The Mimic Stage: Private Theatricals in Georgian Britain

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THE MIMIC STAGE: PRIVATE THEATRICALS

IN GEORGIAN BRITAIN

by

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B.A., St. Olaf College, 1982

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A thesis submitted to the

Faculty of the Graduate School of the

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Department of English

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The Mimic Stage: Private Theatricals in Georgian Britain
written by Janine Marie Haugen
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Date________________________

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
My dissertation examines the cultural significance of the eighteenth-century fashion for private theatricals. As a popular form of entertainment, they played an important role in Georgian society and culture, yet these performances have received very little scholarly attention over the years. The object of this dissertation is to recover, reconstruct, and reevaluate the stories of private theatricals, presenting them in the form of case studies. Utilizing methodology and theory from theatre history, cultural studies, and literary analysis, I examine theatrical artifacts such as playbills, tickets, prologues, letters, memoirs, and newspaper accounts, interpret plays within their performance contexts, and gloss the representations of theatricals in essays, paintings, and plays. The dissertation is framed by close readings of the private performances depicted in *Mansfield Park, Patronage,* and *The Wanderer,* and its title reflects the fact that participants in private theatricals emulated the acting, practices and spaces of the public theatres. In chapter one, I use a performance of *Othello* by amateurs on the stage at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane to analyze the role of such mimicry and to contend that theatricals interrogate issues of legitimacy and blur the distinctions between amateur/professional and private/public. Chapters two and three argue that theatricals by aristocrats in Wales, Scotland, and Ireland and those by soldiers during the Revolutionary War became a means for playing national identity, allegiance and patriotism during the 1770s and 1780s. The fourth chapter explores the contiguities of power, politics, and publicity as revealed in the performances at Richmond House in London and claims that private theatricals provide a means for British
aristocrats to exhibit their national significance and stage their political power, responding to cultural concerns and adapting to societal pressures, in a time of revolutionary change. My project asserts that these performances illuminate the cultural influence and social importance of the theatre in eighteenth-century life, reflecting and refracting the profound changes occurring in British society and mirroring national anxieties about class status, gender roles, race and empire.
To Bryan
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INTRODUCTION

‘Tis true, did reason hold a sov’reign sway,
And none her strictest dictates disobey;
Did all revere her ever honour’d laws,
And only merit gain her just applause;
Much might my friends and self be made to dread,
With tragic stops the mimic stage to tread;

—“Prologue to Otway’s Tragedy of Venice Preserved”

Mansfield Park

Despite their widespread popularity in the long eighteenth century, the only private theatrical that many present-day readers are at all familiar with, or perhaps have even heard about, is the fictional one in Jane Austen’s novel Mansfield Park (1814). In her novel, Austen describes the planning, preparation, and complications that ensue when the adult children of Sir Thomas Bertram and their friends decide to perform Elizabeth Inchbald’s Lovers’ Vows (1798) at home for their own entertainment. Yet though these scenes about the theatrical play a central role in the plot, the play is never actually performed in the novel, and, in fact, the actors never even get through a full rehearsal. The theatrical is aborted just as the first group rehearsal begins, when Sir Thomas, who has been in Antigua tending to the family’s business interests there,

1 Lines six through ten of an anonymously written prologue to Otway’s Venice Preserved, spoken by William Fector before a performance at his private theatre in Dover, 5 Oct. 1784. See Town and Country Magazine, March 1786, 160.

2 Inchbald’s play is a translation of August von Kotzebue’s Das Kind Der Liebe (1780) which she also adapted to make it more acceptable to English audiences.

3 Though Austen does not provide any specific details about Sir Thomas’ business in Antigua, this was in all probability a sugar plantation run with African slave labor, for the small island at one time had over 150 plantations and was a major sugar producer. In a scene that occurs after her uncle’s return home, Fanny asks about the slave trade (Austen 213). The Slave Trade Act of 1807 abolished the slave trade throughout the British Empire, but slavery was not abolished until 1833. See Edward Said, “Jane Austen and Empire,” in Culture and Imperialism (New York: Knopf, 1993), 80-97.
unexpectedly returns and puts an end to all plans for the play. The theatrical’s disappearance from the novel makes it a cogent image for discussing real-life theatricals, for over time they, too, disappeared from narratives of English theatre history.

In addition to burning every copy of *Lovers’ Vows* that he finds (206), Sir Thomas orders all physical traces of the “ridiculous exhibition” of “theatrical nonsense” (199) to be removed, until “the house had been cleared of every object enforcing the remembrance” (203). The stage, recently constructed in the billiard room, is cleared away, and the scene painter dismissed in short order (206). Hoping “to wipe away every outward memento of what had been” (206), Sir Thomas erases the theatrical from Mansfield Park, the country house, in an attempt to efface all memories of the play from family history. And it would seem the theatrical is, likewise, erased from *Mansfield Park*, the novel. Yet one vestige remains, the green baize theatre curtain, which throughout this scene signified the transformation of home into theatre, for Tom, the eldest son, had initially argued that it was the one thing that they simply must have in order to denote a stage (149). It survives thanks to the busybody aunt, Mrs. Norris, who, as always, manages to have her way, for despite Sir Thomas’ efforts, she “contrived to remove one article from his sight that might have distressed him. The curtain over which she had presided with such talent and such success, went off with her to her cottage, where she happened to be particularly in want of green baize” (210). A few memories remain in *Mansfield Park*, as well, and it is the Crawford siblings who keep the theatrical flame burning. Henry tells Fanny, “I shall always look back on our theatricals with exquisite pleasure” (236). For Mary the remembrance is bittersweet. “If I had the power of recalling any one week of my existence, it should be that week, that acting week,” she reminisces (354), exclaiming, “I shall never forget it. . . . Oh! why will such things ever pass away?” (353).
Yet from the very first, the plan for the theatrical is colored by a sense of loss, for it originates when John Yates, a friend of Tom Bertram, comes to Mansfield Park from Ecclesford, a country house in Cornwall, borne “on the wings of disappointment,” because “a play, in which he had borne a part, was within two days of representation, when the sudden death of one of the nearest connections of the family had destroyed the scheme and dispersed the performers” (147). Yates’ sorrow stems as much from his deep disappointment at a lost opportunity for celebrity, publicity, and posterity, as it does from the termination of the play, and he laments, “To be so near happiness, so near fame, so near the long paragraph in praise of the private theatricals at Ecclesford, the seat of the Right Hon. Lord Ravenshaw, in Cornwall, which would of course have immortalized the whole party for at least a twelvemonth!” (147). Still “being so near, to lose it all, was an injury to be keenly felt” (147) and “to boast of the past his only consolation” (147).

Comfortably situated at Mansfield Park, “with his head full of acting,” Yates “could talk of nothing else. Ecclesford and its theatre, with its arrangements and dresses, rehearsals and jokes, was his never-failing subject” (147). While Yates’ single-minded recounting of the details of this play had the potential to make him a particularly annoying house-guest, instead his hosts become enthralled with his tales of nostalgic remembrance, and “happily for him, a love of the theatre is so general, an itch for acting so strong among young people, that he could hardly out-talk the interest of his hearers. From the first casting of the pasts, to the epilogue, it was all bewitching, and there were few who did not wish to have been a party concerned, or would have hesitated to try their skill” (147). Indeed, he speaks of the joys of play-acting in such effusive terms that the Bertrams are convinced to try a play themselves, and thus, the theatrical at Mansfield Park is conceived from the beginning as an imitation of the theatrical at Ecclesford.
After extended debate, the budding thespians finally end up choosing *Lovers’ Vows*, the very same play that was to be given at Ecclesford. Ultimately, their theatrical mimicry continues right down to the play’s unexpected cancellation before opening night and the involuntary dissolution of the acting troupe. In this way, the novel deftly portrays mimicry as a significant feature of theatricals. This is an aspect of theatricals that I underscore over the course of this dissertation, for many of them were conceived and produced as a way of mimicking other private theatricals and the public stage.

Austen’s representation of private theatricals demonstrates a level of familiarity with the practices and proceedings of putting on a play with family members at home because she had first-hand knowledge about the experience of acting in them, having taken part in several as a child. From 1782-1789, the Austen children and their cousins put on plays, first in the dining room and later in the barn at their home in Steventon. She represents the difficulties of choosing an appropriate play, one suited to the performance space, as well as to the number of performers, their gender, and their acting ability. In this way Austen uses the theatrical as a mirror, reflecting a cultural phenomenon so pervasive that she could assume her readers would be completely familiar with the allusions and inferences that she portrayed.

But at the same time, *Mansfield Park* functions as a kind of window, allowing a glimpse into the world of private theatricals, illuminating the diversion that was inherent in the process in addition to the dangerous intimacy implicit in such role playing. In this context, Austen’s use of *Lovers’ Vows* takes on additional significance, for as far as I can discern, a production of the

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play in such a domestic setting was completely unprecedented in real-life theatricals. This is a point that seems to have gone unnoticed in the heretofore extensive commentary on the novel. Certainly the scandalous play allows Austen to make a point about the characters’ lack of discernment and judgment. Fanny, the novel’s moral compass, reads the play and is astonished “that it could be proposed and accepted in a private Theatre! Agatha and Amelia appeared to her in their different ways so totally improper for home representation—the situation of one, and the language of the other, so unfit to be expressed by any woman of modesty that she could hardly suppose her cousins could be aware of what they were engaging in” (161). Perhaps this particular play, the novel seems to imply, does not have a place in private performance, and perhaps Sir Thomas is not unreasonable in attempting to erase it from the family’s collective memory, but this not to suggest that Austen, through this scene, castigates all private theatricals.

Yet the erasure of the theatrical seems powerfully resonant, precisely because such theatricals have been all but erased from the collective memory. Austen’s portrayal rings true, for although theatricals have been mostly forgotten, some memories, recorded and recounted as first-hand accounts in diaries, letters, and memoirs, remain. In a similar fashion, much of the physical evidence of theatricals has been lost, perhaps not through the same kind of willful destruction that Sir Thomas engaged in, but rather through the vicissitudes of time and change those material traces, disregarded and devalued, have disappeared through neglect and indifference. Yet, fortunately, like the green baize curtain, some “outward memento[s]” (206) of actual theatricals—artifacts like playbills, tickets, and newspaper clippings—have survived through the years, tucked away by the Mrs. Norris’ of the world, in cottages, scrapbooks, and attics. Yet ironically, the primary “object enforcing the remembrance” (203) is the novel itself, a fictional account of a theatrical that never occurs.
**What Signifies a Private Theatrical?**

In the heady excitement of envisioning the possibilities of a private theatrical at Mansfield Park, Henry Crawford wonders, “what signifies a theatre?” (149). It’s actually a very good question, and one that is rich with potential for present-day literary critics, but for this study I would like to rephrase it as “what signifies a private theatrical?” in order to develop a taxonomy of these performances and delineate definitions of key terms.

Private theatricals, dramatic performances acted by amateurs before an invited audience, were a popular form of entertainment in Britain during the eighteenth century. Their appeal reached across boundaries of class and gender to such an extent that members of the aristocracy, the provincial gentry, and the middle class were all enthusiastic participants in this fashionable pastime, as were servants, students, sailors, and soldiers. Transcending geographical borders as well, theatricals took place throughout England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, and also in the British colonies, occurring in a wide variety of locations which included town houses and country estates, assembly rooms, ships, and military encampments. Most of the time suitable rooms were temporarily transformed into a stage and green room, but in some cases, barns, kitchens, and greenhouses were turned into theatres, while in others elaborate theatres were built specifically for these performances.

As a general rule, an admission fee was not charged, although some theatricals did raise money for charity. In other respects, many private theatricals emulated a number of the theatrical practices of the public stage: presenting both a mainpiece play and an afterpiece along with entre-act entertainments, framing the play with a prologue and epilogue, and publicizing the performance through newspaper reports and printed playbills. The plays performed ranged from
the latest hits from London’s patent theatres to Shakespeare’s tragedies. In many cases the private stage offered the only opportunity to indulge a passion for acting, playwriting, or even scene painting. The theatricals also provided a way to pass the time, filling what could otherwise prove to be long and dull winter days in the country with an enjoyable sense of shared purpose. Some people took part in or hosted such events primarily as a social occasion, a way to spend time with friends and to entertain the neighboring community. For other participants the chance to exhibit themselves to advantage on stage, thereby becoming the center of attention in their social circle, may have held a strong appeal, a way of enhancing their social prominence through following a fashionable cultural trend. While many of these players were probably not overtly concerned about or aware of the cultural implications of their entertainment choices, the fashion for theatricals did impact both politics and culture. Yet these performances, a ubiquitous part of eighteenth-century culture, have been, at least until fairly recently, all but forgotten, relegated to languish in historical obscurity.

In working to recover and reconstruct these events, I realized that they were being referred to in a number of disparate, and sometimes idiosyncratic, ways, and the reasoning for the choice of terminology was not always readily apparent. While some writers refer to them as “amateur theatricals,” that term is problematic because it also refers to theatricals that were performed by amateurs in schools or in public places. Others use “home theatricals,” but these performances did not always take place in the home, but sometimes in barns, greenhouses, and tennis courts that had been converted to private theatres, and in other cases they occurred in public spaces, even in theatres that had been utilized or repurposed for private performances. Occasionally these performances are called “home entertainments,” an even more inaccurate term, which could also refer to dances, musical performances, or even reading aloud.
“Private theatricals,” which is the term I have elected to use, was the preferred designation during the eighteenth century, reason enough to utilize it, but it too is somewhat problematic, for by and large the theatricals were not exactly private performances. Some of the theatres built for the purpose were quite large, holding two hundred or more audience members, and such performances, which were widely publicized, discussed and reviewed by the public press, would certainly not feel small and intimate. Even plays performed for a more limited number of family members and friends were still often reported on and even reviewed by the local newspapers, and thus, though more private in terms of size, could end up being widely publicized. But since these theatricals took place in privately owned spaces for an invited audience, rather than being open to the public in the same way that coffee houses, pleasure gardens, or even commercial theatres were, they cannot accurately be construed as public events. Thus the private theatricals seem to occupy a unique position in eighteenth-century culture, located in a kind of liminal space between private and public, not really discernible as one or the other, and as result collapsing the Habermasian distinctions between private and public spheres that have often played such a central role in understandings of eighteenth-century cultural history.5

Rather than associating the term private with the venue, which becomes increasingly fraught due to the diverse spaces used for these performances, it is more useful to think about the term private in regards to the audience, as indicative of a select and often invited group of spectators. This is similar to the use of the term private in a formulation like private ceremony or private meeting. In these cases it is apparent that the event does not necessarily occur in a private

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home or a domestic space, but rather private is used to designate the fact that it is not open for the general public to attend.

In light of these issues, developing a strict taxonomy of private theatricals proves problematic, since by their very nature, they tend to collapse boundaries, and thereby defy rigid classification, a point that I will elaborate on over the course of this dissertation. However, four key features, I would argue, are necessarily present in order to classify a performance as a private theatrical:

- it is a performance of a play
- which is not open to the general public, but rather to a private, i.e. a selected or invited, audience
- that is not being done for commercial gain, although on occasion money may be raised for charitable purposes
- the majority of the actors are amateurs who do not earn their living on the stage.

This classification is similar to theatre historian Sybil Rosenfeld’s definition of private theatricals as “performances wholly or mainly by amateurs to selected or invited audiences, as opposed to the general public” (Temples 9). Here the terms amateur and professional also need some clarification. Amateur, which means “lover of,” refers, in this case, to someone who views participation in theatricals or appearance on the stage as an enjoyable pastime, done for pleasure, rather than as a job or profession, done for monetary gain. However, amateur carries another, more disparaging connotation, as an indicator of someone of limited expertise, with inferior skills and training as compared to a professional. Professional, in this context, denotes those who earn their livelihood from the theatre. Thus, the primary distinction between amateur and professional concerns money, specifically whether acting is done for financial remuneration.
An alternate taxonomy is posited by Michael Dobson, a Shakespearean scholar, who argues that “all private theatricals are defined as such by a taxonomy of dramatic endeavor which distinguishes rigorously between the public, national world of the commercial stage and the domestic, familial realm of the household” (Shakespeare 23). However, this conception of private theatricals seems to focus solely on those which occurred in country houses or other domestic spaces, yet performances that occurred in many other types of venues were considered to be private theatricals at the time. The taxonomy also discounts the possibility that private performances had a powerful public and national impact, a claim that I will develop in the following chapters.

**Antecedents of Private Theatricals**

Embedded within three of Shakespeare’s plays are portrayals of alternative dramatic performances, occurring in spaces other than the playhouse, which do not exactly resemble the private theatricals of the long eighteenth century, but can instead be seen as precursors to them. For instance, *Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Hamlet* each depict a play-within-a-play performed at court rather than in a playhouse by players brought in from the outside, but the actors, and thus the end result, are significantly different. *The Most Lamentable Comedy and Cruel Death of Pyramus and Thisby* is performed by amateur, and hilariously unskilled, thespians as diversionary entertainment at a royal wedding, while the powerful rendering of *The Murder of Gonzago*, by an itinerant, professional acting troupe, serves as a way for Hamlet to deduce Claudius’ guilt. Since in both of these plays the actors ultimately expect remuneration for their efforts, Dobson in his book *Shakespeare and Amateur Performance* (2011) argues that a more appropriate example of a private theatrical is the “play extemporae” in *Henry IV Part 1* in which
Hal and Falstaff enact a scene of role-playing, imagining a potential dialogue between the King, Hal’s father, and Hal himself, to amuse themselves and their friends in the tavern (23). This scene does demonstrate the power of theatre to reveal truths about character even as it entertains, something that carries an added potency in the case of non-professional actors, whereby the blurring of lines between actor and role can be particularly acute, illuminating and exposing real-life emotions that would otherwise remain unexpressed, an aspect of private theatricals aptly demonstrated by Austen through scenes which allow Maria Bertram in the role of Agatha and Henry Crawford as Frederick to act out their illicit feelings for each other. Shakespeare’s scene, however, in many ways seems less representative of a private theatrical and more like a nascent example of psychodrama⁷, or, alternatively, an early form of improvisational comedy—amateur night at the tavern in Eastcheap—for it lacks much of what made eighteenth-century private theatricals distinctive: the construction of a specific space to function as a mimic stage, the often protracted preparatory period that tended to surpass the performance itself in terms providing diversion and entertainment for the participants, and, most importantly, the enacting of written drama in a style that sought to mimic the practices of legitimate theatres.

Nevertheless, while the private theatricals that proved to be so popular during the long eighteenth century had distinctive characteristics and customary practices that distinguish them from other types of performance, they are not sui generis, but rather take their place as part of a centuries-old tradition in English culture of amateur actors and private performances. Some of these antecedents can be found in seventeenth-century court masques, dramatic performances in

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⁶ In act two, scene five, lines 340-439.

⁷ Psychodrama, first developed by Jacob Levy Moreno, is a type of psychotherapy often enacted in a group therapy session in which patients enact scenes from their lives and role-play the parts of different characters in order to achieve insight into their own behaviors and emotions and that of others. See Marcia Karp, *The Handbook of Psychodrama* (New York: Routledge, 1998).
noble houses, as well as in the long tradition of school theatricals and plays performed by children.

One of the first recorded instances of a production that closely resembles that which, a century later, would be called a private theatrical involved an original adaptation of scenes from *Henry IV Part 1* combined with others from *Henry IV Part 2* that was written specifically for a private performance by amateurs in 1623 at the country home of Sir Edward Dering in Surrendon, Kent (Dobson 23). There had been a long tradition of theatrical performances in the country houses of the nobility, though usually the actors were hired for the occasion, as they were in *Hamlet*. During the Protectorate under Oliver Cromwell all theatrical performances were banned in England, but some great houses employed, and sheltered, professional actors for illegal and surreptitious performances (Clare 462). Strolling players who travelled throughout the countryside putting on performances in taverns, inn-yards, and country houses were a ubiquitous part of English country life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, bringing culture and theatre (such as it was) to provincial audiences, and though their theatrical practices were influenced by the London stage, they also impacted their provincial audiences’ expectations for theatrical productions. These companies would have been made up of those who earned their living by acting, although it was a notably precarious and financially unrewarding line of work since by law members of the strolling companies could be prosecuted as vagabonds and vagrants. The reputation of all actors was colored well into the eighteenth century by the perception of actors as marginalized members of society.

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8 For more on this performance see Michael Dobson’s detailed reading of it in *Shakespeare and Amateur Performance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 26-30.

Although profoundly different from strolling companies in terms of the class, rank, and social status of both actors and audience, and equally as divergent in terms of aesthetic form, content, and style, seventeenth-century court masques, which were performed by members of the court for the entertainment of others in the court (Lindley 401), can also be seen as precursors to the later fashion for private theatricals performed by amateurs before a select and invited audience of their family and friends. The most famous example of this is the premier performance of Milton’s *Comus* at Ludlow Castle in Wales in 1634, given in honor of John Egerton, first Earl of Bridgwater, with three of Egerton’s children among the actors (Squire 3).10 That these prototypical theatricals first appeared in a court setting is not surprising, for it was there that those with the desire to act would have possessed the money and leisure to implement that desire, as did Queen Henrietta Maria, the wife of Charles I, who, along with her attendants, acted in Walter Montague’s masque *Shepherd’s Paradise* in 1632 at Somerset House (Findley 133).11 After the regicide of Charles I, the masques that had been such an integral aspect of court life were prohibited, yet in 1656, William Davenant organized a series of what he discretely referred to as “pleasant assemblies,” entertainments, reminiscent of Stuart court masques, which melded music with elaborate scenery. Though ostensibly a social event, for they were held at Rutland House, Davenant’s home, they were also a commercial venture for which he charged admission while attempting to skirt the Puritan edict against all forms of theatre (Lewcock 93). Thus Davenant’s performances, which Sybil Rosenfeld refers to as “semi-private” theatricals

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10 The performance occurred at Michelmas, 29 September, to celebrate the installation of the Earl of Bridgwater as the Lord President of the Council of Wales and the Marches.

