 'Remarks upon the present taste for acting private plays', T*he European Magazine and London Review*, 14, August 1788, 115-18.

[179] 'An Old Stager', *Private Theatricals: being practical guide for the home stage* (London, 1882); Henry J. Dakin, *The Stage in the Drawing Room: amateur acting for amateur actors* (London, n.d.).

[180] Quoted in Russell, *The Theatres of War*, 122.

[181] 17th November 1792, quoted in Stockwell, *Dublin Theatres*, 354, note 23.

[182] *Public Advertiser*, 2nd December 1790.

[183] Edward Wakefield, *An account of Ireland, statistical and politica*l, 2 vols (London, 1812) II, 784-85.

[184] Royal Irish Academy, Haliday Pamphlet 617, 'A short vindication of the Right Honourable and Honourable the subscription company of comedians', 1792.

[185] Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis*, 111. These were invented by a French theatre architect Pierre Patte (1723-1814), who published it in his *Essai sur l'architecture* (1782).

[186] Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis*, 123, 171.

[187] Edith Œnone Somerville, *Mrs Maloney's Amateur Theatricals* (1885).

[188] At Townley Hall, county Louth, the 'Royal Obelisk Theatre' company put on plays in October 1881 by younger members of the family and friends. National Library of Ireland, Townley Hall Papers, unsorted accession no. 5408. My thanks to Livia Hurley for this reference.

[189] Patent theatres were those licensed to perform 'spoken drama' after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. Other theatres were allowed to present comedy, melodrama or pantomime only.

[190] Ita M. Hogan, *Anglo-Irish music 1780-1830* (Cork, 1966) 29.

[191] Rosenfeld, *Temples of Thespis*, 170.

[192] *ibid*., 168.

[193] James Greig (ed.), *The Farington diary by Joseph Farington, R.A*., 8 vols, (London, 1924) III, 215. In a footnote in this book, it appears that Lady Caher (or Cahir) was the daughter of James St John Jefferyres of Blarney Castle, county Cork. In 1793 she married Richard Butler, Baron Caher, who was created Earl of Glengall in 1816. They built the Swiss Cottage, a *cottage orné*, in Cahir, county Tipperary, about 1810.

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