11 For more on Queen Henrietta Maria’s acting endeavors at court see Alison Findley, *Playing Spaces in Early Women’s Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006).
in actuality are more representative of the resilience and adaptability of the commercial stage.\textsuperscript{12}

The restoration of the monarchy in 1660 restored the importance of theatre to English culture as well, with masques and plays, some acted by professional actors and actresses and others by courtiers, providing a prevalent source of entertainment for the court.\textsuperscript{13} As one example of this, Samuel Pepys, in a diary entry dated 14 January 1668, reports on a court theatrical of Dryden’s *The Indian Emperor* (1665) acted by James Scott, first Duke of Monmouth (illegitimate son of Charles II), his wife, Anne Scott, Duchess of Monmouth, and others members of the court (Pepys 604).\textsuperscript{14} In 1675, the young daughters of the Duke of York, later James II, starred in James Crowne’s *Calisto*, a pastoral that had much in common with earlier court masques. This performance is especially notable because both young actresses, Princess Mary and Princess Anne, would eventually become Queens of England.\textsuperscript{15}

The *Comus* and *Calisto* performances reveal that plays involving the children of nobility and royalty served as influential, and longstanding, precursors to the fashion for private theatricals. Theatricals were considered to be a form of wholesome entertainment with

\textsuperscript{12} In these performances, the predominance of dance, music, scenery, tableau, and pantomime over spoken drama demonstrates the peculiar contiguity that exists between masques and the illegitimate theatre of the eighteenth century, which utilized programs of music, dance, pantomime, and spectacle since, after 1737, spoken drama could only be legally performed at the two licensed patent theatres. I discuss the implementation and repercussions of the Licensing Act of 1737, and its influence on private theatricals, in greater detail in chapter one.


\textsuperscript{14} Apparently, Pepys was not actually in the audience for this event, but rather heard it being discussed by friends of his wife the following day.

\textsuperscript{15} The correlation between theatricals and royalty is expressed in a footnote in which Allardyce Nicoll asserts that “the fashion for private theatres almost certainly came from France” and cites the theatricals done by Mme. de Pompadour and Marie Antoinette at Versailles as examples. Certainly theatricals done at the French court could have influenced those done by British aristocracy. However, the tradition of theatricals in England predates these French performances by decades. The connection between British and French theatricals is, however, a subject in need of further study. See Nicoll, *History of Late Eighteenth Century Drama, 1750-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1927), 22n1.
educational value, and thus children were encouraged to put on plays at home for family and friends. In 1718 the grandchildren of John Churchill, first Duke of Marlborough performed John Dryden’s *All for Love* (1677) for his amusement in the Bow-Window Room at Blenheim Palace with Richard Steele among the audience members (Montgomery 156-58).\(^{16}\) The belief in the didactic quality of plays is made manifest in the fact that performing plays had been part of the curriculum in English public schools since the sixteenth century. During the Restoration and eighteenth century, the performance of plays in Latin or Greek was seen as an important part of a classical education, but students also acted in English plays, and these experiences were seen to have a didactic purpose, teaching valuable public speaking skills and imparting useful moral lessons.\(^{17}\) Given the attention that acting in school theatricals brought to its young thespians, it seems most likely that some of the participants in the theatricals in private houses may well have caught the “acting bug” as children in these school productions.

**Scholarship on Eighteenth-century Private Theatricals**

Though private theatricals played a significant role in eighteenth-century culture, they have not received much attention from scholars until recently. This may be at least partly due to the fact that for a good part of the twentieth century, eighteenth-century drama itself was not seen as being worthy of serious study, dismissed as consisting primarily of forgettable, flimsy farces or silly sentimental pieces holding scant present-day interest, and as such scholarship on eighteenth-century poetry and novels predominated for decades. Fortunately this perception has

\(^{16}\) The prologue for this play, written for the occasion by Bishop Benjamin Hoadley, was reprinted in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, Feb. 1774, 87-88. See also Allan Ledger, *A Spencer Love Affair* (Oxford: Fonthill, 2014), 25-26.

\(^{17}\) For a comprehensive chronicle of school productions spanning several centuries, see T.H.Vail Motter, *The School Drama in England* (London: Longmans, 1929).
changed considerably, and there is burgeoning interest in the drama of the period. There has also been an evolving sense of the role of theatre history, although the challenge for scholars is that since there are, obviously, no recordings of the performances, other remaining evidence, such as playbills, reviews, paintings, and prompt books, must be used as a means of reconstructing the performances themselves. Nevertheless, the most significant projects, like the *London Stage: 1660-1800*, undertaken by theatre historians to chronicle and catalogue eighteenth-century performances, have, for the most part, privileged those at commercial, public theatres over other types of enterprises. *The Cambridge History of the British Theatre 1660-1895*, as another example, also focuses on the public theatres and does not mention private theatricals. Dobson contends that ignoring non-commercial theatre in these compendiums is the equivalent of a history of sex being written that concentrates solely on “people in the West End doing it for money” (“Theatre” 177).

Yet despite the vigorous and compelling discourse about both the drama and theatre history of the period, scholarly inquiry into and discussion of private theatricals have remained fairly limited. One possible reason may be the difficulty in recovering historical evidence of theatricals, for by their very nature as both ephemeral performance and private entertainment they left fewer lasting traces than did the public theatres. Theatricals have also been seen as merely a frivolous aristocratic fashion, and thus not really worthy of the academic inquiry afforded over the years to performances by professional actors at commercial theatres. Yet this seems to be changing, perhaps due to increasing scholarly interest in examining more diverse types of performance events. While some notable studies have sought to chronicle the history and practices of eighteenth-century private theatricals, there has still been very little
comprehensive work done that interprets these performances and analyzes their significance in the context of eighteenth-century culture.

The only book-length study of eighteenth-century private theatricals, *Temples of Thespis: Some Private Theatres and Theatricals in England and Wales, 1700-1820*, was written in 1978 by Sybil Rosenfeld, a theatre historian, independent scholar, and protégé of Allardyce Nicoll. In this invaluable resource she creates something akin to the *London Stage* for private theatricals: determining where they took place, who participated, what costumes, set, and props were used, who was part of the audience and how they were invited, and examining what responses these events generated from members of the family, the cast, the audience, the press, and the commercial stage. As the title indicates, she focuses on theatricals in England and Wales, and does not include any information on those that took place in Scotland, Ireland, or elsewhere in the British Empire. She amasses a great deal of information about theatricals, which she presents in an engaging narrative style, but her overall focus is not on interpretation or analysis, but rather in chronicling these events.

The interest in cataloguing private performances appears in the nineteenth century in works like the anonymous and privately published *Private Theatre of Kilkenny* (1825) and a review of that tome by Thomas Moore in the *Edinburgh Review* (1827). Continuing this endeavor in the twentieth century, Wilhelmina Ramas’ unpublished doctoral dissertation at Fordham University, “Private Theatricals of the Upper Classes in Eighteenth Century England” (1969), catalogues theatricals in sixty-six different locations, although, like Rosenfeld, she only includes those in England and Wales. A year later, Evelyn Howe’s essay “Amateur Theatre in Georgian England,” a brief narrative history of some of the most widely known theatricals was published in *History Today* (1970).
In some cases historians who claim to be writing about private theatricals are, in fact, really writing about school theatricals. For example, in the essay “Garrick and the Private Theatres” (1944), T.H. Vail Motter explores David Garrick’s connections to school theatrical productions. An earlier work by Motter, *The School Drama in England* (1929), provides a detailed chronicle of school performances from the fifteenth century on. Despite the title of Emmett Avery’s essay, “Private Theatricals in and Near London 1700-1737” (1959), he also looks solely at theatrical productions in the public schools. Both of these scholars seek to catalogue school performances in terms of dates, locations, participants, and repertoire. While much of this earlier research focused on an attempt to reconstruct the details of the performances, much has changed in terms of historical scholarship and understandings of historiography in the ensuing decades.

A few more recent works have gone beyond the task of cataloguing and chronicling, analyzing the cultural and historical significance of these private theatricals. One of these, Gillian Russell’s chapter, “Private Theatricals,” in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730-1830* (2007), gives a brief history of private theatricals and mentions many of the seminal issues that those theatricals illuminate: issues of gender, class, national identity, along with the importance of theatre, the public sphere, and sociability in Georgian culture. However, because the chapter is meant to provide a brief, introductory overview of the topic, Russell’s discussion of those issues is necessarily truncated. Theatre historian Helen Brooks, in the essay “‘One Entire Nation of Actors and Actresses’: Reconsidering the Relationship of Public and Private Theatricals” (2011) presents the most cogent and compelling analysis of private theatricals to date, investigating the overlap between private theatres and their public

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18 She also wrote an earlier entry on private theatricals for *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture, 1776-1832* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 726.
counterparts and interrogating what this meant for the newly emerging professional status of actors.

Michael Dobson in *Shakespeare and Amateur Performance* (2011) explores amateur drama from the seventeenth century to the present day but focuses solely on amateur productions of Shakespeare. Thus, by necessity, he leaves out the vast majority of eighteenth-century private theatricals. He does, however, present a detailed close reading of an eighteenth-century theatrical that took place in Salisbury, one that he had first examined in an earlier essay, “Theatre for Nothing” (2007). Most importantly, he makes a compelling argument that private theatricals need to be studied further, for such research promises to enhance our understanding about “the place of drama in eighteenth-century culture more generally” (176).

For the most part, though, when eighteenth-century private theatricals appear in scholarship, they are usually presented as a peripheral topic, important only in so far as they shed light on the author’s primary topic, which is not private theatricals. For example, in the early twentieth century, noted theatre historian Allardyce Nicoll focuses on the eighteenth-century patent stages in *A History of Late Eighteenth Century Drama: 1750-1800* (1927), and though he mentions private theatricals briefly as part of his chapter on the late eighteenth-century audience, contending that they had “considerable influence upon the drama of the time” (19), he does not look closely at the contiguities between the audiences for commercial theatre as compared to those for private theatricals (19-22). Other research on private theatricals lies buried in tomes like Cecil Price’s *The English Theatre in Wales* (1948), a chronicle of the performances of traveling companies which includes a six-page summary of the theatricals that took place at Wynnstay (61-67). In *The Georgian Theatre in Wessex* (1958), Arnold Hare tells the story of a few provincial playhouses in Wessex in the latter decades of the eighteenth century, though he
does include a chapter describing private theatrical performances by prominent Wessex families (120-40). Jared Brown includes amateur performances in his examination of *The Theatre in America During the Revolution* (1995). He is, however, more interested in chronicling the theatre history of this time and place than in delineating the differences between these performances and those by professional companies (22-50). *Theatre of War: Performance. Politics, and Society, 1793-1815* (1995), Gillian Russell’s study of military performances, the theatricality of military culture, and the depiction of war and patriotism in British drama, uses a brief synopsis of the fashion among civilians for amateur acting to illuminate the participation in theatricals by British sailors and soldiers (122-33). In *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theatre Theory of British Romantic Women Writers* (1997), Catherine Burroughs includes a brief discussion of the implications of private theatricals for women in the context of her reading of Baillie’s play *The Tryal* (143-151), concentrating on the opportunities that theatricals offered aristocratic women to participate in and experiment with theatre practices (146-152). In his study of the performance of race on Georgian era stages, David Worrall, *Harlequin Empire* (2007), examines the popularity of James Townley’s *High Life Below Stairs* (1759) at private theatres (32-34). Daniel O’Quinn in *Entertaining Crisis in the Atlantic Imperium, 1770-1790* (2011) analyzes a performance of John Home’s *Douglas* (1756) in Philadelphia during the Revolutionary War in relation to a broader project examining the relationship between the newspapers and theatre in London and utilizing the effect of such mediation in the reading of a variety of performance events (178-185). Two recent biographies also each include chapters about private theatricals: Allan Ledger’s *A Spencer Love Affair* (2014) is concerned with the rather scandalous marriage between Edward Nares, hired as a tutor for the children of the Duke of Marlborough, and Lady Charlotte Spencer, one of the Duke’s daughters, who met while taking part in private theatricals at Blenheim in 1789 (25-
29, 41-60, 87-111). In the Life of Anne Damer (2014), his biography of the sculptor, Jonathan David Gross recounts her participation in the theatricals at Richmond House (106-131).

The private theatrical in Mansfield Park has received a substantial amount of attention from scholars of literature, which, given its iconic status, is only to be expected. Innumerable critics have discussed this scene, and work by Joseph Litvak, David Marshall and Emily Allen\(^{19}\) provides insightful and influential close readings, but for the most part the critical commentary has focused on the scene as revelatory regarding Austen’s attitudes toward theatricality and the theatre and has made little attempt to situate the private theatricals of Mansfield Park in the context of the fashion for eighteenth-century private theatricals. However, Nora Nachumi (2008) discusses the representation of private theatricals in a chapter on Jane Austen’s Mansfield Park (147-172) and examines the theatrical in Francis Burney’s The Wanderer (1814), providing a useful short description of these theatricals in order to provide context for her argument, which focuses on the way that the theatre informs and influences the way that female novelists represent female characters (139-140). Gillian Perry in Spectacular Flirtations (2007) places Mansfield Park at the center of her chapter on women in private theatricals as reflected by novelists and artists during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (169-189). In particular, she explores Mansfield Park in light of caricatures of aristocratic women by James Gillray. In Jane Austen and the Theatre (2002), Paula Byrne includes an informative chapter on Jane Austen’s own experiences with private theatricals (3-28) and Penny Gay, in another study titled Jane Austen and the Theatre (2002), develops a compelling reading of the theatricals as indicative of the theatricality that pervades the novel (103-117).

Methodology

In this dissertation, I utilize a variety of methodologies from literary criticism, theatre history, and performance studies, recognizing that there are limitations inherent in each of them, but operating under the conviction that in the aggregate they will reveal more than any of them could if used separately. Throughout this project, I have focused on reading, analyzing and interpreting theatrical artifacts, performance events, representations of these events, and a variety of pertinent texts to determine what they reveal about the significance of theatricals in their temporal, geographic, and cultural contexts. Much of this work is historical in nature: locating traces of theatricals, compiling the evidence and artifacts of these events, reading, describing, and analyzing these materials, and using them as a means to imaginatively reconstruct details of these performances. Such reconstruction is necessary because the focus of the study, the theatrical performances themselves, are, in the words of theatre historian Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History* (2003), “in essence evanescent” and hence, “always irrecoverably lost” (7), due to the fundamentally transient nature of live performance. This truth about performance becomes more glaringly apparent when, as in the study of the eighteenth-century, no photographic or film records exist. The goal of such a project, thus, becomes one of outlining, of attempting to sketch the contours of an event, the center of which, the actual performance itself, is absent, erased by time.

A crucial first step in this project was devoted to archival research, with the aim of discerning what evidence could be gleaned from the existing archive and recovering heretofore undocumented or unexamined artifacts pertaining to private theatricals. Much of this evidence is to be found in that which is often referred to by archivists as “ephemera,” material of a transitory nature, not necessarily intended for preservation: playbills, tickets and invitations, newspaper
clippings, notes, sketches, and letters. These materials, in many respects the detritus of performance events, all that remains since the performance itself is ephemeral, tend to be collected and located in sources that themselves are often discounted or ignored: scrapbooks, account books, diaries, and memoirs.

It is critical to acknowledge the way in which the archive influences the historiography, for the available evidence determines both the course of the research and the resulting conclusions. The source and nature of what is preserved in the archive illuminate truths about what is valued in a culture. In the case of private theatricals, not only is information and evidence limited, often located in obscure and difficult to access locations, but such traces as do remain almost invariably concern those theatricals given by people of high rank and status in society—royalty, aristocrats, nobility, gentry, wealthy and powerfully connected people—whose activities were deemed significant enough to be reported on by the press, or as Austen put it in Mansfield Park to be “immortalized” in a “long paragraph” (147), and whose letters and diaries are also determined to be worth preserving. In addition, memorabilia from these performances was considered worth keeping, for as proof of one’s attendance at a highly selective affair, it functioned as a status symbol, and consequently engraved invitations, playbills, and printed prologues and epilogues from elite theatricals still remain. Unfortunately, such evidence and information about less illustrious theatricals has been mostly lost to time. What information does exist about middle class and lower class theatrical activity is, in most cases, due to the celebrity of one of the participants. For instance, we know about the plays done by the Austen, Burney and Edgeworth families because of the status of these novelists and the fact that their diaries and

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letters have been saved and studied. It may be that material on other, more humble, theatricals lies hidden in obscure diaries and letters but the significance of these traces remains unrecognized.

Fortunately for the researcher into private theatricals, some of the most valuable source material in the existing archive was compiled in a scrapbook devoted solely to a collection of items pertaining to private theatricals. This scrapbook was donated to the British Museum as part of the estate of Sarah Sophia Banks, the sister of the naturalist Sir Joseph Banks, and is now held in the British Library where it is listed as part of the Banks Collection. The scrapbook, almost exclusively devoted to information about theatricals done by society’s elite, is methodically and carefully organized by theatrical location and contains playbills, admission tickets, invitations, copies of prologues and epilogues, and an abundance of newspaper clippings dated from 1750 until 1808. There are also annotations in what is presumably Banks’ handwriting, which add personal comments and other valuable inside information to the whole. Since over time this volume has deteriorated significantly, it had been very difficult for researchers to be granted permission to gain access to it. During the course of my research, I was extremely fortunate to have been allowed several hours to examine it at the British Library. The scrapbook has recently been digitized, but in another sign of the ongoing marginalization of private theatricals, its digital iteration is located in a database devoted to Victorian popular culture.

However, the scrapbook also illustrates the way that historians are influenced in their conclusions by the state of the archive. Rosenfeld, who in Temples of Thespis described the

\[21\] Sarah Sophia Banks (1744-1818) was an inveterate collector of diverse types of ephemera and a number of her collections are held at the British Library. There is some confusion about the proper attribution of the scrapbook, and it is also described by some researchers, including Rosenfeld, as being part of the Burney Collection of Theatrical Ephemera, an immense collection of newspaper clippings, playbills, and other ephemera related to the English theatre compiled into eighty-four notebooks, which is also archived in the British Library.

\[22\] See Adam Matthews, http://www.amdigital.co.uk/m-collections/collection/victorian-popular-culture/
scrapbook as “the most important single source of the period” (3n2) and who used it extensively in her research, comes to the conclusion that private theatricals tended to diminish after about 1810, and states this contention in quite definitive terms: “The craze reached its climax in the 1780’s, declined somewhat in the 1790’s, increased again slightly in the first decade of the 19th century and, after that, petered out” (11). Since this scrapbook was one of her main resources, it is possible that the fact that the evidence compiled in the scrapbook does not continue past 1808 may have influenced her conclusion. However, the fact that evidence of private theatricals does not exist in the scrapbook past 1808 does not mean that private theatricals did not continue after that date. It may simply be that whoever it was that compiled the scrapbook, Banks herself or someone else, had just decided to stop adding to it, due to loss of interest, or ill health, or any number of possible reasons. In any case, the scrapbook project would have, in all probability, come to an inevitable end upon Banks’ death in 1818. And in actuality there appears to be quite strong evidence in support of the fact that private theatricals continued to be a popular form of entertainment throughout the nineteenth century.23

Like Rosenfeld’s study, much of the earlier work on private theatricals followed a strictly empirical approach, relying upon “the material remains of theatrical life” and positing that history “lies in the artifactual record,” which Robert Hume, one its most outspoken defenders, calls “archeo-historical” research (Bratton 5).24 The London Stage: 1660-1800, a staggeringly huge undertaking and invaluable resource, is a particularly striking example of the useful outcomes that have resulted from this kind of work. But along with Bratton, I would argue that

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23 For more information about nineteenth-century theatricals, see a special issue entitled “Amateur Theatre in the Long Nineteenth Century” of Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film 38, no.2 (2011).

such projects, as useful as they can often be, ultimately only reveal partial truths. Knowing when, and where, and by whom something was produced can be productive, but it only takes us so far toward an understanding of what such a performance might have meant and how it was perceived within its cultural milieu.

While cataloguing and creating annals (lists organized by time, like the London Stage) and chronicles (which are more descriptive, like Temples of Thespis) have their place, interpreting and placing these performances in historical context is also needed. To that end, one can utilize artifacts in new ways, and in this project, I employ Bratton’s innovative approaches to reading and interpreting theatrical ephemera like playbills (38-40), in my readings of playbills, tickets and invitations. Additionally, I follow Bratton’s example of using alternative sources of evidence, like anecdotes, memoirs, and biography, employing them with the awareness that, for the most part, they present a more subjective or “representative truth” rather than serving a strictly objective or “factual” purpose (95-103), and that they need to be interpreted accordingly. In the process, it is important to resist the siren song of positivism and recognize that historical discourse cannot claim to represent empirical truth in an objective way, and instead to realize that historical writing, like all forms of discourse, is subject to the imprecise and slippery nature of language, as well as to the subjective choices imposed by the historian and the available archival evidence.

Textual analysis of the plays themselves, the drama, also forms an important part of this project. Study of the plays being produced has not been included as one of the tools in traditional approaches to theatre history, yet developing readings of plays which take into account performance contexts—where the performance takes place, how it is performed, who the

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performers are, and who is in the audience—can lead to deeper understandings of both the text and the context. These readings can be especially productive in regards to private theatrical performances, since the distinctions between actor and role, and between theatrical location and dramatic setting, are not always as clearly demarcated as they might be on the public stage, a point underscored by Dobson who argues that "the special power" of private, non-professional performance “lay in the close comparison and synergy that it enabled between the personal identities of the players and those of the characters they represented" (Shakespeare 26).

During the course of this research, I have amassed a tremendous amount of evidence, examining and assessing information about dozens of theatricals. Thus one significant aspect of this project has been the necessary process of selecting and sorting, in order to decide which theatricals to include. My goal was to achieve a balance between presenting an overview of a number of theatricals and developing more detailed readings of a few theatricals within their performance contexts. To that end, I present my research findings in the form of case studies of specific theatricals, which were chosen in some instances because they were representative, illustrative of a number of similar performances, and in others because they were unique: in the case of the theatricals at Wynnstay in Wales, because they occurred over such a long period of time and so many artifacts have survived, and in the case of the Richmond House theatricals, because they received so much attention and publicity due to the elite status of their participants and location in the center of London. Though there is considerable overlap, I do present the case studies in a, more or less, chronological manner. In so doing, however, I am not claiming that these theatricals follow any sort of teleological purpose. Rather I contend that they are better understood in terms of what theatre historian Joseph Roach, in Cities of the Dead (1996), terms a “genealogy of performance,” the melding of memories of past performances with deep-seated
cultural anxieties and influences such that they impact and color the way these productions are presented and perceived (Cities 20).

In addition, in light of significant recent work that speaks to the importance of including texts which have been left out of traditional historical accounts and literary criticism, I also broaden my study to include afterpieces, prologues, and epilogues rather than just five-act mainpiece plays. In electing to research and examine private theatricals, which have been mostly left out of traditional scholarship, I use Terry Castle’s *Masquerade and Civilization* (1986) as a model, for her seminal work on a misunderstood, and mostly ignored, aspect of eighteenth-century culture, the masquerade, melded cultural studies with literary criticism and demonstrated not only how tremendously fruitful such an approach can be but also the value of recuperating an aspect of cultural history that had heretofore been marginalized or forgotten.

**Scope and Purpose of the Project**

This dissertation focuses on private theatricals that occurred between 1737 and 1789. These dates are significant because they cover the time from the passage of the Licensing Act until the French Revolution. Within that time period, I am concerned with those theatricals that took place in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, as well as in the American colonies by British troops. I do not examine theatricals by British subjects in other parts of the British Empire, and I focus solely on theatricals by British participants, even though theatricals took place during the eighteenth-century in a variety of locations on the European continent. Due to the fact that the majority of the available evidence concerns elite performances, and very little

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evidence has survived to document theatricals done in middle-class households, the project concentrates on private theatricals given by the nobility or gentry and those which occurred in private houses or private theatres. I do not examine school theatricals, fete champêtres, subscription theatres, plays done in French, or puppet shows. While all of these entertainments had a significant cultural impact at the time, they differ enough from the private theatricals that are my main focus, in terms of their participants, audience, or purpose, as to render them beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The dissertation’s title reflects the fact that participants in theatricals saw their performances as “the mimic stage,” and described what they were doing in terms that highlight this imitative quality. By using this language, amateur actors acknowledged that they were engaged in mirroring the public theatres as well as other private theatres, just as the would-be thespians at Mansfield Park mimicked the theatrical at Ecclesford. Mimicry always includes a sense of doubleness, for that which is being duplicated is necessarily invoked and recalled by the imitation. This is especially true in performance, when the memory of the original informs the mimic representation as well as the spectators’ response to it. Yet mimicry also connotes difference, for a copy, even an accurate one, is, by definition, not the original. Thus Homi Bhabha in The Location of Culture (1994) describes mimicry as “almost the same but not quite” (127). In addition, mimic often implies a kind of diminishment and inadequacy, the simulacrum falling short in comparison to the original. The term was utilized in numerous prologue and epilogues written specifically for private theatrical performances as a way of characterizing and distinguishing the players’ efforts as derivative. At the beginning of each chapter, I include an epigraph consisting of a few lines from one of these prologues or epilogues in order to accentuate various aspects of theatricals and how they were viewed at the time as taking the “mimic’s part,”
practicing “mimic art,” performing “mimic scenes,” demonstrating “mimic power,” and producing a “mimic tale.”

In chapter one, “‘The Mimic’s Part’: Private Performance and the Public Stage,” I begin with an examination of a performance of Othello by a group of aristocrats who rented the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. This amateur performance was the first to receive a significant amount of attention from the press and to capture the notice of the general public, and because it took place at a patent theatre, it accentuates the ways that theatricals were contingent upon the public stage. In order to situate private theatricals within the context of eighteenth-century theatre history, I present a brief overview of the effects of the Licensing Act of 1737 on London theatres, construing Samuel Foote’s successful mimic performances in light of this law, and limning the influence that David Garrick’s innovative acting style and ensuing rise to prominence had on amateur actors. I contend that private theatricals can be understood as a response to changes on the public stage, analyzing the proliferation of private theatres and the use of prologues and epilogues written specifically for private theatricals as manifestations of this mimic response.

Chapter two, “‘Mimic Art’: Performing British Aristocracy in Wales,” presents the private theatricals that took place at Wynnstay in Wales as an extended case study. Occurring at a country house over the Christmas holidays, these performances illustrate a number of features typical to many such theatricals, but, partly owing to their duration over two decades, considerably more evidence remains to document these productions than exists for most others. George Colman the Elder took part in these theatricals along with his son, and I have discovered several of his prologues and epilogues which have not, to my knowledge, been discussed before. I utilize memoirs and anecdotes as a means of reconstructing these events, elucidating the way
that location and circumstances impact a play’s meaning and employ close readings of playbills and tickets, comparing them to their counterparts from the public playhouses and arguing that they provide a means of depicting and displaying Welsh identity along with British allegiance.

In chapter three, “‘Mimic Scenes’: Peripheral Performances,” I examine private theatricals that were peripheral in terms of geography, culture, or politics. As such, I begin by analyzing theatricals done mid-century by those who were part of Frederick, Prince of Wales’ Leicester House circle, on the periphery of the court of George II. Next, I elucidate and interpret a number of theatricals that took place across the British Empire, by the British military in the American colonies, and by aristocrats in Scotland and Ireland. These theatricals in Scotland and Ireland in particular have not been included in previous chronicles of the subject to any extent, and much of the material that I present in this chapter has not been investigated by scholars previously. I use it to develop the argument that theatricals on the periphery became a means for exhibiting British loyalty and patriotism and that they played an important role in refashioning the image of the British aristocracy during the 1770s and 1780s.

In chapter four, “‘Mimic Power’: Publicity and Political Theatre,” another detailed case study, this time of the theatricals at Richmond House in central London, illuminates the contiguities of publicity, politics and power in these performances. In this chapter, I contend that private theatricals take on a different valance in the latter decades of the century, becoming more culturally influential and socially important, shifting the power dynamic between the mimic stage and its public counterparts, such that professional actors are said to be the true mimics, merely copying aristocratic behaviors and manners that they cannot ever hope to truly obtain, and the repertoire at the patent theatres begins to mirror the plays produced by the amateurs. Plays written specifically for private stages and plays about private theatricals are both produced
at the public theatres in an attempt to profit from the fashion for theatricals, and a close reading of some of these plays helps to elucidate some of the pervasive cultural anxiety regarding theatricals at this time.

The final chapter, “‘Mimic Tale’: The Continuing Saga of Private Theatricals,” concludes the dissertation with a brief overview of theatricals after 1789. I assert that negative publicity and polemical attacks in the face of the profound political and social upheavals of the French Revolution lead to a change in the public portrayal and perception of aristocratic private theatricals, and to concomitant changes in the way that such performances were produced and presented. I end the chapter with a reading of two novels published at the same time as *Mansfield Park, Patronage* by Maria Edgeworth and *The Wanderer* by Frances Burney, analyzing the way that these novels describe scenes of private theatricals and what these depictions reveal about cultural attitudes towards amateur performance.

Throughout the dissertation, one of my goals is to demonstrate that private theatricals are worthy of this kind of sustained academic study, for as a popular form of entertainment with widespread appeal across boundaries of class, gender and geography, they played a significant, albeit often unacknowledged, role in Georgian society and culture. Though literary criticism during the twentieth century often privileged the novel over drama, in the eighteenth-century theatre remained remarkably influential, a key feature of British life. Nevertheless, we cannot fully comprehend the significance of the theatre without taking into account the role that private theatricals played in the drama of the time, even though they have been mostly ignored or forgotten by history. Thus this dissertation seeks to reclaim the importance of these theatricals and restore them to the scholarly discourse, arguing that they represent a potent means of staging British patriotism, national allegiance, and political power at a time of instability and change.
CHAPTER ONE

“THE MIMIC’S PART”: PRIVATE PERFORMANCE
AND THE PUBLIC STAGE

Sure some infection hovers in the air!
For every man and woman is turned player.

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What wonder then in this theatric age,
If we too catch the epidemic rage?
If with the rest we play the mimic’s part
And drive to our own barn the Thespian cart?

Amateurs on Stage at Drury Lane

On 7 March 1751 a group of seven amateur aristocratic actors rented the stage of the Theatre Royal Drury Lane for the evening, performing Othello to a full house, an event so singular that theatre historian George Stone considered it to be one of the most noteworthy performances of that entire year (London Stage 1:203). The unprecedented nature of the performance appears to have been just as apparent to contemporary observers like Horace Walpole, who commented in a letter on the novelty of “a play acted by people of some fashion at Drury Lane, hired on purpose” (Letters 242), and the writer William Cooke, who observed that “private theatricals were at this period very rare; . . . the report of this intended fête, as a novelty, drew much of the attention of the town. The scenery was some months in preparation, the dresses were magnificent, and tickets of admission were distributed to only the first people of condition”

¹ Lines 1-2 and 11-14 from a prologue written by the poet laureate William Whitehead for a private theatrical given by Oldfield Bowles on 7 November 1776. The play, an original composition entitled The Siege of Scutari, took place in a barn that had been converted into a theatre in North Aston, Oxfordshire. See Sybil Rosenfeld, Temples of Thespis (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1978), 142-43. The prologue was published in the Universal Magazine, Nov. 1777, 270.
(Memoirs 71). The performance is deserving of examination in the context of this dissertation because it illuminates the cultural significance of private theatricals in the middle of the eighteenth century, as amateur actors responded to changes on the patent stages by playing the “mimic’s part” and imitating the actors, practices, and spaces of the public theatres.

“A Play performed on the common stage, by persons of distinction, is an incident that our age has, perhaps, the honour of having first produced to the world” announced the writer John Hill, calling attention to the novelty and the significance of this performance in a column titled “The Inspector” which appeared in the London Advertiser and Literary Gazette on 9 March 1751.\(^2\) The incongruity of “people of distinction” appearing on a “common stage” is clearly what Hill finds so very striking, and he further emphasizes that the whole project was conceived by “some Gentlemen” as an attempt to do something extraordinary and, hence, memorable, for they “were determined to give their friends and acquaintance an uncommon entertainment, and to do it in an uncommon manner” (“Inspector”). However, doing things in an uncommon manner was common practice for these gentlemen actors, three Delaval brothers, aristocrats who were known for their outrageous behavior.\(^3\) Sir Francis Delaval, the organizing force behind this production, was heir to an ancient Northumberland family. He was an inveterate lover of the theatre, a regular at Drury Lane and Covent Garden where he cultivated friendships with managers, actors, and playwrights alike (Askham 35-6). Notorious for being a rake and a spendthrift, his dissipated life-style ensured that he was often at the center of scandal. This production,

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\(^2\) Hill’s “Inspector” column was a regular feature in the paper. In it he commented on events and happenings around the city, styling himself as the Inspector, an alternative, and more intrusive, version of Addison and Steele’s Mr. Spectator. See G.S. Rousseau, The Notorious Sir John Hill (Bethlehem: Lehigh UP, 2012), 107-109. Hill’s Inspector essays from 1751-1753 were revised and published in two volumes by R. Griffiths in 1753. The essay on the Delaval performance is number three in this volume. Hill’s column on the Othello performance was reprinted in its entirety as “Observations on the Late Performance of Othello” in the Gentleman’s Magazine, March 1751, 119-121.

\(^3\) There were twelve Delaval siblings in all.
however, placed him literally on center stage, satisfying his appetite for exhibitionism and allowing him to demonstrate his prowess as an actor.

Sir Francis, as might be expected, took the lead role of Othello, his brother John played Iago, and a third brother, Edward, was Cassio. In the casting of the women’s parts, though, the production verged into scandalous territory, for one of the actresses was Sir Francis’ young mistress, Elizabeth Roach, and Sir Francis’ willingness to exhibit her publicly in this way was both shocking and titillating. She played the part of Emilia and her sister, Deodata Quane, played Desdemona. Though Desdemona’s character is virtuous and irreproachable, despite Othello’s jealous suspicions, society gossip maintained that Quane’s virtue was no better than her sister’s (Askham 41). As a result, these women’s appearance on the Drury Lane stage accentuated the decades-old stereotype about the sexual licentiousness of female players. Felicity Nussbaum in “Actresses and the Economics of Celebrity, 1700-1800” argues that “the boundary between theatre and life, public and private, was remarkably supple, especially in regard to women’s sexuality. . . . The actress’s private life, from her first appearance on the stage, was fair game for gossip” (150). This association had been present since the first appearance of actresses on the English stage after the Restoration with the conflation of Nell Gwynn’s roles as celebrated actress and mistress to Charles II, for the actress as spectacle, on public display and subject to the gaze of male spectators, added to the perception of her “excessive sexuality” (89), contends Kristina Straub, in Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology (1992). In addition, the very location of the theatre contributed to the elision of actress and whore, for as

4 Much of the vitriol in Jeremy Collier’s A Short View of the Immorality, and Prophaneness of the English Stage (1698) is directed at actresses, who bear the brunt of Collier’s attacks on the lewdness and debauchery of the English theatre.

5 For more on Nell Gwynn see Gill Perry, Joseph Roach and Shearer West, The First Actresses (Ann Arbor, Michigan UP 2011), 35 and 64-75. For an insightful gloss on Nell Gywnn’s role as cultural icon see Roach, It (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 2007), 164-66.
Gill Perry indicates in *Spectacular Flirtations* the area where the Drury Lane and Covent Garden theatres were located was “renowned for its brothels” and all too visible street prostitution (27). Notably absent from the Delaval cast was Sir Francis’ wife, Isabella, whose fortune, used without her consent, had financed the extravaganza and whose exploitation by her husband added to the pervasive sense of scandal (Askham 55).  

It was not just stereotypes about women and acting that were highlighted by this performance, for the Delavals’ attempt to reflect the practices of the public stage ultimately proves to be a kind of magnifying mirror, heightening and emphasizing issues that had been present in the British theatre all along, but which became much more obvious when the players were aristocrats. This was especially true in regards to class status, with the appearance of these “persons of distinction” on the “common stage” amplifying anxieties about the evolving class and professional status of actors. For while the status of actors had, in many respects, been steadily improving over the course of the century—Straub notes that “players claimed a sort of bourgeois professional status by midcentury” (153)—a substantial class divide still separated the professional actors and these amateur aristocrats. Though like David Garrick, the famous actor and manager of the Drury Lane, many of the most successful actors would, over the course of their careers, attain the manners of gentility, associate with members of the elite, and acquire markers of upper class life—houses, land, possessions—they were still not viewed as equals by those in high society. Shearer West, in *The Image of the Actor* (1991), observes that among the nobility, “Garrick’s assumption of gentility was perceived by many as emulation, rather than a

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6 Isabella Nassau Pawlet was a wealthy widow, much older than Delaval, and rumored to be mad. He had married her solely for her money in April 1750 only to find that it was largely entailed. In 1755 she charged him with criminal conversation for his adulterous relationship with Elizabeth Roach. See Francis Askham, *The Gay Delavals* (New York: Rinehart, 1955), 51.
reflection of his actual status” (17). The desire of the aristocrats to imitate the actors on the stage seems to underscore the actors’ desire to emulate the nobility in real life.

Yet the audacity of the performance’s taking place on a public stage invited a direct comparison with professional players, who had the power of experience and training on their side. The amateur status of the actors was all too apparent in their clearly discernible stage fright, invoked, Hill observes, by “the terrors of an audience,” and as a result they did not project enough to fill the space, making it hard to hear the dialogue. Hill attributes these problems to the “infinite disadvantages” an inexperienced player labors under “in comparison of those whose nightly task it is to act” (“Inspector”). Many years later, Austen would echo Hill’s comments, when in Mansfield Park she has Edmund disdain the “raw efforts of those who have not been bred to the trade” and disparage amateur actors as “a set of gentlemen and ladies, who have all the disadvantages of education and decorum to struggle through” (150). By the time of the Delaval performance, acting was coming into its own as a profession that required specific skills and training and that, as a result, was also worthy of respect (Straub 10). Still the presence of the amateurs on the stage would seem to undercut the assumption that acting should be the purview of professionals. Walpole bolsters this view when, with a back-handed compliment, he comments in a letter to Horace Mann a few days after the event, “They really acted so well, that it is astonishing they should not have had sense enough not to act at all” (Letters 242).7

In any case, what they lacked in skill and experience, they made up for with money. The London Evening Post (7-9 March 1751) reported that over a thousand pounds had been spent on the production resulting in impressive scenery, outstanding music, and incomparable costumes, “not only magnificent, but well fancied, and much better adapted to the Characters” than in

7 In a letter dated 13 March 1751.
previous productions (Hill, “Inspector”). Since expense seems to have been no object for these wealthy aristocrats, they could stage the production much more lavishly than was the norm for the commercial theatres, where profits, budgets, and the bottom line held sway. All things considered, Hill concludes that the amateurs were ultimately successful because they really did not have to act at all; they could simply be themselves, and their superior manners and breeding would carry the day, in an authentic expression of both nobility and emotion: “there was a Face of Nature that no theatrical Piece, acted by common Players, ever came up to. It was evident that the Performers felt every Sentiment that they were to express, and that they were not reduced to labour at an Imitation at what would be done in real Life on the Occasion” (“Inspector”). While it is necessary to bear in mind the obsequious nature of press reports in this time period, especially when the aristocracy was involved, Hill’s focus on the natural quality of the acting as a function of the innate preeminence of the actors seems telling, for such statements reveal underlying assumptions about the essential effect of class as determinative of character. Correspondingly, professional actors are found wanting by comparison and dismissed as mere imitators of noble characters. It comes as no surprise, then, that professional actors seem to have been quick to deride the Delavals’ abilities. According to an often repeated story at the time, the actor Samuel Foote did not attend the performance but appeared in the greenroom after it was over and sotto voce asked Garrick how it had gone. Garrick replied that “I never suffered so much in my whole life!” To which Foote supposedly replied, “What for the author? I thought so. Alas, poor Shakespeare!” (Cooke 72). The performance, according to this anecdote, was an

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8 Though Garrick joked, at the Delavals’ expense, he did not suffer financially for this performance: his take for the evening was approximately 160 pounds, or the equivalent of an average night’s profit on Masque of Alfred (1740), the play he was currently running. See George Winchester Stone, The London Stage, 1747-1776: A Critical Introduction (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1968), xcvi.
affront not only to those who act for a living, but also to Shakespeare himself, whose great tragedy the untrained players had no right to undertake.

Nevertheless, the combination of Delaval notoriety and the novelty of seeing amateurs act on a public stage resulted in an unprecedented demand for tickets, with Hill claiming that up to twenty thousand people desired one of the thousand available tickets (“Inspector”). The Evening Post Intelligencer reported that originally the play was to be held at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, but the Delavals realized that the space simply was not large enough to accommodate their anticipated audience, and so they petitioned Garrick for permission to stage their production at the Drury Lane (5-7 March 1751). A report in the London Evening Post enumerates some of the notables who were in attendance as well as the travails endured by the elite ticket holders as they braved the disreputable streets surrounding the theatre:

On Thursday night, their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales, the Duke of Cumberland, Princess Amelia, Prince George and Princess Augusta with the greatest number of the nobility, foreign ministers and gentry of both sexes went to the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane to see the play Othello acted by several ladies and gentlemen for their diversion. The company was the most brilliant ever seen in a Playhouse in this Kingdom, the streets and avenues were so filled with coaches and chairs that the greatest company of the ladies and gentlemen were obliged to wade through dirt and filth to get to the house which afforded good diversion and benefit for the pickpockets and other gentlemen of that trade. (7-9 March 1751)

The interest in this extraordinary event even enveloped Parliament, where, according to Walpole, “the rage was so great to see this performance, that the House of Commons literally adjourned at three o’clock on purpose” (242).

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9 Allardyce Nicoll states that at that time the Drury Lane would have had seating for about a thousand people, but indicates that the capacity of the Little Theatre in the Haymarket in those years is unknown, The Garrick Stage (Athens: Georgia UP, 1980), 40,60. According to this Delaval anecdote, it must have been less than a thousand. The move from the Haymarket to Drury Lane also reflects a move from a minor theatre operating without a royal patent to one of the Theatres Royal, conferring a sense of legitimacy on the performance.

10 This report was reprinted almost verbatim in the Morning Advertiser, 8 March-11 March 1751.
Once inside the theatre the illustrious spectators filled the whole house, which Hill observes was lit up with an unusual number of wax candles, the better to illuminate the fashionable audience who “glittered with Diamonds and Embroidery” (Inspector 11). Since “the Tickets expressed no particular Part of the House,” seating was first come, first served, and “the whole House was filled with equally good Company.” Hill notes approvingly the pains that the Delavals took to create an exclusive audience for their play, for they knew that “every Part of the House would be full of Persons of the first Fashion; and they paid them the just and sensible Compliment of keeping all improper People from among them” by not only making sure that tickets were only available to their elite social circle, but also ensuring that “the Tickets were so carefully disposed of” that the ladies of the evening who frequented the theatre district and who were ubiquitous at theatrical performances “found no Possibility of Admittance” (10-11).

In fact, one of the most striking aspects of all the commentary on the evening is that it focuses more on the audience than the actors, as if the really compelling spectacle was in the house rather than on the stage. For many observers, seeing the theatre filled with a homogeneous audience comprised solely of the elite and well-connected was perhaps more astonishing than seeing amateurs acting on a patent stage. Patrons of the public theatres at this time normally represented a fairly diverse cross-section of London society, with class stratifications inscribed in the galleries and boxes of the house. As a result, the sight of members of the aristocracy seated in the middle gallery, which was usually filled with tradesmen and merchants along with their wives and families, or even, more shockingly, in the upper gallery, the haunt of raucous apprentices and servants, appears to have been truly remarkable. The Morning Advertiser makes a point of mentioning that “the Marquis and Marchioness of Granby, Duke of Kingston, Lord Cholmondely, and several of the Nobility were in the Upper Gallery” (8-11 March 1751) and
Hill notes that “half a Dozen Stars glittered for the first, and probably for the last, time in the upper Gallery” (“Inspector”). Because it was a private event, even though it was in a public theatre, the Delavals could control who was there, and perhaps more importantly, who was not. Since the audience was made up entirely of the elite, the absence of any class distinctions became glaringly obvious. By removing those differences, the performance magnified the class hierarchies that normally existed within the theatre audience.¹¹

Though Foote and Garrick may have felt that only professional actors should have the right to stage Shakespeare, and while Othello, laden as it is with ideological significance, may also strike twenty-first century observers as an overly ambitious choice, in Othello: A Contextual History (1994), Virginia Mason Vaughan argues that the Delavals’ decision may have been based on more practical reasons. Othello requires a fairly small cast and thus could be produced by a group of amateur actors more easily than a play like Hamlet (124).¹² Additionally, there were good male roles for each of the Delaval brothers, obviously an important consideration, but, perhaps more significantly, the role of Othello would have provided a duly challenging and highly respected vehicle for exhibiting Sir Francis on the public stage. As Leslie Ritchie, a scholar of performance practices of the period, notes, eighteenth-century theatre aficionados considered the character of Othello to be one of the greatest roles for actors due to the wide emotional range that it encompassed, particularly the challenge of portraying jealousy, which was considered to be “the apex of theatrical sentiment” with Othello representing “the epitome of that sentiment” (“Spouters” 58).

¹¹ Terry Castle observes something similar about the masquerade, writing that it “made hierarchies explicit by dramatically suspending them.” See Masquerade and Civilization (Stanford: Standford UP, 1986), 87.

¹² Vaughan’s chapter “The Delaval Othello” provides a useful and detailed overview of this production, which she reads in the context of other Othello performances. See Othello, 113-134.
Notably, the Delavals had been tutored in acting by Charles Macklin, a playwright, manager, and actor, renowned for his portrayal of Iago (Vaughan 121), who a decade earlier had pioneered, in conjunction with Garrick, a more realistic style of acting, which aimed to show emotions that were true to nature (Vaughan 117). According to James Kirkman in his *Memoirs of the Life of Charles Macklin* (1799), Macklin taught his technique not only to “persons employed on the Stage” but also to “people of the first rank and character” who “profited, in an eminent degree, by his manner of teaching elocution” (333). The Delaval’s relationship with Macklin may have influenced their decision to produce *Othello*, for Kirkman states that these aristocratic pupils “became desirous of performing in public, in order to display their own acquirements and abilities, and at the same time to give an incontestable proof of Mr. Macklin’s eminence in theatrical instruction” (333). In this light, the performance at Drury Lane can be viewed as a kind of recital, providing proof of the students’ accomplishments and testimony to the efficacy of the teacher. It is probably no coincidence that another of Macklin’s students, Samuel Foote, was Sir Francis’ closest friend. Foote, who would go on to become a successful playwright, professional actor, and theatre manager, had made his own acting debut as Othello in 1744, in a performance given by a group of Macklin’s acting students at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket (Nicoll, *Garrick* 4). Cooke, in his *Memoirs of Samuel Foote, Esq.* (1805), indicates that it was, in fact, Foote who first suggested that Sir Francis, who “was fond of the stage and a good performer,” should employ his talents in staging a play (71). It certainly seems likely that given Macklin and Foote’s own performance history with *Othello*, the Delavals’ choice of it may have been driven by a desire to imitate and acknowledge their professional mentors.

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13 Macklin’s career spanned over sixty years and his influence on the British theatre achieved “near-mythic proportions” according to Richard Bevis, an expert on the drama of the period. See *The Laughing Tradition* (Athens: Georgia UP, 1980), 129-138.
Sir Francis’ class status may have given him an advantage when it came to playing the part, for as Vaughan explains, “When a mid-eighteenth-century audience came to see Othello, it expected a noble hero, a gentleman who displayed good manners and civility” (119). The actor Tate Wilkinson emphasized that Sir Francis really embodied the role: his “person was noble, handsome, and commanding, and very proper to give a striking resemblance of the Moorish General” (2:221). To eighteenth-century audiences, class similarity may have been more significant than racial difference. Nevertheless, Sir Francis, like the professional actors he emulated, played the part of Othello in blackface, probably achieved by using burnt cork.\(^{14}\) While it would seem to be obvious that the blackface that Sir Francis wore when he played Othello would have been read by the audience as a signifier of racial difference, marking Othello’s North African origins, John O’Brien writes in *Harlequin Britain* (2004) that actually “skin color signified differently to the eighteenth century than it does to us. This is particularly the case for the first half of the eighteenth century, when the link between skin color and race—indeed the very concept of a race itself as a meaningful category for grouping humans—was much less fully articulated than it would be later” (121).\(^{15}\) However, in *Performing Blackness on English Stages, 1500-1800* (2005), Vaughan argues that a white actor playing Othello in blackface, was, even early in the eighteenth century, clearly a marker of otherness (though that alterity may not necessarily have been racially charged), whereby “the recognition that the actor underneath the blackened skin is actually white” creates “a sort of double consciousness on the

\(^{14}\) The epilogue comments on Sir Francis’ face being blackened. See Smart 7 line 18.

\(^{15}\) David Worrall examines other plays with blackface roles that were popular in private theatrical settings, James Townley’s *High Life Below Stairs* (1759) and Edward Young’s *Revenge* (1721) and distinguishes between blackface roles on the eighteenth-century stage and the American minstrelsy shows of the nineteenth century, as analyzed in Eric Lott’s seminal work on the subject *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993). Worrall argues that minstrelsy “was highly contested in a British setting.” See *Harlequin Empire* (London: Pickering, 2007), 27, 30-33.
The discordance between actor and role is magnified in such a case, as is the spectators’ appreciation of the transient and fictional nature of the performance, for the blackface will be removed when the play is finished, giving it a mask-like quality.

A black mask was conventionally worn by Harlequin in eighteenth-century afterpiece pantomimes, where the character represents the spirit of carnival and misrule. O’Brien delineates the semiotics of Harlequin’s mask as a signifier of both a kind of exaggerated and pronounced theatricality and illegitimate performance (128). That carnivalesque inversion of everyday reality, the world upside down, seems to have been a large part of the appeal of private theatricals, where playing one’s opposite allows for a release from the rigid hierarchies that determined the course of daily life. The carnivalesque effect of the mask was also a key convention of the masquerade, for, as Castle points out, “one was obliged to appear, in some sense, as one’s opposite” (75). Though “eighteenth-century critics saw the masquerade and the theater as related” (79) for both involved dressing up and role playing, there was, actually, a fundamental difference between them. The masquerade was, ultimately, about disguise; the costume was supposed to prevent the wearer from being recognized. Acting, particularly in

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17 The link between the black mask, legitimacy, and blackface is developed further when O’Brien makes the connection between Harlequin’s black mask and the Black Act of 1723 which made it a capital crime to black one’s face and which had been implemented in response to poachers blackening their faces for disguise, Harlequin Britain (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004), 128. John Stevenson points out that because the Black Act was aimed at preventing poaching, hunting having been designated the sole legal privilege of those members of the gentry who owned property worth at least one hundred pounds it becomes associated with issues of legitimacy and class. See The Real History of Tom Jones (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 78.


19 Castle indicates that on a psychological level the choice of masquerade costume may reveal deep-seated desires, making the costume less about otherness and more about the opportunity to express one’s true nature in a veiled manner, 73.

20 Disguise, of course, was also the reason that poachers painted their faces black. See note 17 above.
private theatricals like the Delaval performance, was, to a great extent, not about disguise but display. The actors desired recognition even as they played characters that were essentially quite different from themselves.

However, blackface carries a unique valance, signifying something much more potent than just another other costuming choice. In *Cities of the Dead* (1996), Roach argues that an actor playing Othello with “a black mask covering his white face” and “a European general’s uniform covering [Othello’s] history as a slave,” “poignantly reverses the polarities of Du Bois’s double consciousness” (112). Thus like Vaughan, Roach construes such a performance in terms of double consciousness, but he argues that the potency of this effect in the theatre stems from the real-life exploitation and oppression that it evinces, though I would argue that this does not presuppose a conception of race as we might understand it today. While the significance of blackface is powerful when a professional actor performs the role, it is even more striking when the white face belongs to an aristocrat. For in many cases, the tremendous wealth that allowed aristocrats like Sir Francis to spend extravagant sums on private theatricals stems from the commerce of Empire, which to a great extent depended on the enslavement of those with black faces. Thus while the appearance of Sir Francis in blackface can be seen to signify inversion, misrule, and alterity, there is no way to ignore the fact that it ultimately serves the function of anamnesis, becoming that which Roach describes as an effigy, bodying something forth, evoking an absence, and recalling the faces of slavery (*Cities* 36).

For the purposes of this study, the Delaval theatrical at Drury Lane provides a fruitful starting point, for it is originary in several respects. At the time, observers recognized it as something new and innovative and remarked on its singularity. Moreover, this is the first production by adult amateurs that received substantial press coverage, inaugurating an era when
private theatricals were regularly reported on in the papers, becoming the eighteenth-century version of media events. This occasion manifests the way in which private theatricals blur the distinctions between private and public on multiple levels: theatres, spheres, and discourse. In addition, it emphasizes the categorization of actors as amateur or professional. Because the Delavals appropriated a patent stage, their performance illuminates and magnifies a number of issues regarding women, class, race, and empire that would prove to be resonant for private theatricals throughout the remainder of the century.

Mimicry, Illegitimate Theatre, and Samuel Foote

The Delaval theatrical also demonstrates the way that amateurs sought to reflect the performance practices of the public stage, accentuating the importance of mimicry in these productions. Accordingly, some background information on the public stage of the time will prove helpful in developing a more complete understanding of private theatricals within their historical context. For in order to make sense of private theatricals as a mimic stage, it is necessary to comprehend what was occurring at the public theatres, not only in terms of stage practices but also in terms of the politics and policies regarding the regulation of the theatres. To that end, an examination of events surrounding the Licensing Act of 1737, which ushered in a new era of licensing and censorship at the British theatres, and the constitutive development of notions of legitimate and illegitimate dramatic forms that resulted will be expedient, as will a closer look at the career of the actor Samuel Foote, who not only figured prominently in the plan for the Delaval theatrical, but who, as a mimic extraordinaire, pushed the boundaries of legitimacy in an age of strict regulation, blending mimicry and illegitimate theatre in a way that would impact both public theatres and private theatricals.
On 24 June 1737, Robert Walpole’s government passed the Licensing Act, which increased governmental control over the public theatres. This act proved to be pivotal in British theatre history, for it stipulated that spoken drama could only be performed legally at the two London theatres holding a license, or royal patent: The Theatre Royal in Covent Garden and the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. All new plays, additions to old plays, prologues, and epilogues performed by these theatres had to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain fourteen days before the performance, and he had the power to refuse to allow the performance of any play. His decision was final and there was no possibility of an appeal (Liesenfeld xxiv).  

The Licensing Act effectively ended the careers of a number of actors, managers and playwrights. Like Henry Fielding, who left the theatre to pursue a career in the legal profession and, eventually, in novel writing, a number of these displaced theatre professionals sought employment elsewhere. But despite the legal ramifications, other intrepid actors and theatre managers began to seek ways to continue making a living on the stage. Since the patent theatres had the sole right to charge admission for drama that utilized the spoken word, one common tactic was to charge admission for a concert of music, dance, acrobatics or even rope dancing, all of which were not regulated by the Licensing Act, and then perform a play during the interval, gratis. Indeed, for a while, the authorities allowed this means of evading the law, which became known as the “concert formula” because, technically, admission was not being charged for a play. Another way of circumventing the Licensing Act involved claiming that a performance was merely a rehearsal; tickets in such cases would have been purchased elsewhere, often from an agent stationed at a pub, coffee house or bookseller. Another ruse declared that a given play’s

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actors were actually students practicing their art under the tutelage of a drama instructor, since student performances at schools were not subject to the Licensing Act (Scouten, *Critical* liii-v).

Private theatricals which occurred in private homes and theatres were exempt from the restrictions of the Licensing Act. Thus a double standard emerged whereby a group of professional actors could not legally present plays if they charged admission, but a group of amateurs could present the same plays with no repercussions from the authorities.

Foote’s debut performance as Othello, mentioned in the section above, provides a case study in how acting companies attempted to get around the Licensing Act. The play took place at the Haymarket theatre under the management of Macklin. However, Macklin did not have a patent and so was not legally allowed to perform any spoken drama. In a notice placed in the *Daily Advertiser* on 21 January 1744, he claimed instead that the play “will be perform’d by a set of Gentlemen for their own Diversion, no money will be taken at the doors nor any person admitted but by printed tickets; which will be delivered gratis by Mr. Macklin at his House in Bow Street, Covent Garden” (Scouten, *Critical* liv). Since Macklin, a well-known professional actor, played the part of Iago himself, the ruse that this was just a private theatrical done by amateurs for their own diversion and not for any monetary gain may have seemed less than convincing to the authorities, and thus on the day of the performance, 6 February, the advertisement for the play reverted instead to the tried and true concert formula.

In 1747 Foote attempted to use the concert formula at the Haymarket again, but this time he was the one managing the company of illegal actors, and the authorities halted their evening performance. Never one to give up, he tried again, but the advertisement this time read as follows: “On Saturday Noon, exactly at Twelve o’Clock, at the New Theatre in the Haymarket, Mr. Foote begs the Favour of his Friends to come and drink a Dish of Chocolate with him.” As
before, no money was to be collected at the door, yet another legal precaution, but rather tickets
were to be purchased “at George’s Coffee House, Temple Bar” (*Daily Advertiser* 25 April
1747). This time the authorities let the show go on, most likely because the noon performance
time, a really quite brilliant innovation that probably can be viewed as the first matinee, did not
conflict with the patent theatre’s evening shows, thus underscoring the fact that enforcement of
the Licensing Act in the decade after its passage came to be primarily about upholding the
monopoly of the two patent theatres. Charging money for the dish of chocolate and not the play
was yet another way round the Licensing Act, but Foote also deployed the “diversion” tactic as
utilized by Macklin into the very title his play, *The Diversions of the Morning* (Chatten 18).
Plays performed for financial remuneration would be subject to the Licensing Act, but those
done merely for the actors’ own personal amusement and diversion would not be. Playbills for
private theatricals, and published prologues and epilogues like those for the Delaval *Othello*
usually emphasized the class status of the amateur actors, stating that they were “gentlemen” or
“persons of distinction” who perform for their own amusement or diversion, and thus stressing
that these are decidedly *not* professional actors. In this case, Foote appropriates the term
“diversion” as a signifier of amateur, and thus perfectly legal, performance and applies it to his
illegitimate production. The term takes on a protean quality, though, marking Foote’s
performance as something fairly trivial, and therefore not worthy of a serious inquiry by the
authorities, while at the same time labeling it as a truly diversionary tactic, a means of distracting

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22 For more on Foote, his evasion of the Licensing Act, and his shows featuring mimicry see Jane Moody,
“Stolen Identities: Character, Mimicry and the Invention of Samuel Foote,” in *Theatre and Celebrity*,
eds. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 65-89. For an indispensable analysis of illegitimacy
and the eighteenth-century theatre see Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP,
attention from Foote’s actual purpose, which, of course, is not primarily his amusement or entertainment, but making money off this illegal performance.23

Foote’s *Diversions of the Morning* consisted of a constantly changing series of satirical imitations which displayed Foote’s incomparable talent for mimicry, a talent which Samuel Johnson described as being “very entertaining with a kind of conversation between wit and buffoonery” (Boswell 1:441). In these performances, which drew large crowds, he would mimic the personality characteristics, behavioral quirks, and vocal quality of professional actors and other public figures in London. Peg Woffington, Garrick, Quin, and Fielding are just some of the theatre professionals who were subjected to his scathing attacks (Moody, “Character” 69-70). In 1752, Foote published a version of it as *Taste*, a two-act comedy dedicated to Sir Francis Delaval. In this dedication he argues that comedy’s purpose lies in exposing “the Follies and Absurdities of Men” (iv), a viewpoint that earned him the moniker the “English Aristophanes” for his embrace of the corrective nature of satiric comedy (Bevis 150). Foote’s mimic satire made him successful, but it also made him enemies, and while some of those that he lampooned enjoyed the publicity and attention, many others did not appreciate being the focus of his mockery. Garrick was often Foote’s target, and therefore it comes as no surprise that Wilkinson reports “that Garrick had much reason to be offended with Foote is certain, and that he inwardly hated him is as certain; nor is that to be a matter of surprise, as Foote was ever endeavoring to expose, and even, if possible, to injure him. He gloried in it and seized every opportunity to have a cut at him and serve him up as the maimed, not perfect Garrick” (2:23).

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23 Daniel O’Quinn explicates yet another definition of “diversion”: a means of turning away from or forgetting unpleasant situations. He quotes Richard Steele in *The Tatler*, no 89. “What we take for Diversion, which is a kind of forgetting ourselves, is but a mean Way of Entertainment, in comparison of that which is considering, knowing, and enjoying ourselves,” *Entertaining Crisis in the Atlantic Imperium, 1770-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2011), 44.
In 1766 Foote himself was actually maimed, thrown from a horse, in what appears to have been a jest turned sour on the part of Sir Francis and Edward, the Duke of York. They had urged Foote to ride an exceptionally spirited horse as joke, but the ensuing accident ultimately resulted in the amputation of Foote’s leg. Out of remorse, the Duke of York secured a royal patent for Foote, which allowed him to produce plays legally during the summer season (15 May through 15 September) at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket (Smith, *Plays* 34). Though Foote was finally granted legitimate status as a theatre manager and actor, he did not abandon his use of mimicry as a satirical tool. He continued acting, incorporating his wooden leg into characters like the devil on crutches in his play *The Devil on Two Sticks* (1768) and thereby creating a self-reflexive mimicry that proved to be wildly popular with audiences (Bevis 164-5).

Foote’s remarkable and enduring talent for mimicry and his ability to market that talent through his own plays resulted in commercial success but also impacted the cultural valance of mimicry. Foote created a burlesque that presented a distorted reflection of a specific individual’s distinctive personality quirks and mannerisms, and although primarily done for comedic effect, such mimicry also functioned as a kind of social satire which could ultimately affect the way that the original subject would be perceived. In a compelling analysis of the contiguities between farce, politics, and Foote’s mimicry, Betsy Bolton states that “the successful mimic ensures that the original’s performance itself will henceforth be received as something distorted, distorting, and unnatural” (149). The true power of such mimicry resides in the way it parodies the original rather than providing a straightforward copy, exposing the reality of the subject through exaggeration and excess, and subsequently changing the way the mimic’s subject is perceived.
David Garrick and Mimicry

Garrick’s associations with mimicry are also worth examining, for Garrick’s acting style and method were rooted in a mimic impulse. Additionally, Garrick’s celebrity and acclaim as an actor eventually engendered a mimic desire among some of his ardent fans who sought to emulate his famous roles and scenes themselves, in drawing rooms, assembly halls, and private theatres. Yet this type of mimicry differs from that which made Foote so famous because it seeks to emulate not parody, to attempt to re-create an accurate and faithful imitation, even if inexperience or lack of talent makes such an achievement impossible. In his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), Johnson codifies this distinction by defining the noun “mimick” as “a ludicrous imitator; a buffoon who copies another’s act or manner so as to excite laughter;” yet he defines the adjective “mimick” as “imitative.” One can almost imagine a picture of Foote appearing next to the first definition and one of Garrick next to the latter.

Garrick’s own interest in, and talent for, acting seems to have had its early roots in mimicry, according to Arthur Murphy in *The Life of David Garrick, Esq.* (1801). Murphy explains that as a young boy, Garrick “discovered a turn for mimickry: the strolling actors who at times visited Litchfield, kindled in his young mind an early love of theatrical performances” (6). His own abilities as a mimic, combined with seeing the power of acting and mimicry on the stage, led him to want to experience the theatre for himself. Murphy describes how Garrick mimicked the strolling players by creating a little theatre company of his own:

What he admired he soon wished to put into practice; and, with that view, engaged a set of his school-fellows to undertake their several parts in a comedy. He was now the manager of a company. *The Recruiting Officer* was his favourite play. Having drilled his young performers by frequent rehearsals, the play was acted before a select audience in the year 1727. Garrick was then eleven years old. (6)
Garrick was certainly not the only young person who became enamored with the idea of acting after seeing a performance by strolling players in the provinces. These companies of itinerant actors went from one small town to another, staging plays in whatever space was available—generally public houses, inns, and barns—and though the entertainment they provided was often of dubious quality, still it was the only opportunity to see a theatrical performance that many in the audience would ever have. Before the 1737 Licensing Act, a troupe of strolling players needed to get a license from the Master of the Revels and the permission of the town magistrate in order to perform any “Interludes, Drolls, Country Shews, and Entertainments” explains Sybil Rosenfeld in her book *Strolling Players and Drama in the Provinces 1660-1765* (1939), though the popularity of these entertainments, especially with the country gentry, usually insured that such permission was given (6-7).

However, one of the results of the Licensing Act was that theatrical performances were no longer legal in the provinces, and thus in rural areas actors were at risk of being arrested as rogues and vagabonds.

In *Strolling Actresses Dressing in a Barn* (1738), William Hogarth depicts the situation that strolling companies found themselves in after 1737 (fig.1). The engraving shows a troupe of actresses getting ready for a performance in a country barn. It seems notable that Hogarth focuses specifically on actresses, for their status as women on the stage emphasizes the liminality of the strollers’ position in eighteenth-century society. A copy of the Licensing Act appears in the image, highlighting the unlicensed nature of strolling performances which made this way of life increasingly precarious. Framing the scene as if it were a stage, Hogarth emphasizes the incongruity of a ramshackle barn with a hole in the roof pressed into service as a theatrical space,

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25 For the complete text of the Licensing Act of 1737 see, Liesenfeld, n. pag.
yet the space also feels attic-like, a repository of theatrical artifacts, filled with myriad costumes, props, and scenery, as if the old theatrical tradition of strolling companies has been, by virtue of the Licensing Act, relegated to a dusty corner of the cultural attic. The general shabbiness of Hogarth’s depiction of this theatrical detritus adds to our impression of the strollers themselves. A contemporary description of a strolling company notes how “ragged and emaciated” they were, “yet some shreds of old lace were visible either in the hats, breeches, or petticoats of these poor deplorable mortals” (Rosenfeld, *Strolling* 16) and Hogarth portrays the wretchedness of the actresses’ poverty alongside the romance and grandeur invoked by the theatre.

The romance and allure of the strolling company captured the imagination of many budding young actors like Garrick. His initial forays into acting with school-boy theatricals, were not, however, his only experience with private theatricals and illegitimate theatre. Ten years after the school production, in 1737, the same year that the Licensing Act was passed, Garrick moved to London along with Samuel Johnson, who had been his school master in Litchfield. Three years later he took part in in a private theatrical production of Henry Fielding’s *The Mock Doctor* at the offices of Edward Cave’s *Gentleman’s Magazine* in Clerkenwell (Knight 16). Little is known about the performance itself, but the epilogue that Garrick wrote for this theatrical was printed in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in September 1740. The opening line, “how happy chance can alter one’s position” (“Epilogue” 461), seems startling prescient in retrospect, for the very next year—1741—happy chance did dramatically alter Garrick’s position when he appeared as Richard III in an illegitimate production in Goodman’s Fields. Because the theatre did not have a patent, the playbill describes the show’s location as “the late theatre in Goodman’s Fields,” as if disclaiming its very status as a theatre might aid in the attempt to evade the Licensing Act (fig.2).

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26 Samuel Johnson was working for Edward Cave as a writer for the *Gentleman’s Magazine* at this time.
Using the “concert formula,” the playbill advertises “a concert of vocal and instrumental music. Divided into two parts,” and information about the play appears only as an addendum, a mere afterthought: “NB Between the Two Parts of the concert will be presented an historical play, called the Life and Death of King Richard the Third.” According to the playbill, the play given during the interval “will be performed gratis, by Persons for their Diversion,” and as if to underscore the point that this performance is not being done by professional actors for money, it announces that the part of King Richard will be played by a novice (Garrick), “a Gentleman (who never appeared on any stage)” (Nicoll, *Garrick* 1).

Despite the performance’s illegitimate status, it not only launched Garrick’s acting career, but proved to be a transformational moment in English theatrical history. Murphy describes the profound impact that Garrick’s performance of Richard III had on the world of eighteenth-century theatre, saying that in it “the audience saw an exact imitation of nature” (*Life* 23). Theatre historian Allardyce Nicoll explains that Garrick’s audience experienced his acting style as “natural” based on “the illusion of reality” that he created: “he invested his lines with passionate delivery; and he possessed, to a supreme degree, the ability to move from emotion to emotion with supple ease and rapidity” (*Garrick* 14). Part of his “natural” acting technique was also due to his ability to mimic the actions and behaviors of real people. That Garrick seems to have been an astute observer of human nature is underscored by Georg Lichtenberg, a professor of mathematics and physics from Germany who on a visit to London made a point of observing Garrick, noting with approval that no small part of the great actor’s success was due to the fact that “man was his study, from the cultured and artificial denizens of the salons of St. James, down to the savage creatures in the eating-houses of St. Giles” (Lichtenberg 8). Stone, Garrick’s

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27 Garrick began acting at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane during the next season, 1742-3.
biographer, attests that “Garrick turned observation and mimicry into art, giving as a result of study, pains, and infinite practice the appearance of unforced realism in detail” (David 40).

In 1744 Garrick articulated his theory of acting in a pamphlet with the inordinately long and deeply satirical title of *An Essay on Acting: In Which Will Be Considered The Mimical Behavior of a Certain Fashionable Faulty Actor, and the Laudableness of Such Unmannerly, as Well as Inhumane Proceedings, To Which Will Be Added, a Short Criticism on His Acting Macbeth* (1744). The pamphlet was written and published primarily as a marketing tool, a way of generating interest in his upcoming debut as Macbeth, but Garrick begins it with a serious explanation of the actor’s craft as “an Entertainment of the Stage, which by calling in the Aid and Assistance of Articulation, Corporeal Motion, and Occular [sic] Expression, imitates, assumes, or puts on the various mental and bodily Emotions arising from the various Humours, Virtues and Vices, incident to human Nature” (5). He quickly, though, moves into a satiric mode, parodying those who would criticize his acting style. Mimicking the voice of one his detractors, who dismisses Garrick as merely a mimic and thereby unworthy to appear on the patent stage, he frets, “How his being a good Mimick should entitle him to be a great Actor, I can’t so easily comprehend,” and complains about the use of satiric mimicry, “how can he answer it to Conscience and his fellow Creatures, his endeavouring, by modulating his Organs of Speech and Action, to those of other Actors, to render them contemptible, by such a visible exposure of their Infirmitities” (24-25).

Garrick’s descriptions of the use of physical gesture and movement by mimic and actor are very similar; perhaps being a great actor is predicated on being a good mimic after all. Johnson acknowledges this fact when he declares, “To be good mimick requires great powers; great acuteness of observation, great retention of what is observed, and great pliancy of organs to
represent what is observed” (Boswell 1:440). Such a description would also accurately describe Garrick’s acting technique. At times, though, he, like Foote, recognized the comedic and commercial power of burlesque mimicry. He is reported to have enjoyed doing mimic impressions of friends and associates as a kind of parlor trick, and his old friend Johnson seems to have been the butt of Garrick’s mimic talent on numerous occasions: “Of Dr. Johnson’s manner, Garrick was a great mimic, and by his imitations at times rendered Johnson abundantly ridiculous” (“Memoir” 19). He employed the satiric mimicry of Foote, for instance, in his comedy Miss in Her Teens (1747), in which he played the role of the foppish Fribble to ridiculous excess, and in doing so reportedly mimicked “eleven men of fashion” (Bolton 148).

Mimicry, whether sincere or satiric in intent, represents only the surface, though, and it was Garrick’s ability as an actor to create a sense of depth in the characters that he played, making them seem both real and believable, that garnered accolades from appreciative audiences.

In 1746, Richard Cumberland saw Garrick perform the part of Lothario in Nicholas Rowe’s Fair Penitent (1703) alongside James Quin who played Horatio. Cumberland observes that Quin, a practitioner of the older eighteenth-century style of declamatory acting, spoke his lines “in a deep, full tone, accompanied by a sawing kind of action, which had more of the senate than of the stage in it, he rolled out his heroics with an air of dignified indifference” (Nicoll, Garrick 10). This rhetorical acting style really had more in common with oratory than acting as we think of it today, focused as it was on the recitation of speeches. Garrick embodied his role in a profoundly different way, by acting the part rather than just speaking it, and Cumberland describes his entrance as a moment of palpable change: “it seemed as if a whole century had been stept [sic] over in the transition of a single scene” (10).
During his three decades at Drury Lane, Garrick created many memorable scenes, but the most acclaimed of these occurred in act one, scene four of *Hamlet* when on the ramparts of the castle Prince Hamlet encounters his father’s ghost for the first time. It was literally a hair-raising moment, for Garrick wore a wig that allowed him to discreetly pull a string and make his hair stand on end, a stage effect guaranteed to both terrify and thrill the audience (Roach, *Player’s* 58). Over the course of his career, he played Hamlet ninety times (Stone, *David* 540).

Lichtenberg attended two of these performances and marveled at Garrick’s acting technique (Lichtenberg 2). In a letter written in 1775, Lichtenberg describes this famous scene in great detail:

Garrick turns sharply and at the same moment staggers back two or three paces with his knees giving way under him; his hat falls to the ground and both his arms, especially the left, are stretched out nearly to their full length, with the hands as high as his head, the right arm more bent and the hand lower, and the fingers apart; his mouth is open; thus he stands rooted to the spot, with legs apart, but no loss of dignity, supported by his friends, who are better acquainted with the apparition and fear lest he should collapse. His whole demeanour is so expressive of terror that it made my flesh creep even before he began to speak. The almost terror-struck silence of the audience, which preceded this appearance and filled one with a sense of insecurity, probably did much to enhance this effect. (10)

Garrick believed that the ability to create such a charged connection between actor and audience was the result of the actor’s own sensibility, the ability to empathize with and imitate the emotional responses of others. Writing in 1769, he contended that to be effective, an actor needs the “keen sensibility that bursts at once from Genius, and like Electrical fire shoots thro’ the Veins, Marrow, Bones and all, of every Spectator” (qtd in Roach, *Player’s* 95).

**Mimicry of David Garrick**

The power of this charged connection between actor and audience led many amateurs to strive to imitate Garrick’s acting style, and particularly his famous scenes, for themselves. Joseph
Cradock, an amateur acting enthusiast, indicated that his well-regarded performances in a wide variety of private theatricals were often inspired by Garrick’s acting. In his *Literary Memoirs* he acknowledges his debt to Garrick, stating “from frequently reading with and attending Garrick I became a very exact copyist,” and specifically mentions Garrick’s Hamlet: “as to myself I freely declare my Hamlet . . . was a direct imitation of our great original.” He boasts that “I must say Garrick spoke with great satisfaction of my acting” (4:241-2), and an unverified anecdote claims that Garrick offered to play the ghost to Cradock’s Hamlet at a private theatrical (“Memoir” 20). Cradock assisted with the planning of Garrick’s elaborate, and problem ridden, homage to Shakespeare, the Stratford Jubilee, in 1769, and Garrick attended the private theatricals held at Gumley Hall, Cradock’s country house on Leicestershire, where the acting by Cradock, his wife, Anna, and their “amateur friends of distinction” was said to be “long the talk of the country round” (20). Cradock’s friend, George Beaumont, another inveterate amateur, reminisces in a letter to him about Garrick’s help with a performance of Garrick’s adaptation of *Hamlet* at Oldfield Bowles’ private theatre in Oxfordshire:

> When we performed *Hamlet* at North Aston we went a few days before to see him [Garrick] in that character. You know how difficult it was to procure places at that time. He, however, secured us a box, and was so kind as to lend us his alteration of the play, which however justly criticized, suited our small force better than the original…On the stage, it is impossible to forget him…I was a complete enthusiast, and he made such an impression on me that at the distance of half a century, every look, attitude, and gesture, is before me; every tone and variation of his rapid and energetic voice rings in my ear at the present moment. In short, for the seven last years of his bright career, I never missed seeing him if it were possible. His Lear, Hamlet, Kity, &c. are so impressed upon my memory, that I can now see him perform them in my “mind’s eye” with almost the effect of actual presence. (*Literary* 257)

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28 Among many other changes to Shakespeare’s play as it had been traditionally performed in the eighteenth century, Garrick’s adaptation restores a number of speeches from the first act, the Fortinbras subplot, and the entire Mouse Trap play, but removes the gravediggers’ scene, the character of Osric and the fencing match, and renders Ophelia’s fate ambiguous. See George Winchester Stone and George Morrow Kahrl, *David Garrick: A Critical Biography* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1979), 269-276.
The roles that Beaumont lists as so deeply memorable are some of those that Garrick reprised for packed houses during his final season Drury Lane season before retiring in 1776. The role of Kitely is from Garrick’s adaptation (1751) of Ben Jonson’s *Every Man in his Humour* (1598), he also adapted Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1772), *Lear* (1756), and *Macbeth* (1744). That season he also played Leon from his adaptation (1756) of John Fletcher’s *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife* (1624), Lusignan from his adaptation (pub.1776) of Aaron Hill's *Zara* (1735), which was itself an adaptation of Voltaire's *Zaire* (1732), Abel Drugger from his adaptation (1743) of Ben Jonson's *Alchemist* (1610), Sir John Brute from his adaptation (1744) of Vanbrugh's *Provoked Wife* (1697), and Archer from George Farquhar’s *Beaux Stratagem* (1707). His final performance was as Don Felix in Susanna Centlivre’s *The Wonder* (1714) on 10 June 1776. These roles had become legendary for Garrick, and they, along with Garrick’s adapted scripts, became favorites of amateur actors who attempted to emulate Garrick’s genius, despite the fact that “the English Roscius” was widely acknowledged to be inimitable.

One example, among many, of this desire to imitate Garrick occurred in 1773, when Cradock participated in a private theatrical of Thomas Otway’s *Venice Preserved* (1682), which occurred at Kelmarsh Hall. The part Cradock played, that of the tragic hero, Jaffier, was another of Garrick’s memorable roles (*Literary* 258), one that Murphy considered to be “perfectly suited to the genius of Garrick” (Stone, *David* 528). Stone, in his biography of Garrick, elaborates on this notion, claiming that the role revealed Garrick’s ability to act “so subtly at times, but so affectingly as to draw the spectator on to participate creatively himself” (532), which may explain why it became a perennial favorite for amateur actors: Rosenfeld claims that the play appeared more frequently than any other tragedy on private theatrical stages (169). But the most

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29 For a detailed discussion of the chronology of Garrick’s alterations to *Zara*, see Fred Bergmann, “Garrick’s *Zara*,” *PMLA* 74, no. 3 (1959), 225-232.
noteworthy presence in the theatrical at Kelmarsh Hall would certainly seem to be that of David Garrick, who played the part of Priuli. However, it was not the illustrious Drury Lane actor who made an appearance, but his nephew and namesake, whose resemblance to his uncle “was striking to everyone” (*Literary* 254), and who, therefore, truly did present a mimic version of the famous actor on the private theatrical stage.

The desire to copy Garrick’s most successful scenes and speeches was not confined solely to aristocratic amateur actors. A large number of passionate Garrick emulators came from the lower and middle classes and were involved in a movement known as “spouting,” a form of oratory and public dramatic recitation that, like private theatricals, became very popular in the middle of the eighteenth century. According to Ritchie, who presents a thoughtful examination of the phenomenon in her essay “The Spouter’s Revenge,” spouting was an “established trend” by the 1750s (46). “Spouters,” often apprentices and tradesmen, met in “spouting clubs” which frequently were located in public houses, where for a small fee they could perform their favorite roles for their fellow enthusiasts. Since the performance of an entire play in a public house would violate the Licensing Act, the spouters would spend the evening acting out a variety of favorite scenes and reciting famous dramatic speeches. However, like their aristocratic counterparts, they were generally not interested in creating an original interpretation of a role, but instead sought to mimic performances that they had seen on the public stage, especially Garrick’s most celebrated scenes (Ritchie 50). John Thieme, in an article titled “Spouting, Spouting Clubs, and Spouting Companions,” emphasizes that Garrick’s famed performances inspired many spouters and argues that the rise in attendance at the theatre by middle and lower class patrons influenced spouting’s popularity, inspiring spouters to attempt to imitate the actors they had seen on stage (11). Dane
Farnsworth Smith discusses spouting briefly in his *Plays about the Theatre in England* and also links the rise of spouting to Garrick’s ascension as an actor, saying that to be a spouter, one required only a good memory, a loud voice, and the conviction that one possessed an undiscovered dramatic talent. The exact causes of this remarkable phenomenon appear inexplicable, but Garrick’s meteoric rise as an actor and his popularization of Shakespeare surely influenced many a young man to take acting lessons or to join one of the numerous organizations derisively known as “spouting clubs.” (148)

The derision with which professional actors viewed spouters is apparent in *The Apprentice*, a two-act farce by Murphy which premiered at Drury Lane as an afterpiece in 1756. In it Murphy parodied the passion among apprentices for spouting, exposing the folly of young Dick Wingate, who, though apprenticed to an apothecary, puts all of his energy and enthusiasm into spouting, so that his everyday speech is composed of famous speeches from great plays. He runs off with a group of strolling actors to try to make his fortune, only to be thrown in jail as a vagabond. His father sees the danger of imitation at work: “I caught the Rascal, myself, reading that nonsensical Play of Hamblet [sic], where the Prince is keeping Company with Strollers and Vagabonds: A fine Example” (6). In the play, the apprentices, who are expected to watch and imitate their masters in order to learn their trade, focus instead on imitating accomplished actors like Garrick. Spouting provides an unofficial apprenticeship for “giddy young Men, intoxicated with Plays” who “think of nothing but to become Actors” (8). In the farce’s prologue, written by Garrick and read by Murphy, the Drury Lane audience is told to “Look round—you’ll find some Spouting Youths among ye,” and Garrick lampoons the acting pretensions of young apprentice haberdashers, woolen drapers, and tobacconists who after attending the public theatres attempt to imitate some of his most well-known scenes.
Private Theatricals and Changes to the Public Stage

In 1747, the same year that Foote began presenting his *Diversions of the Morning*, Garrick took over the management of the Drury Lane theatre. His meteoric rise from amateur and illegitimate performer to being considered the greatest actor of the age and a powerful person in the world of London theatre also resulted in his vigorous defense of the monopoly of the patent theatres to produce spoken drama. In 1752, a year after the Delaval performance of *Othello*, Parliament passed another law which further regulated public performances. This one required a license for all commercial public entertainment within twenty miles of London. While the Licensing Act only attempted to regulate spoken drama, the Act of 1752 targeted the very sorts of performances that had developed in response to the limits of the Licensing Act: the circus, burletta, and pantomime, among others. Such performances had been occurring in a state of liminal legality since 1737, but now their legal status was to be regulated (Moody, *Illegitimate* 17-18). However, this new act ultimately resulted in a stricter interpretation of the earlier Licensing Act so that the authorities were more likely to pursue and prosecute infractions of the law, and thus, in the years after the Delaval *Othello* it became much more difficult to evade the terms of the Licensing Act than it had during the years from 1737-1752. Private theatricals, though, remained unregulated, since they were not commercial enterprises, and not, at least technically, open to the public, and thus they were free to perform whatever they wished, from five-act plays to pantomime, and with no obligation to get approval from the Licensor.

Over the course of the next decade the public stage began to undergo a number of significant changes. Ever since the Restoration, some aristocrats had been allowed to sit on the public stage during a performance, and they saw this practice as a customary right of privilege. But they also regularly disrupted performances by talking, getting in the way of the action on
stage, and distracting the audience by providing a spectacle that competed with the actors (Stone, *Critical* xli). In 1762, Garrick, after years of trying, managed to ban aristocrats from the stage of the Drury Lane. Another customary practice at both patent theatres allowed patrons to enter after the main play of the evening had finished and pay half-price admission to see the afterpiece.

Riots ensued in 1763 when the managers at Drury Lane and Covent Garden attempted to end the practice of half-price admission, for this was an option that was especially valued by the theatres’ less affluent patrons, many of whom could not afford to pay full price admission. Changing the rules was seen as tantamount to excluding them from the theatre. As a result, when playbills for performances at both playhouses in January and February of that year stated that “Nothing under Full Price will be taken,” mobs caused extensive damage to both theatres and the managers were forced to capitulate to the mob’s demands to reinstate half-price admission (Nicoll, *Garrick* 90).

Then in 1765, after a trip to the continent, Garrick revamped the theatre’s lighting, adding footlights and sidelights, so that the stage could be better illuminated, focusing the attention on the actors rather than the audience (118). Nicoll in *The Garrick Stage* states that one of the distinctive characteristics of the stage during this time period had been “the close association of actors and spectators,” which led to what he characterizes as “an unconscious feeling that this was a kind of family party” (91), and he argues that while the improvements that Garrick made were clearly beneficial in a number of ways, they resulted in an “only partly conscious breaking away from the family party atmosphere which had hitherto prevailed” (115).

It is possible to view private theatricals at this time as, in part, a response to these changes to the patent theatre spaces and the aristocrats’ position there. The aristocrats, who were used to going to the theatre to be seen, found themselves out of the spotlight. Private theatricals allowed them once again to appear on stage and to be the focus of attention. Additionally, during
the eighteenth century, the stage became increasingly commercialized, as the monarchy withdrew its patronage for the theatre, and the patent theatres became more subject to market forces. The account book for Covent Garden in the 1760s indicates that only one quarter of the theatre’s income came from ticket sales for expensive box seats (Stone li). Less elite patrons thus began to have more influence on the patent theatres’ production choices, and these consumers preferred music, pantomime and spectacle over traditional drama. Such production decisions were also necessary to compete with the illegitimate stages and fairground entertainments. The rise of the private theatrical allowed aristocratic participants to choose plays that appealed to them, subverting this growing tendency toward commercialization by reclaiming the theatre from the marketplace and using sociability as the currency instead of money.

Even though participants in private theatricals seem to want to reclaim the theatre from commercial and professional influences, the private theatricals, nevertheless, imitate the patent stages in a multitude of ways. The private theatres structured their performances according to the model of the patent stages by including prologues, epilogues, and afterpieces. Some of the private theatres even produced the very pantomimes and farces that had become so popular on the London stage. So that, for the most part, it appears that participants in private theatricals were less interested in theatrical innovation than in attempting to duplicate what they saw on the patent stages, but in a more elite and exclusive venue of their own making.

**Private Theatres**

In *The Inspector*, Hill notes approvingly that the Delaval family’s use of a real theatre was a marked improvement over theatricals performed in country-house drawing rooms:

“Theatrical performances have often been exhibited by persons of the first fashion, and with
success; but the apparatus of a regular theatre has been wanting in all these representations, and the whole has been greatly hurt by that deficiency” (10). As a point of comparison, it is useful to study Hogarth’s conversational painting *A Performance of the Indian Emperor*. In 1732, William Hogarth received a commission to record a scene from a play done by aristocratic children at home before an audience of family members and friends, and the resulting painting provides an invaluable glimpse into such a performance (fig.3). This performance of John Dryden’s *The Indian Emperor* (1665) took place in London at the home of John Conduitt who was the Master of the Mint.\(^{30}\) Hogarth depicts the four young actors on a makeshift platform stage in an elaborate drawing room.\(^{31}\) The children are mimicking the acting practices of famous professional actors like James Quin, and were, in fact, coached by Theophilus Cibber, another practitioner of the declamatory acting style. Striking stylized poses while they speak their lines, the children appear as miniature versions of adult actors, and the painting creates a vivid representation of the domestic setting: the presence of family members—squirming youngsters and chatting adults—in the audience and the close physical proximity between audience and actors.\(^{32}\) The differences between this drawing room theatrical and the Delaval production at the Drury Lane are striking. By imbuing an amateur performance with all the trappings of a professional one, the Delavals demonstrated the tremendous appeal of acting in an actual theatre. Perhaps in a desire to emulate that experience, and in response to the significant changes taking

\(^{30}\) Conduitt commissioned the painting by Hogarth. The resulting work “The Indian Emperor” is considered to be one of Hogarth’s best conversational paintings. For more information, see Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth: High Art and Low, 1732-1750* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991), 1-4.

\(^{31}\) The actors were all about 10 years old, and included Kitty Conduitt playing Alibech, Lady Sophia Fermor playing Almeria, Lord Lempster playing Cortez, and Lady Caroline Lennox, the daughter of the Duke of Richmond, playing Cydaria. The performance was repeated at the Duke of Cumberland’s request before his own family at St James’ Palace on April 27, 1732, see Paulson, 1.

\(^{32}\) The members of the audience have been identified as the Duke and Duchess of Richmond, and the royal children William, Duke of Cumberland, and his sisters, Princesses Mary and Louisa, along with their governess the Countess of Deloraine and her daughters, see Paulson, 1.
place at the public theatres during the 1760s, a number of amateur theatrical aficionados began to build theatres of their own, a trend that continued to grow in popularity during the 1770s and 1780s.

Once again the Delavals appear to have led the way, building a private theatre near St. James Park in London where in 1767 they presented Nicholas Rowe’s *Jane Shore* (1714) and *The Fair Penitent*. This may have been one of the very first, if not the first, purpose-built private theatre in London. Thomas Percy described the theatre in a letter to his wife dated 20 January 1767, as “small but fitted up in a most elegant taste . . . which will just hold 50 persons and no more. The seats covered with fine cloth, and the floor all over with carpeting. The Stage raised about 2 feet & decorated in a very pretty neat manner, will all sorts of Scenery as in the great Theatres, but quite new and much more genteel” (qtd. in Rosenfeld 102). The project seems to have been initiated by the Duke of York, who though only 11 years old when the Delavals performed *Othello*, had in more recent years become good friends with Sir Francis and who desired to have a place where he could act in private theatricals. Richard Edgeworth, the father of novelist Maria Edgeworth and a friend to Sir Francis, notes that Macklin once again coached the amateur actors and states in his memoirs that “no trouble and expense were spared, to render [the theatre] suitable to the reception of a royal performer” (76). A generation later, after the death of Sir Francis in 1771, the Delavals built a much larger and more elaborate private theatre at Seaton Delaval, their estate near Newcastle, where from 1790-1792 they staged *The Fair Penitent* four times and *Othello* twice. Interestingly enough, these were the only mainpiece plays

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33 He had taken part in theatricals as a child: at age 9 he had acted in the private theatrical production of Joseph Addison’s *Cato* at Leicester House organized by his father in 1749. See John Heneage Jesse, *Memoirs of the Life and Reign of King George the Third* (London: Tinsley, 1867) 1:4-5. I discuss this performance in chapter three.
that they attempted, as if they were intent upon reprising the private theatricals made famous back in the days when Sir Francis tread the boards.

In 1768, a year after the Delavals built their theatre in London, a private theatre was built at Winterslow the country estate for the Charles Fox family near Salisbury in Wessex. There is no indication in the historical record of whether or not this theatre was envisioned in imitation of the Delavals’ new performance space, however, in this case, a barn on the property was utilized, reconfigured so as to turn it into a working theatre. Arnold Hare in *The Georgian Theatre in Wessex* presents quite compelling evidence that demonstrates how the barn might have been converted into a functional theatre and what it may have looked like (128). It was described on opening night of the Fox’s theatricals as “a commodious theatre, decorated with handsome scenes, etc. properly adapted” (*Salisbury Journal*, qtd in Hare 128). This premiere starred members of the Fox family in Hill’s *Zara*, before an audience of “the Nobility and Gentry in the neighborhood, the City and Close of Salisbury” (130). The *Salisbury Journal* related the evening’s festivities in detail: “When the company were come, and had taken their seats, tea was handed round, (a band of music playing in the meantime for about an hour before the play began),” and after play ended “the company went to Mr. Fox’s house, where they were entertained with an elegant cold collation, and broke up about twelve” (130-1). Theatricals continued at the Winterslow theatre through 1774, attracting spectators from Salisbury and the neighboring countryside, as well as friends of the Fox family, and perhaps even Garrick himself. A letter dated 31 Oct1770 written by Mrs. Harris, a family friend, states that Garrick was expected to attend an upcoming performance of Ambrose Phillips’ *The Distressed Mother* (1712). She adds that “Garrick does not act there this year, but says he will another year act Lord Ogilby, if they will act ‘The Clandestine Marriage,’ which I much hope they will” (Malmesbury
The emphasis she places on this year could imply that Garrick had previously acted in the theatricals at Winterslow, but it could also just represent her hope that he may participate in the future. 8 January 1774 marked the family’s final production, *The Fair Penitent* followed by James Townley’s *High Life Below Stairs* (1759). In a letter to her son written the next morning, Mrs. Harris writes that she had attended the performance the night before and was “most highly entertained” by it; however, a real life tragedy occurred at five o’clock that very morning when a fire broke out in Winterslow House, burning it to the ground (277). Fortunately, no lives were lost, but the house was never rebuilt, the theatricals came to a dramatic end, and the theatre became a barn once again (Hare 137).

Such private theatres became increasingly popular among amateur actors who enjoyed the experience of acting on a stage that mimicked those at the public theatres. Moreover, these theatres allowed for the invitation of more spectators than could be accommodated in a drawing room, so that the actors had the experience of playing for larger audiences, albeit more elite and exclusive ones than in the public theatres. There is, however, also a sense in which these theatres became a way not just of mimicking the public stage but also mimicking what had been done by other amateur actors and attempting to out-do previous productions and one-up the neighbors’ private theatre, the theatrical version of keeping up with the Jones’, or as Austen depicted it, keeping up with Ecclesford. She has Edmund sarcastically give voice to this impulse: “Let us do nothing by halves. If we are to act, let it be in a theatre completely fitted up with pit, box, and gallery, and let us have a play entire from beginning to end; so as it be a German play, no matter what, with a good tricking, shifting after-piece, and a figure-dance, and a horn-pipe, and a song.

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34 *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766) was collaboration between Garrick and George Colman. Lord Ogilby a genial aristocrat, was one of Garrick’s most popular creations.

35 At the time Hare wrote the book, 1958, he indicated that the barn was still standing, but whether it is still there today, I do not know.
between the acts. If we do not out do Ecclesford, we do nothing” (149). Despite Maria’s declaration that they should “make the performance, not the theatre, our object” (149), for the Bertram family, as for many participants in private theatricals, the creation of a theatre space becomes an integral part of the process, with much of the pleasure of presenting a play deriving from having a proper mimic stage on which to play the mimic’s part.

In 1776 another barn was converted into a private theatre, this time in the village of North Aston in Oxfordshire, near the home of Oldfield Bowles, the Lord of the Manor there. Like those at Winterslow, the Bowles family’s theatricals attracted friends and neighbors from the surrounding countryside as well from Oxford. Graham Midgeley in his book University Life in Eighteenth Century Oxford notes that the theatricals were favorites with the Oxford faculty because “these genteel and elegant establishments, free from the rough and tumble of the town playhouses, were more to the taste of the senior and staid members of the university, and all within convenient carriage distance” (134-135). The epigraph for this chapter comes from a prologue written by the Poet Laureate William Whitehead to mark the first performance in this barn turned theatre. In the prologue, Whitehead alludes to the seemingly ubiquitous nature of private theatricals, noting “every man and woman is turned player” (Universal, “Prologue” line 2). Cameos of favorite scenes for amateur actors follow, depicting their appeal across boundaries of age and class such that “no rank escapes it” (line 7) from the “school-boy Richards” who “lisp—A horse!—a horse!” (line 6) to “right honourable Hamlets” who “stare and start” (line 8). The fact that they perform “with a Garrick art” (line 7) these scenes that the great actor made famous further emphasizes the mimicry that informs the private stage. Whitehead


37 All references to the prologue are taken from the Universal Magazine, Nov. 1777, 270.
avers that it is no surprise that Bowles, like everyone else, has organized a private theatrical in his barn: “What wonder then in this theatric age,/If we too catch the epidemic rage?/If with the rest we play the mimic’s part/And drive to our own barn the Thespian cart?” (lines 11-14).

Stressing the humble origins of the theatre, “for we confess this pageant pomp you see/Was once a barn—the seat of industry” (lines 15-16), he also, in language that echoes the last act of The Tempest, imagines a time “when all this glittering show/Of canvas, paint, and plaster, shall lie low;/These gorgeous palaces, yon cloud rapt scene,/This barn itself, may be a barn again” (lines 17-20). In that case, it may also, once again, offer shelter to strolling players rather than providing a stage for well-to-do amateurs: “Hither once more may unhous’d vagrants fly/To shun the inclement blast and pelting sky;/On Lear’s own straw may gypsies rest their head./And trulls lie snug in Desdemona’s bed” (lines 25-28). There is poignancy to this proleptic rendering of the future time when the theatre is a barn once again and the theatricals are merely a memory, yet even then, traces of the plays, of Lear and Desdemona, will remain.

Whitehead realizes that the fact that the theatre once had been a barn gives it added significance which is worth emphasizing in the prologue. Though the practice of turning nearby barns into private theatres was most likely due to pragmatic considerations, for they provided the necessary space with the potential to be transformed into a workable stage and seating, this practice may also reflect the provincial strolling companies’ longstanding use of barns as performance sites. The memory of those illegitimate performers haunts these stages, and the contrast between aristocratic actors and those threadbare vagabonds could not be more striking. Class status is also invoked by the fact that the wealthy actors have the luxury of transforming the barn in the first place, since they do not need to use the barn for its intended agricultural purpose, so that the industry mentioned by Whitehead is subsumed by leisure. The barn invokes
a dichotomy between country and city that also seems very much at play in provincial private theatrical representations, the domestic, rural retreats contrasted with the crowded, urban settings of the London theatres. Thus even though a barn truly represents a mimic stage, in the sense that mimic implies a diminished version of the original, it also carries the connotation of wholesome family entertainment. Austen herself had childhood memories of acting in a barn, and the image of young people putting on a play in a barn to amuse themselves, as in Busby Berkeley’s 1939 movie *Babes in Arms* starring Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney, persists, even though private theatricals have been mostly effaced from our collective cultural memory.

**Prologues and Epilogues**

Another way that private theatricals functioned as a mimic stage was the use of prologues and epilogues. For the Delaval production, a prologue and epilogue were written specifically for the occasion by the poet Christopher Smart who had been John Delaval’s tutor at Pembroke College in Cambridge. While we are fortunate to have a number of contemporary accounts of the Delaval *Othello* and reaction to it, for other private theatricals precious little in the way of historical evidence has survived. Indeed, prologues and epilogues comprise the best, and often the only, information that we have about many eighteenth-century private theatricals. One example comes from a private theatre in Dover where William Fector and a group of his friends performed *Venice Preserved*. While no account of the performance seems to have survived, the prologue was printed in the March 1786 edition of *Town and Country Magazine* along with the following identifying information: “Prologue to Otway’s Tragedy *Venice Preserved* written by a Friend, on the occasion of its being privately represented at Mr. Fector’s Theatre, October 5, 1784. Spoken by Mr. Fector,” and it constitutes all that we know about this particular private
theatrical event (102). Yet valuable insight can be gleaned from these prologues and epilogues. As occasional pieces, engaged with the specifics of particular theatricals and functioning as commentary on them, prologues and epilogues can provide a lens by which we can gain a greater understanding of the theatricals, their significance residing in the mediating role that they perform between the amateur players and their audience, between the private stages and their patent counterparts, and between private and public spheres of discourse.

The convention in the eighteenth century, on both public and private stages, was to have a prologue introduce the mainpiece drama. A temporal marker signaling the start of the performance, the prologue would be spoken by one of the lead actors who stepped in front of the curtain and stood at the edge of the stage, literally placing the prologue in between the audience and the play. The epilogue, coming as it did at the end of the mainpiece play but before the afterpiece, served to engage with the audience members about the play they had just seen, appealing to them to express their appreciation and pleasure and creating a transitional space in the theatrical experience between the mainpiece play and the afterpiece to come. On the public stage, one of the lead actresses customarily spoke the epilogue, and cultural stereotypes regarding the “loose morals” of women who acted professionally certainly colored the audience’s experience of the epilogue with sexual innuendo. In light of the cultural connotations carried by prologues and epilogues in the public theatres, Richard Cumberland in the essay, “Remarks upon the Present Taste of Acting Private Plays,” argues, vehemently but futilely, that they should be eliminated altogether from private stages: “Prologues and epilogues in the modern stile [sic] of writing and speaking them I regard as unbecoming, and I should blush to see any lady of fashion in that silly and unseemly situation . . . [they] are only retained in our
London theatres as vehicles of humiliation at the introduction of a new play, and traps for false wit, extravagant conceits and female flippancy at the conclusion of it” (117).

The private stages did attempt to differentiate themselves from the public stages in one notable way: their prologues and epilogues were spoken by either women or men. The Delaval production, following the tradition of the public stage, had John Delaval speak the prologue and Deodata Quane the epilogue (Vaughan, *Othello* 126). But for Arthur Murphy’s *The Way to Keep Him* at Richmond House in 1787, Mrs. Hobart spoke the prologue and Mrs. Damer the epilogue (Banks 87). Sometimes the same person would speak them both, as Fector always did. Occasionally, the speaker would cross-dress: at Hinchingbrook in 1786 the epilogue was spoken by Major Arabin costumed in the character of Mrs. Cheshire (Banks 75), and at Wargrave in 1790 Mrs. Goodall spoke the epilogue to the *Constant Couple* in the breeches part of Sir Harry Wildair (Banks 134). Uncoupling both prologue and epilogue from their conventional gendered connotations may have been one way to make them better suited for domestic entertainment, particularly with *respectable* women’s reputations at stake.

As Cumberland indicates, not only who spoke the prologue and epilogue, but how they spoke it was of great interest to eighteenth-century observers. Newspaper reports about these theatricals almost invariably mention the speakers and evaluate their ability. For instance, *The Morning Chronicle* for 30 November 1785 comments that the prologue and epilogue for Fector’s production of *Zenobia* were “charmingly spoken. In these sort [sic] of recitations Mr. Fector is unrivalled.” *The Morning Post* for 1 April 1787 reports that the prologue to *The Way to Keep Him* at Richmond House was spoken with “great judgement and effect by Mrs. Hobart” and the *Evening Post* for the 8 May 1787 informs us, “The Epilogue is very happily spoken by Mrs. Damer.” This interest in how these pieces were spoken reminds us that in one respect they could
be viewed as a kind of poetry reading, whereby the inevitable rhymed couplets could result in a either a painful sing-song chant or a pleasing poetic effect, depending on the speaker’s abilities. Yet they also demand a level of performance, beyond mere recitation. If the speaker was skilled, the effect would be that of a conversation with the audience, lending an appealing sense of intimacy and connection to the proceedings. But if the oration was halting and awkward, the illusion of a spontaneous discussion and its mediating potential with the audience would be destroyed.

Sometimes, though, the writing itself was so terrible—hackneyed, disjointed, or overwrought—that no performer could save it. One cannot help but feel sympathy for Lady Mary Bertie who at a private theatrical at Grimesthorpe on 15 November 1787 had the great misfortune of having to speak the following epilogue: “For us and for this trifling show/With Smiling Face and Curtsy Low/I come an Advocate/From you we trust indulgence will ensue/For we shall strive with all our power/To while away an Idle Hour/And when his Fogs November brings/Some hours will hang on leaden wings/In short good folks we merry elves/Will kindly steal you from yourselves” (Banks 51-52). Again in this case no record of the performance survives, so we’re left to wonder if these amateurs were better actors than writers. For it seems a reasonable conclusion that this epilogue, whose author wisely remained anonymous, was not penned by a professional writer, or at least not a very successful one, but rather a family member or friend. Like most of the prologues and epilogues for private theatricals it was written for a specific performance, to mediate between a particular set of amateur actors and their audience, to be as the epilogue puts it, “an advocate” for the players and their play, and this helps to explain why they did not simply repurpose prologues and epilogues which had been written for the public stage.
Yet, perhaps in an attempt to avoid Lady Mary Bertie’s fate, numerous amateur actors engaged professionals, the same people who wrote for the public stage, to pen their prologues and epilogues. The more elite and aristocratic theatricals generated enough publicity for these authors, that, among others, Garrick, Cumberland, Whitehead, George Colman the Elder, and Miles Peter Andrews, joined Smart in writing prologues and epilogues for the private stage. Though generally less cringe-worthy than the Grimesthorpe epilogue, probably none of these works would today be considered great poetry. Though the newspaper *The World* had printed countless prologues and epilogues for private theatricals on its pages, it recognized that they “are for the most formed for an occasion, and seldom are able or fitting to go beyond it” (2 Nov. 1787).

However, throughout the eighteenth century, prologues and epilogues were commonly understood to be “poetical works” with an intrinsic value apart from the play. No less an authority than Joseph Addison discussed this issue in the *Spectator* number 341, where he claimed, "everyone knows, that, on the British stage, they [the prologue and epilogue] are distinct performances by themselves, pieces entirely detached from the play, and no way essential to it" (45). Mary Etta Knapp in her book the *Prologues and Epilogues of the Eighteenth Century* further explains, "By readers and audience alike, prologues and epilogues were considered independent performances to be judged without reference to the plays they preceded or followed" (8). The fact that in the eighteenth century prologues and epilogues were often reproduced as independent literary works, not connected textually to a play, provides support for the perception of them as fundamentally separate from the plays they frame.

Prologues and epilogues for both the public and private stages were regularly printed in newspapers and magazines throughout the century. In fact, the earliest prologue that I have found
was published in *The Poetical Courant* in 1706. It was written for a performance of Thomas Otway’s *Caius Marius* (1680) “acted privately by several gentlemen for their diversion” (6 April). Even though the private theatricals themselves were a noncommercial enterprise, the prologues and epilogues clearly had commercial value, for they were endurably popular with the reading public. This may be partly explained by the fact that their publication allowed those who did not attend the private performance to envision and participate in the event in some way. The printed version of the prologues and epilogues that appeared in the newspapers allowed them to reach a much larger audience, turning what had been a private performance into a public text.

Smart, taking advantage of the publicity surrounding the play and the enormous public interest that it generated, had the prologue and epilogue for the Delavals’ *Othello* printed along with a special dedication to Francis and John Delaval. On the day of the performance (7 March 1751) a notice appeared in the *General Advertiser* stating that this pamphlet would be for sale starting at 8 o’clock the following morning and that it could be purchased at the pamphlet shops in the Royal Exchange and Charing Cross or from Mr. Newbury in St. Paul’s Churchyard. The printed text not only allowed Smart to benefit financially from the event, but it also created a means of public access for those denied admission to the play itself. Occasionally, prologues and epilogues for the private stage were printed and distributed as remembrances of the evening, as was the case at Richmond House in 1787 (Banks 87-90). The printed versions served as a memento for the performance event, as well as a marker of status, demonstrating one’s presence at such an exclusive event. Their significance as printed texts then, seems less about their own literary merit, than their relationship to the performance, and for researchers today, as for those eighteenth-century spectators, their ultimate value lies in their relative permanence as compared to the ephemerality of the performance event.
To make sense of the relationship that prologues and epilogues have to the plays that they frame, Gerard Genette’s term “paratexts,” seems helpful. He uses this term to describe material that exists in addition to, as well as in relation to, the main body of a text, the title page, preface, notes, and index. Though Genette’s focus is on printed texts, and he does not discuss prologues and epilogues for plays, his definition of a paratext as a "threshold," providing a point of entry into the main text, yet not exactly a part of it, seems applicable to prologues and epilogues. As liminal texts, they occupy a space in-between, both separate from and connected to, "a zone not only of transition but also of transaction" (2). While this definition is applicable to all prologues and epilogues, public or private, the transactional, mediating quality of these paratexts seems to be magnified on the private stage, partly because of the much closer connection that exists between the actors and their audience, but also because of the need to apologize for the amateur acting and defend the private performance.

To this end, some prologues and epilogues seek to defend private theatricals through appeals to the past and English tradition. The prologue that Smart wrote for the Delaval Othello performance prologue proceeds to justify and legitimize their performance by locating amateur performance in a context of past English glories and aristocratic custom, saying “This now perhaps is wrong—yet this we know,/'Twas Sense and Truth a Century ago:/When Britain with transcendent Glory crown’d/For high Achievements, as for Wit renown’d;/…Our noblest Youth, would then embrace the Task/Of comic Humour, or the mystique Mask” (5-6). In a similar vein, the prologue written for a performance of The Tempest at Hinchingbrook in 1760 contends: “Should some harsh censor blame theatric joys/ And cry, this acting spoils our forward

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38 Diane Solomon applies Genette’s concept of paratexts to prologues and epilogues from the Restoration patent theatres. She also utilizes his terms peritexts and epitexts, predicating her use of these terms on the specific performance practices of the Restoration stage. See Prologues and Epilogues of the Restoration Theater (Newark: Delaware UP, 2013), 6-9.
boys/Should Prudes exclaim shame on our modern ways/No girls of mine shall see those filthy plays/Let them be taught that pastimes such as these/Did oft amuse our grave forefathers days” (“Prologue,” London 1 Jan.1761). The anti-theatrical prejudice evident in this prologue also appears in one written by Cumberland in 1774 for a private theatrical at Kelmarsh. In it he defends the value of country-house theatricals as a counter to the dissolution of urban cultural pleasures: "In this voluptuous dissipated age,/Sure there's some merit in our rural stage./Happy the call, nor wholly vain the play,/Which weds you to your acres for a day" (Cradock, Literary 262).

From their earliest days prologues argued for the didactic value of private theatricals. The prologue to the 1706 performance of Caius Marius claims, “There’s nothing more instructive than a play/For plays at once delight and profit reach/And pleasingly insinuate what they teach.” (Poetical Courant 6 April). In his prologue, Smart claims that the actors in Othello seek to instruct as well as entertain their audience, overtly making the comparison to theatre professionals whose sole motivation is money-making, “While mercenary Actors tread the Stage/And hireling Scribblers lash or lull the Age/Ours be the task t’instruct, and entertain/Without one thought of Glory or of Gain” (5). Yet stating that the Delavals took center stage at Drury Lane “without one thought of Glory or of Gain” seems strikingly disingenuous. For the performance offered them a clear moment of glory, the chance to display their acting prowess with all the trappings of a real stage and to be the center of attention both on stage and as part of the tremendous publicity that surrounded this performance, all of which seems to have been its own immensely satisfying reward. While they may have been “heedless of profit” in monetary terms, they do not appear to have been indifferent to the social benefit or the “praise”
that ensued (5). Likewise, Smart most likely had thoughts of both glory and gain when he penned
the prologue and epilogue.

George Sutton, Esq, the writer and speaker of the prologue “to the *Provok’d Husband*
performed by Gentlemen and Ladies, at Nocton, near Lincoln, 26 Dec. 1775” (C. Burney
77:52) comments that his illustrious troupe of actors are taking to the stage even “tho’ surly
Wits may frown, tho’ Critics rage,/That Senators should strut upon the stage.” Sutton’s prologue,
like most, goes on to plead for indulgence and beg the friendly audience’s forgiveness for the
acting they are about to see:

> Not that in Nocton’s hospitable hall,
> The foul-mouthed Critic’s angry curses fall;
> Here kind indulgence fortifies the weak,
> And prompts even Diffidence itself to speak;
> For if by chance the mists of error rise,
> And catch the timid Actor by surprise,
> Lead him astray far off theatric ground,
> Lost and bewildered in the mazy round;
> Still can your smiles the noxious mists defeat,
> Your Smiles, like Sol, will brighten all they meet,
> Then, for to-night, be candid, if you can,
> And, tho’ you blame the Actor, spare the man.

The lack of critics at private theatres is one of the most often mentioned characteristics
distinguishing these settings from their public counterparts. Here only a “foul-mouthed Critic”
could fail to be touched by this image of the poor, hapless amateur actor, wandering aimlessly in
the mists of error on stage.

A more blunt assessment comes from the pen of George Colman the Elder, who found
himself rather unwittingly cast as the director of the theatricals at Wynnstay and who reveals his

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39 Taken from an undated newspaper clipping found in the “Theatrical Register,” in *The Burney Collection of Theatrical Ephemera*, Th.Cts.77, 52. Nocton was the seat of the Hon. George Hobart whose wife, Albinia, participated in private theatricals over the course of three decades. I discuss her at greater length in the last two chapters.
frustration with the hopelessly inept actors in the 1778 production of the *Beggar’s Bush* through the words of his prologue: "What tho' our Play'rs stand trembling with dismay?/What tho' they mar the scenes they wish to play?/Unskill'd their anxious terrors to conceal./Their very awkwardness denotes their zeal" (*Prose* 281). Even a fairly skilled group of actors can occasionally overreach, and in the prologue to *Venice Preserved*, Fector apologizes for the audacity of his amateur troupe’s attempt to stage a great tragedy: “Perhaps this night censorious folks may say,/Ambition more than judgment chose the play;/Our powr’s unequal to the great design/That paints each conflict of the human mind./Venice’s stern laws I hope won’t here prevail,/But mercy, more than justice, hold the scale./Candour will sure each liberal mind inspire;/That, should we err, to please is our desire” (“Prologue,” *Town* 120). The prologues repeatedly point out that though the actors may lack skill and talent, they merely desire to please and to amuse their friends and themselves.

Another prologue, this one written for the opening of the Earl of Barrymore’s theatricals at Wargrave states, “Nor, by our friends encircled, shall we fear/Detraction’s venom or the critics sneer;/Our humble wish one steady aim pursues,/Its first, its only object—to amuse” (*World* 6 Dec. 1790, italics in orig.). The prologues and the epilogues repeatedly emphasize the close connection between the actors and the invited, and therefore exclusive, audience, and highlight the quality of the spectators as markedly different from that of the public theatres. The relationship between actors and audience is acknowledged to be one of social equals, of friends who are sympathetic and understanding, in marked contrast to the hostile critics that fill the public theatres. The prologue from 27 December 1786, speaks of the Earl of Sandwich’s theatre as a place “where with good cheer, and pastimes such as these/The neighboring circle we each night may please” (“Account,” *Town* 683), a sentiment which Desdemona, brought back from
the dead to speak the epilogue for the Delaval’s production of Othello “in spight [sic] of suffocation” (7), affirms: “Tis our Ambition, and our Fame to please” (8). To please was their desire, and with the fond hope that everyone, actors and audience alike, was pleased with the performance, the epilogue would bring the play to a close with a plea for applause.

At the end of a play, the epilogue often acknowledged that the experience of private theatricals was primarily concerned with amusement and pleasure. Yet while entertaining the audience was one aspect of what the amateur players desired to accomplish, their main objective, in most cases, was to please themselves. Acting for their own amusement, they took the mimic’s part, imitating the styles of acting, the practices—like prologues and epilogues—and the stages of the public theatres and appropriating them for their own ends. Part of the pleasure of the enterprise resided in the play of mimicry itself, although the performances often ended up reflecting, and even magnifying, key cultural issues of gender, class, and race.
CHAPTER TWO

“MIMIC ART”: PERFORMING BRITISH ARISTOCRACY IN WALES

Tonight, to try our tragic force, appears
A gallant set of friendly volunteers:
Unpractised in the trade of mimic art;
We only shew the dictates of the heart.
—Benjamin Victor, “Prologue Spoken before the Tragedy of Jane Shore”

The Theatricals at Wynnstay

The longest running private theatricals in the eighteenth century took place in Wales at Wynnstay, the country estate of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn the 4th Baronet, who has been called the “greatest patron of the arts Wales has ever produced” (“Williams-Wynn”). He had inherited the largest fortune in Wales when he was just five months old, after his father died in a hunting accident. As a Welsh baronet, a hereditary title, he was a member of the landed gentry, part of the aristocracy, but not the nobility, for the title does not confer a peerage. In many respects, Sir Watkin’s life seems to be typical for a wealthy British aristocrat of his time. He was educated at Westminster School and Oxford, favored schools of the English aristocracy. The year he spent on a grand tour of Europe seems to have been a powerfully formative experience for him, one

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1 The phrase “mimic art” appears in a prologue written by Benjamin Victor for a private theatrical performance of Jane Shore in Staffordshire, 1775. The epigraph is from lines 5-8. The complete prologue was printed in Victor, Original Letters, Dramatic Pieces and Poems (London: Becket, 1776), 3:69-70. The phrase also occurs in the “Prologue to Every Man in his Humour” written for the Countess of Ely’s Attic Theatre in Dublin on 7 May 1789: “with mimic art, To trace the various mazes of the heart;/To bring fictitious anguish to your view,/Or Fancy’s joys with eager haste pursue” (lines 7-9). It was printed in the European Magazine, June 1789, 493.

2 For additional information see the National Museum of Wales, “Williams-Wynn Collection.” The museum hyphenates Williams-Wynn when referring to the family name. At the National Library of Wales, the family name appears both with and without the hyphen. The hyphenated usage appears to have become prevalent in the nineteenth century. Documents show that Sir Watkin did not hyphenate his name. Accordingly, I have chosen to write Williams Wynn without the hyphen throughout this dissertation, reflecting the standard practice of Sir Watkin’s day.
that developed into a life-long passion for art, music and theatre. He served as the MP for Denbighshire for seventeen years, spending the first half of each year at his mansion in London in order to be there for the sitting of Parliament and the London social season. Actively involved in the cultural milieu of the London elite, he was elected to the Society of Dilletanti in 1775 (Roberts 17) and along with the Earl of Sandwich organized private concerts beginning in 1776 for the Society of Antient [sic] Music (Brewer 401). Yet he was also proud of his Welsh heritage, becoming the vice-president of the Society of Antient Britons (the first Welsh society in London) and supporting the Welsh charity school established in London (Thomas). He spent the second half of each year at Wynnstay, his family’s seat in Wales, and it was there that his annual theatricals took place from 1773 through 1787.

The longevity of the theatricals, their Welsh location, and Sir Watkin’s position as a wealthy and well-connected aristocrat are some of the reasons that they are worth studying. Since they took place over so many years, the practices and customs of the actors and theatre could become codified in a way that theatricals that just occurred a few times could not. But their longevity also resulted in the theatricals becoming a significant part of the cultural landscape of the Welsh border region. Both the local newspapers and the national press in London reported on these plays quite extensively, and playbills have survived for almost every performance, as have a number of beautifully engraved tickets. In addition, Sir Watkin invited well-known London theatricals have been included in a few studies by theatre historians and literary critics, among them Price in The English Theatre in Wales, Rosenfeld in Temples of Thespis, and Elizabeth Heard in her article “The Theatre at Wynnstay: Eighteenth-Century Private Theatricals at Their Finest,” Theatre Notebook 58, no.1 (2004): 18-34, they for the most part confine their discussion to chronicling the performances, delineating the stage practices, and cataloguing some of the theatricals’ ephemera. More recently, Gillian Russell, in “Private Theatricals” has suggested that the Wynnstay theatricals demonstrate the performative nature of aristocratic identity, but as her essay seeks to provide a broad and general overview of the entire topic of private theatricals, she does not develop this argument in depth.

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theatre professionals to take part in his productions, using their celebrity as a means of publicity and augmenting the perception that the theatricals’ cultural import included both the urban and cosmopolitan center as well as the rural periphery.

In *Britons* (2005), historian Linda Colley mentions the changes that can be traced in the Williams Wynn family over the course of one generation, from father to son, as a prime example of the way that in the 1770s and 1780s the aristocracy evolved from an alignment that was mainly regional and provincial to one that was generally national and cosmopolitan. She describes Sir Watkin Williams Wynn the third Baronet (1692-1749), a committed Jacobite and provincial Welshman, as a “quasi feudal local overlord,” but states that his son and namesake, in contrast, styled himself as a truly British aristocrat (161). Colley presents a convincing and detailed argument that this profound transformation in identity and self-fashioning is rooted in the loss of the American colonies, a “humiliating defeat” that “proved devastating” to the “public image” of the aristocracy who both commanded the army and led the government (148-49). The resulting “blow to the ruling order’s pride and reputation was immediate and immense” (149), calling into question the “very legitimacy of the power elite” (152) by “casting doubt on the belief that men of land and birth were inherently more suited to the exercise of authority than any other social group” (150). Nevertheless, the members of the British aristocracy managed to reinvent themselves, “re-ordering their authority, their image, their ideas and their composition” (149) and proving their commitment to leading the nation by demonstrating that they were “authentically and enthusiastically British” (155). Although Colley delineates a number of ways

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5 Dror Wahrman builds on Colley’s claims, asserting that the American Revolutionary War had profoundly destabilizing effects on notions of national identity in Britain and that as a result the 1770s, a decade often “glossed over” by historians who are more interested in focusing on 1790s and the events of the French Revolution, were a period of momentous change, leading to a restructuring and realignment of categories of identity (221-222). He argues that the significance of the aristocracy underwent a profound shift as well (151), but he does not mention theatricals either. See Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). See also Paul Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman 1689-1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).
that the elites brought about this successful reconstruction of their identity—increased focus on military service and heroism, attendance at public schools, encouragement of domestic tourism, and amassing collections of British art—she does not, however, include private theatricals in her discussion. In this chapter, I intend to build on Colley’s argument by claiming that private theatricals played a crucial role in the rehabilitation of the aristocracy’s public image, developing and strengthening the notion of its members as fundamentally British and an essential part of its national identity. In this case, the Wynnstay theatricals highlighted and publicized Sir Watkin’s identity as a British aristocrat with a proud Welsh heritage.

To this end, then, not only the time period but also their location in Wales proves to be relevant for understanding Sir Watkin’s theatricals. In *Shakespeare and Amateur Performance*, Michael Dobson argues that, in fact, the great distance from Wynnstay to London played a large part in the theatricals’ success and longevity, since their remoteness meant that they posed no real threat to the London patent stages (*Shakespeare* 70). Yet due to Wynnstay’s location in the Welsh and English border region, about 5 miles from the Welsh market town of Wrexham, 10 miles from the borderland market town of Oswestry in Shropshire, England, and 20 miles from Chester, England, the largest city in the area, the theatricals manifest a hybrid identity, both Welsh and English. The audience they attracted also reflected these qualities, and from the outset, the plays drew large audiences from the surrounding country estates and nearby towns of Denbighshire in Wales and Cheshire in England. In 1775, the first year a record exists for a season of six performances, the Wynnstay theatre held “very full Houses consisting of more than

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*6 While Gillian Russell does mention “the importance of the theatricals to Sir Watkin’s cultivation of a distinctively British public identity” she does not elaborate on this idea. See “Private Theatricals,” 194-95.*
two Hundred Ladies and Gentlemen from the neighborhood of Chester, Wrexham, Oswelty” according to the Adams’s Weekly Courant, a periodical published in Chester (15 Jan 1775).  

The theatricals constituted an important social event among the landed gentry of the region according to George Colman the Younger, who took part in the theatricals for three years, from 1779-1781, along with his father, George Colman the Elder, a playwright, actor, and manager of the Little Theatre in the Haymarket. Colman the Younger includes a number of reminiscences about his experiences at Wynnstay in his memoir, Random Records (1830), which provides an illuminating window into the experience of being a participant in these elaborate country house theatricals. In it he describes the Wynnstay audience as “good Cambo-Britons, of the first families” who “flocked from distant domains to see us;--some came from thirty miles off” (1:259), and tells the story of one evening when so many people staying at inns in the surrounding area needed coaches to get to Wynnstay that some groups resorted to using the only available vehicles, hearse. He notes the incongruity of “two mourning coaches waiting in the Park, which had each brought a very merry party of six inside” (1: 259).

The lengths, both literal and figurative, to which people were willing to go in order to attend the theatricals at Wynnstay, are also the subject of the farewell epilogue for the January 1780 season. It was written by Colman the Elder, and included in his collected works, Prose on Several Occasions (1787) along with three prologues that he wrote specifically for the Wynnstay

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7 Coaches could travel about 5 miles/hour, so the trip from Chester would have taken about four hours, depending on the weather.

8 Colman the Elder also participated in the theatricals in 1783.

9 Colman the Younger was a young man (ages seventeen through nineteen) when he took part in the theatricals. He went on to become a successful playwright, succeeded his father as manager of the Haymarket theatre, and became the Examiner of Plays in 1824.

10 Colman lists the date as January 1779, but since he specifically mentions the plays from the January 1780 season, Cymbeline and The Spanish Barber, it is apparent that the date is incorrect and should read January 1780.
theatricals, none of which have been examined in the scholarly literature previously. In it, he describes the stage at Wynnstay as being similar to a stage coach filled with travelers.\footnote{11} Since the new post-horse tax, I dare engage
That some folks here have travell’d in the Stage:
Jamm’d in at midnight, in cold winter weather,
The crowded [sic] passengers are glew’d [sic] together.
O’er many a rut, and ill-pav’d causeway jumbling.
They pass their Journey, jostling, jolting, grumbling.
Sometimes a pleasing prospect strikes the eye,
Sometimes they chuckle when a good inn’s nigh;
’Till many a squabble, some endearments past,
They part well-pleas’d, and with regret at last.
So in our Stage, in which this Christmas Tide
As inside passengers you’ve deign’d to ride,
You thought yourselves perhaps not well convey’d,
The cattle broken-winded, roads ill made;
Yet fond of travel, some kind looks you bend
Tow’rds fellow trav’llers at your journey’s end. (Prose 283)

The season of plays is described as a lengthy journey that audience and actors have taken together over a number of days, a conceit that accentuates both the multi-day format of the theatricals, their rural locale, and the distance that must be traveled to attend them.

As Colman indicates in the epilogue, the theatricals took place during the Christmas season, with five or six performances usually occurring over a two week period in January.\footnote{12} According to Colman the Younger, the acting troupe “upon these occasions, staid [sic] about three weeks,--began to muster strong about eight or ten days previously to the performances,--acted through the holiday week,—and separated a few days afterwards” (1: 259).\footnote{13} The actors in

\footnote{11} This epilogue bears an extremely close resemblance to the opening paragraph to book 18 of Fielding’s \emph{Tom Jones}. Colman would, of course, be very familiar with Fielding’s novel since he had adapted it for the stage, in conjunction with Garrick, as \emph{The Jealous Wife} (1761).

\footnote{12} During some years the theatricals lasted a week, and in 1785 they occurred in January and then again in late December. There were no theatricals during January of 1786. See the Banks Collection, 151-99, MS 937.g.96, British Library, London.

\footnote{13} Christopher Christie comments that Welsh Christmas celebrations traditionally continued for three weeks, \emph{The British Country House in the Eighteenth Century}(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 298.
the theatricals as well as some audience members were among those invited to come and stay at Wynnstay as part of a large and lively house party over the Christmas holiday. Colman recalls, “At the fullest time of our season, we generally sat down to dinner from twenty-five to thirty in number, upon an average,—the family, and guests, (partly visiting actors, partly audience,) included” (1: 259, italics in orig.). In a prologue written for the 1779 season, Colman the Elder includes theatricals as an integral part of the “Good Humour” of “the joyous season” along with the rural Christmas traditions of “sports and games, religion, and good cheer” (281). Noting particularly the rural roots of the muse of comedy, Thalia, he argues that, like the Colmans themselves, she leaves London, and the pantomime and spectacle that dominate the stage there at Christmastime, to make an appearance at the Wynnstay theatricals, “Now, at our call, from London, routs, and drums,/Back to her rural home Thalia comes./While Harlequin in town the Christmas keeps,/To Wales unheeded and incog. she creeps” (281; italics in orig.). Just as Christmas pantomimes had developed into an established holiday custom in London, the Wynnstay theatricals, over the many years that they occurred, became an eagerly awaited part of the Christmas holiday tradition in Denbighshire and Cheshire.

These plays draw on a long English tradition of dramatic entertainment at Christmastime, including court masques and mummers plays. In the seventeenth century, masques provided elaborate spectacles that were a much anticipated aspect of the Christmas revelry at court. Mumming, a popular tradition all over the British Isles since the medieval period, usually consisted of amateur players who would go from house to house acting out short plays (of these the legend of St. George and the Dragon was a perennial favorite) in return for gifts of food and

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14 Colman the Elder says this prologue to the play Beggar’s Bush was written for Christmas 1778, and though the theatricals were an important part of the Christmas festivities for 1778 at Wynnstay, the performances were actually held every night starting Tuesday, January 5th through Saturday January 9th of 1779. See Prose on Several Occasions, (London, 1787), 3:281, and Banks, 159-63.
money. The Wynnstay theatricals also share a cultural kinship with Welsh “anterliwts,” translated as “interludes” in English, which were short satirical plays written and presented in Welsh, most often by amateurs. These were particularly popular in the countryside of northeast Wales, where Wynnstay was located (Koch 76). Thomas Edwards, known throughout Wales as “Twm o’r Nant,” the most celebrated writer of interludes in the eighteenth century, lived in Denbighshire in northeast Wales (Price 53-54). The Wynnstay theatricals are part of this rich theatrical tradition of plays by amateurs, plays in rural areas, and plays as part of Christmas festivities.

Even Walpole, in a letter to the Countess of Ossory, contends, albeit rather sarcastically, that private theatricals should be included as a regular aspect of holiday entertainment, for they are just as enjoyable, if not more, as other common forms of Christmas merriment: “I do think the representation of plays as entertaining and ingenious, as choosing king and queen, and the gambols and mummeries of our ancestors at Christmas; or as making one’s neighbors and all their servants drunk, and sending them home ten miles in the dark with the chance of breaking their necks by some comical overturn” (Yale 34: 1).15 Another Colman prologue thanks the audience members for leaving their comfortable homes and traditional Christmas games to venture out in the cold to attend the plays: “You then who deign for some few hours to quit/Your fire-side humour, and domestick wit,/Who though the weather’s cold, and roads are rough,/Leave your Hot-Cockles and your Blindman’s Buff,/With looks well pleas’d bring in the new-born year,/And laughing join our Christmas Gambols here!”(286).16 Like Walpole, Colman asserts that Sir Watkin’s passion for private theatricals represents wholesome entertainment in

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15 In a letter dated 15 Jan. 1788.
16 Though Colman the Elder lists the date as Christmas 1780, the prologue was most likely written for the January 1780 theatricals, when the plays were Cymbeline, Colman’s The Spanish Barber (1777), George Farquhar’s The Constant Couple (1699), Foote’s The Author (1757) and Devil upon Two Sticks, Prose 3:285; Banks, 164-67.
comparison to more dissipated amusements like drinking and gambling, or more dangerous ones like hunting (285-286). Although others may choose to pursue these pleasures while in the country, Colman declares that “to Antient Britons from Wynnstay/Our host distributes tickets for a Play” (286), highlighting through his prologue the Welsh identity of the theatraclals’ locale, history, and flamboyant host and affirming that the Wynnstay theatraclals have developed into an alternative, and much enjoyed, Christmas tradition in that part of Wales, combining crowd-pleasing entertainment and Welsh hospitality.

The fact that the Colmans returned to Wynnstay for several years would seem to indicate that they too appreciated being part of the theatraclals, or that at least they enjoyed being Sir Watkin’s honored guests and partaking of his renowned hospitality and elegant accommodations, for as the younger Colman explains, “never were parties more festiv, nor arrangements better made, for the perfect ease and comfort of a houseful of guests, than at Wynnstay” (1: 258). The Wynns’ generous hospitality was widely admired as an exemplary expression of traditional Welsh values and English hospitality. A letter by R.W. to the Philological Society of London in the European Magazine affirms, “The hospitality of this ancient family, and the unaffected generosity of the present representative of it, afford the most pleasing picture to the contemplation of an Englishman. Here at certain festivals, men whose genius will hereafter contribute to adorn the age now passing, and women whose accomplishments grace the present times, are frequently assembled” (71). Another article in the European Magazine, presents the Wynns as shining examples, deserving of “every praise,” for they “serve to revive the almost lost ideas of English hospitality.” In addition “they furnish an elegant spectacle, agreeable both to youth and age,” one that is of widespread interest to “many of our present readers,” and although most readers will not have attended the theatraclals in person, still they are “not incurious to know
the history of the Wynnstay Theatre”—which serves to justify the inclusion of several playbills and tickets in the magazine. Curiously, however, the anonymous writer of this article also foresees that “the time will come when the performances exhibited there will be the objects of enquiry, and it is the duty of a literary journal to supply information for futurity as well as the present day.” The main justification for the theatricals themselves is that “for the time of their exhibition they soften the gloom and horrors of winter, and diffuse innocent amusement at a festival season peculiarly set apart for relaxation” (“Account” 363).

As another aspect of traditional Christmas entertainment and hospitality, Sir Watkin chose to entertain not only his friends and family, but also his tenants, servants, and local tradesmen. An important feature of this annual ritual was the practice that prior to the actual performances the company had two dress rehearsals which were opened to neighboring farmers and tradesmen (Adams’s Weekly Courant 15 Jan. 1775). Colman writes that “these joyous, unsophisticated folks, with their wives and daughters, were, in comparison with our more refined visitors, as the London Galleries are to the dress’d Boxes, much the most cheering Audiences to the Actors. Their Applause, it must be own’d was too injudicious to be very flattering; and their expressions of delight were sometimes directly the reverse of that which might be wish’d” (2:55). Though the unsophisticated reaction of the excited crowd at the dress rehearsals may have provoked some sneers from the aristocratic actors, yet the importance of these performances in creating benevolent feelings for the Williams Wynn family amongst the local populace seems to have been widely recognized. The Chester Chronicle noted the positive effect that the theatricals had on provincial class relations and argued that they should be emulated throughout Britain:

It were to be wished, that the rational and elegant manner of passing the gloom of Winter, practiced by the worthy Baronet of Wynnstay, were generally adopted by men of superior
fortune throughout the kingdom. The presence of their Lords, while it furnished employment for the neighbouring poor, would render the rigours of that severe season scarcely perceptible, and compensate for the absence of the Sun. To diffuse joy and gladness amongst surrounding multitudes, is the most glorious prerogative of wealth and greatness. (22 Jan. 1776)

The hospitality reflected in the Wynnstay theatricals, in this view, may blunt the harsh realities of winter and poverty to some extent, but it also reveals the entrenched class inequalities and established hierarchies of rank and status at the same time. This is also evident in the presence of the Colmans, for while they enjoy a warm reception at Wynnstay, the class difference between the professional actors and amateurs is always apparent, as is the noticeable disparity in skills and training. Describing the first rehearsal that he witnessed in January 1779, Colman the Younger reports that his father was only able to sit part way through the first rehearsal before “the awkwardness of the amateurs and their ignorance in the commonest arrangements of the stage;--they either cross’d behind each other’s backs, or ran against one another, in the attempt to change sides” caused him to go on stage to offer much needed direction. The novice actors realized that they would benefit “by my father’s stage-knowledge, and from that moment he became stage-manager and driller of the whole Company” (1:260). These rehearsals seem to have been taken quite seriously; appearing at them in boots and spurs or a state of dishabille was forbidden, and attendance was mandatory, with illness being the only acceptable excuse (World 17 Jan. 1787).

Colman, for the most part, is rather condescending in his assessment of the acting ability of the amateur troupe, commenting, “I much doubt whether my father, or any London Manager, would have offer’d the best actor among them a good salary” (1: 258-259), yet he does admit that some of the actors were reasonably proficient on the stage. He acknowledges that Sir Watkin was considered the best of the amateurs, but this may simply have been requisite flattery towards
a generous host. He also attests to the abilities of Bob Aldersley, a barrister from Cheshire who was said to be “like Garrick,” and Henry Bunbury, a caricaturist from an aristocratic English family, both of whom played a number of lead roles over several seasons (1:261). In 1785 the *Morning Post* seemed to reach a similar conclusion, singling out Aldersley and Bunbury, along with Mr. Kinnersley who began acting at Wynn Stacy in 1784, as deserving the “greatest merit” among the actors, and noted that “all three are excellent actors” (27 Jan). As early as the 1776 season, the *Adams’s Weekly Courant*, claimed that all of the principal actors demonstrated “great theatrical abilities,” (16 Jan), and though this may have been more an expression of local pride than anything else, for the majority of the actors were drawn from the Welsh gentry, the seriousness with which Sir Watkin approached the theatricals and the fact that many of these amateur thespians seem to have been quite dedicated to them, returning year after year, would argue for their being, at the very least, dependable players. Some of these Welsh amateurs did, though, possess noteworthy skill on the stage. Mrs. Cotes, from North Wales, played many of the female leads to great acclaim, as did Miss Jones, known as “the Sparkler” for her vivacious personality and sparkling eyes. Much admired for her “histrionic talent,” she is said to have lived at Wynn Stacy as a ward of Sir Watkin for much of her youth (Sanders 11). Also from the Welsh gentry were Mr. Apperly, Mr. Clough, Mr. Griffith, and the Ravenscroft sisters, all of whom performed over a number of seasons (*Byegones* 349). Others, however, acted for just a couple of seasons: Mr. Yorke, a Welsh country squire whose estate, Erddig, was nearby, acted in 1777 before Garrick and again in 1778 (Wherry 196). Mr. Maddocks of Denbighshire and Mr. Bridgeman from Shropshire both participated during the last two years of the theatricals (Banks 191-96). Overall, the actors seem to have taken their performances quite seriously, yet it is

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17 The same report appeared the next day in the *Morning Chronicle.*
probably safe to assume that the Morning Post's assertion that “in respect to the principal characters” the plays were “performed in a style worthy of the London stage” (27 Jan 1785) is more representative of the overblown rhetoric common to such reviews than it is an accurate reflection of the quality of the entertainment. Nevertheless, the presence of the Colmans and their associations with the London public theatres probably helped to improve the caliber of the acting and certainly seems to have helped enhance the public perception of the theatricals’ quality.

Colman the Younger, a student at Oxford during those years, states the Wynnstay theatricals provided him with a welcome opportunity to develop and hone his acting skills. He recounts how “I went annually to Wynnstay, for three seasons, --beginning as a promising actor, and having greatly risen in my cast of parts, after the first year” (1: 261). He started out with small bit parts like Ginks in Thomas Hull’s The Royal Merchant; or, the Beggar’s Bush (1706) and Biondello in Garrick’s adaptation of Taming of the Shrew, Catherine and Petruchio (1754), but by the next year was playing Guiderius in Cymbeline and Clincher Jr. in George Farquhar’s Constant Couple (1699) and in 1781 starred as Young Wilding in Foote’s The Lyar (1762), a role made famous by Foote himself (Bevis 158). Getting this opportunity to act caused his “stage-mania” to be “stronger than ever,” for he recounts that “nothing could better suit my young propensities” (1: 258); his parents, who wanted him to be a lawyer, may well have rued the day he went to Wynnstay, for it seems to have cemented his predilection to follow in his father’s footsteps. Though Colman the Elder took on the position of manager and director of the Wynnstay theatricals, he also acted in a number of roles, among them the lead in Richard III, King Henry in 2 Henry IV, and Sir John Trotley in Garrick’s Bon Ton (1775). He also acted parts in several of his own plays, Russet in The Jealous Wife (1761) an adaptation of Fielding’s novel

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18 An adaptation of John Fletcher and Philip Massinger’s Beggar’s Bush (1622).


*Tom Jones* (1749) done in collaboration with Garrick, Basil in *The Spanish Barber* (1777) his adaptation of the Pierre Beaumarchais’ *Le Barbier de Séville* (1775), and Lord Ogelby in *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766), another collaboration with Garrick. In these casting and repertoire decisions, Sir Watkin appears eager to draw attention to the fact that he has a well-known theatre manager, actor and playwright from London taking part in his theatricals.

Not surprisingly, Colman’s son indicates that his father’s acting skills proved “vastly superior to the whole corps” (1:261), yet he also acknowledges the social superiority of the aristocratic amateurs over professional actors, noting that “the Company here, when off the stage, was superior to any regulars on it” (1: 258; italics in orig.). This class differential is manifested in a striking way in the prologue Colman wrote to open the season in January 1781.19 Speaking in the character of a stroller from Wrexham but highlighting his actual role in the theatricals and his position as manager of the Haymarket theatre, he states: “Rival Strollers have arisen, and are resolv’d to exhibit at Wynnstay:/And what I am sure in cause will make you very hearty,/The little Manager from the Hay-market is one of the party” (*Prose* 288). In the persona of this stroller, he focuses on the resentment felt by those who consider themselves true artists and who need to make a living on stage, meager though it is, when they find themselves in competition with amateur actors, who merely dabble in the dramatic arts.

They call themselves *Gentlemen* indeed, but still I say so much the worse!
For when Gentlemen act unlike Gentlemen, ‘tis a private and a publick curse.
Why should a Gentleman pretend to more than he understands,
Take the bread out of our mouths, and our trade out of our hands?
All arts are best executed by the artists themselves;
Gentlemen Artists are mostly mere Dabblers and ignorant Elves. (288)

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19 The plays for this season included *Richard III*, *Merchant of Venice*, Garrick’s 1756 adaptation of Fletcher’s *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife* (1624), Garrick’s *Bon Ton* (1775), and Foote’s *The Lyar* (1762).
Whether these opinions really represent the way that Colman saw private theatricals, or are merely a fictional construct, we cannot be sure, but chances are, the lines probably express, at least in part, a view held by many theatre professionals. Yet there is a certain irony implicit in the fact that Colman, a London theatre manager, takes on the guise of a provincial strolling player, someone clearly at the bottom of the theatre profession’s hierarchy. His adoption of this character, and the resonance this has in terms of class status, thus provides him some distance from the statements that he makes about gentlemen actors. Colman’s decision to be an active participant and supporter of the theatricals for so many years also serves to distinguish his own perspective and situation from the stroller’s remarks. However, it is worth noting that the Colmans did not return to Wynnstay the following year. Colman the Elder did participate again in 1783, but evidently did not write a prologue or epilogue that year, making these remarks about the folly of amateur actors and their potential for harming the livelihoods of hard working professionals Colman’s last published words on the theatricals.

**The Theatre at Wynnstay**

The involvement of the Colmans, with their professional expertise and theatrical acumen, helped to increase the stature and the quality of the Wynnstay theatricals, but the Colmans also represent Sir Watkin’s desire to emulate the London stage in terms of acting and repertoire. However, the “mimic art” of his theatricals is also reflected in the design of the tickets, the layout of the playbills, and the structure of the theatre itself.

As a location representing traditional hospitality, it seems particularly appropriate that the Wynnstay theatre had originally been a large outdoor kitchen. This kitchen was built for the lavish celebration of Sir Watkin’s twenty-first birthday and coming of age party on 21 April
1770. The *Gentleman’s Magazine* for May of that year reports that 15,000 people were fed at the enormous dinner given in Wynnstay park and lists the staggering bill of fare for this feast as including hundreds of roasts, pies, cakes and pastries (“Historical” 6).

The kitchen was turned into a theatre a few months later, and between August and December the Wynnstay account book notes that 300 pounds were paid to Mr. Roger Johnston for the construction costs, as well as painting the scenery and sending puppets from London (Rosenfeld 77).

The first production given at the Wynnstay theatre was a puppet show, but it is unclear if the puppeteers were professionals from London or members of the Wynn family. Whoever they were, one of Sir Watkin’s guests, R. Kenyon, found the new Wynnstay theatre to be quite impressive but the performance to be decidedly less so, writing in a letter to a Miss Kenyon,

> About nine o’clock, we all went to the puppet show, where a handsome theatre and good music were exhibited; but as to Punch, I have seen him much more entertaining for a penny. . . . The whole must have cost Sir Watkin a couple of thousand at least, and was meant to please everybody [sic], but whether calculated rightly for that purpose, or to answer any good end, I much doubt. (502)

Six years later, the *Chester Chronicle* described the theatre as “neat and convenient” (22 Jan 1776), and this view is echoed by Colman who, in his memoir, described the private theatre at Wynnstay as it appeared during the years that he took part in the theatricals as a sensible space, adequate to the purpose, and quite tastefully done:

> The Theatre at Wynnstay has in its time been destined to provide food for both body and mind; it was originally a *Kitchen*, --built on the occasion of its late possessor’s coming of age,--which event was celebrated with all observance of eating and drinking, to be expected on the twenty-first anniversary of the birth of a Sir Watkin Williams Wynn. . . .

This building though intended to be temporary, was I know not how many years old.

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20 The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Sir Watkin Williams Wynn 4th Baronet states that 8700 tickets were issued for the party, allowing 15,000 people into the estate, and that the total cost was 1621 pounds. See Thomas.

21 Rosenfeld cites the Wynnstay account book kept by the butler Samuel Sidebotham in the Wynnstay manuscript collection of the National Library of Wales, MS 102.
when I saw it, and it still, I believe, exists.—It afforded no capabilities, except space, for altering it from a kitchen into a Theatre; the alteration, however, was made with good taste; it presented a plain simple interior . . . and as it could not boast altitude proportional with its breadth, and horizontal length, the Audience part had neither Boxes nor Galleries, but consisted, merely, of a commodious Pit. (*Random* 2: 42-43; italics in orig.)

The building Colman describes was of just a single story, as would befit an outdoor kitchen, and originally built as a “temporary” structure, with a functional but very simple style. All of the spectators sat on one level, akin to the seating in the pit section of the London theatres. This seating arrangement, however, allowed for a change to the stage lighting which Colman felt was notably superior to that at the Theatres Royal, for

there was no row of flaring lamps, technically call’d the float, immediately before the Performers’ feet, in front of the proscenium; but this same float was affix’d to a large beam, form’d into an arch, over their heads;--on that side of the arch nearest to the Stage;--so that the Audience did not see the lamps, which cast a strong vertical light upon the Actors.—This is as we receive light from Nature; whereas the operation of the float is exactly upon a reversed principle, and thows all the shades of the Actor’s countenance the wrong way;--a fault which seems to be irremediable;--for, if a beam to hold lamps, as at Wynnstay, were placed over the proscenium of Drury Lane, or Covent Garden Theatre, the Marybone Goddesses in the upper tiers of Boxes, and the two and one shilling Gods in the galleries would be completely intercepted from a view of the Stage. (2:43-4, italics in orig.)

Sometime in 1782, a new theatre designed by John Evans was built that could hold three hundred spectators, a hundred more than before. There is a drawing of the theatre dated 1782, signed by Evans, that depicts a square two-story building with a large central window framed by porticos, so that the edifice creates a rather stage-like effect (fig. 4). 22 There are two identical one-story structures on either side, one of which may have served as a green room behind the stage and the other as a lobby for entering spectators. In the drawing, which was printed in the *European Magazine* in 1786, the theatre is surrounded by a stage curtain with columns on other

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22 This drawing, the central one in the figure, was used as a ticket for the theatricals and printed in the *European Magazine* in Feb. 1786 in conjunction with two other tickets. Rosenfeld reprints it in *Temples*, illus.12a.
side as if the theatre itself were on center stage. The characters of comedy and tragedy stand next to the curtain and frame the portrait of the theatre. According to the magazine, this engraving was used as a ticket for the Wynnstay theatricals (71), and it appears designed to display and to publicize the completion of the new theatre.

The press provided ongoing publicity for the new and improved Wynnstay theatre, touting it with enthusiastic accolades. In 1785, the *Morning Post* reported that “the worthy Baronet’s theatre is finished in a most elegant style, and is as complete for its size as any of the Royal Houses. It contains about 300 persons . . . Sir Watkin has spared no expence [sic] to make this the completest private theatre in the kingdom” (26 Jan).23 The *Morning Chronicle* in 1787 averred, “The playhouse of Sir Watkin is one of the completest things of the kind. The scenery on a smaller scale than in London, but in every other respect not at all inferior” (11 Jan). Having everything necessary for a complete theatre experience not only set Wynnstay apart among private theatres of the time, but allowed it to even be compared favorably with the London patent theatres.

**Playbills**

The playbills used for the Wynnstay theatricals represent yet another way of mimicking the public stage. Remarkably, playbills have survived for almost all of the Wynnstay performances, providing a wealth of information by documenting which plays were performed and when, as well as which actors were involved and the parts they played. In terms of layout, structure and content, the these playbills reveal obvious similarities to the playbills of the patent theatres, artifacts which Bratton describes as “the solid, comfortable, substantive stuff of theatre

23 A virtually identical article ran the following day in the *Morning Chronicle*. 
history,” explaining that “the body of theatre history hangs upon these bones,” for they have been “extracted and calendered, charted and published” (38-39), resulting in tremendously useful reference works like *The London Stage, 1660-1800*.

Yet the playbills actually reveal much more than just dates and names. Bratton contends that rather than being a “simple source of extractable factual information” theatre historians need to “read the bill whole, and understand that every element on it is a signifier, which, like all signifiers, has a meaning only as part of a system of relationships” (39-40). A closer reading of these documents demonstrates that they transmit meaning in a variety of ways, turning layout and type size into discursive elements. A playbill from Drury Lane dated 3 December 1767 exemplifies this (fig.5).24 It lists the plays and actors using all uppercase block letters, whereas character names are printed in both lower and uppercase italics. The names of more prominent players, like Garrick, appear first, and in much larger type, but all of the players are given courtesy titles. Information about the logistics of the show, details about how to secure places in the boxes, notes about entre-act performers, and the starting time, are given in the smallest print of all. By illuminating such assessments and perceptions about relative worth and value, this type of reading can contribute to our understanding of these more subjective, and illusive, matters, helping us to develop a more comprehensive view of performance events.

In many respects, a Wynnstay playbill from 5 January 1779 looks much like those from the public stage (fig.6). The titles of the plays are in the largest type, and, as in the Drury Lane bill, the characters are listed on the left side using upper and lowercase letters, although not italics, and the actors’ names are written in all uppercase, with size of type indicating the importance of the role. This was the Colmans’ debut performance on the Wynnstay stage and the

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24 While public theatre playbills might differ from this one in terms of print and organization, this kind of close reading allows us to glean similar sorts of details from a wide variety of playbills.
type size indicates a desire to highlight Colman the Elder’s appearance there. His son, listed as Mr. G. Colman, was still a student, and as a novice actor does not receive special billing. It seems suggestive, then, that the playbills from the following year, and all years after that, use a different format, altering the visual cues that demarcate prominence and importance. For instance, a playbill dated 18 January 1780 lists all of the actors using the same type size (fig.7). The effect is to eliminate differences in status and standing between the actors. While there is nothing that would help to definitively decipher why this would have been done, it could possibly have been due to the fact that Posthumous, the lead role in Cymbeline, was played by Bunbury rather than Colman the Elder, who plays Pisanio, Posthumous’ servant. Perhaps listing Colman, the successful professional, in smaller type than Bunbury, the talented amateur, would have created an uncomfortable predicament for all concerned, especially Sir Watkin. The more egalitarian layout eliminates those difficulties by erasing such distinctions.

Yet the class differential between theatre professionals and the aristocratic amateurs is underscored by the fact that several Wynnstay servants were also part of the acting company, as were some hired hands, brought in specifically to help with the theatricals. The company was thus comprised of a curious amalgam of actors, combining people from a wide variety of classes, ranks, and backgrounds, all working toward one common goal. In his memoirs, Colman makes special note of the presence of the servants, and, very helpfully, assesses their acting ability and delineates their positions in the household: Carter, the cook, was “a really good low comedian,” Salisbury, the house steward, had previously worked as a professional actor, and Roberts, a domestic servant, played bit parts. The butler, S. Sidebotham, was in charge of ticket distribution and along with a relation of his, C. Sidebotham, played minor roles, often servants, in many of the plays. Meredith, a cooper and talented singer, whose music lessons were paid for by Sir
Watkin, also took minor roles. Wilkinson, a strolling player, came to Wynnstay every year to act
and paint scenery (2:49). These same names appear on Wynnstay playbills year after year. Yet
Colman also points out that they were listed on those playbills by surname only with no courtesy
title. Indeed, all of the Wynnstay playbills use this method to demarcate the servants from their
fellow players. In the playbills from 1779 and earlier, the servants’ names are printed in the very
smallest type, further setting them apart from the rest of the cast. So while the contributions of
these servants to the theatricals were clearly important, necessary, and most likely, valued, the
playbills still differentiate them from the rest of the acting troupe, making the class distinctions
among the actors visible and signifying that those established divisions of rank and status
continued to play a noticeable and salient role in the theatricals.

Although the form and content of these Wynnstay playbills clearly mimics those used for
the public stage, there is little evidence to indicate whether they also served similar functions. At
the public stages two types of bills were used, each with a different purpose. One was sold inside
the theatre by concessionaires called orange women (who, as their name implies, also sold fruit
as refreshments). Audience members purchased these playbills to find out the cast lists and the
order of the evening’s program (Hogan, Critical xli). The same information was also printed in a
larger format on something called a “big bill” which was posted around town in advance of the
show to advertise it (xx). For the Drury Lane, almost two hundred of these posters were put up
every day at spots throughout the city (clxiv). The bills that have survived from the Wynnstay
theatre are all one size; there is no record of whether larger ones had been printed as well and
just were not preserved. Still, the smaller playbills, the size of a typical broadside sheet, could
have been posted in places where they could be seen by the general public as an advertisement
for the show. As one example, the playbills for December 1785 alert us to the fact that they were
probably meant to be seen in advance of the show. That year it seems that the exceedingly large hats that were currently fashionable for women posed a potential problem, for they would block other spectators’ views of the stage. Thus the playbills emphasize that “Ladies are particularly requested to come without hats” (Banks 191-3). This is clearly information that theatrical organizers would want disseminated beforehand, indicating that the playbills were not simply given to attendees as they entered the theatre. These same bills, though, could have doubled as programs, distributed on the night of the performances to inform the audience as to who would be playing each role. Or they may have been sent round to specifically chosen houses and families to notify them about the plays and who would be involved, a practice that would be more akin to an invitation. A couple of very small versions of the playbills, about the size of a calling card, are included in the Banks Collection and would have been well-suited to serve such a function (189-90). It is certainly possible that the playbills were used in all of these ways.

The fact that several of the Wynnstay playbills were also printed in London newspapers is suggestive about their role in publicizing the theatricals. Since these appeared in print after the performance, they clearly were not intended as advertisements or publicity in the sense of creating interest in attending the theatricals among potential audience members, though this would be the primary type of publicity sought by commercial theatres who desired to fill the house with paying customers. Instead, publishing these playbills broadcasts the existence of the theatricals to a much wider and more general public and assumes that readers will be interested in whom the actors were and which roles they played, albeit after the fact. The playbills allow for the illusion that the reader has been allowed access to a private and exclusive realm, and their appeal resides not just in their usefulness in announcing that a group of aristocrats took part in

25 From some examples see the Morning Chronicle, 28 Jan. 1783 and 11 Jan. 1787.
private plays, but in their identification of those aristocrats with the parts they played and in the opportunity to compare these cast lists to those of the public stage. The London newspaper the *World* printed a series of Wynnstay playbills in January of 1790, and though this was after Sir Watkin’s death and the dissolution of the Wynnstay theatricals, there was still the clear expectation that these playbills would still be of considerable interest to readers.  

As the *World* stated, “The Theatre of Sir Watkin W. Wynn is well known.—A copy of the Cast-Book kept there, obviously an elegant curiosity, will be given from day to day in the World” (2 Jan. 1790). Despite rather high-minded claims that these theatrical mementos were being made accessible because of their intrinsic aesthetic or cultural worth, their real fascination for readers, and thus their commercial value for the periodicals, lay in a more voyeuristic desire, to witness and feel like a participant in that which had been restricted to an elite and select audience. Due to their readers’ keen interest in aristocratic theatricals, these publications sensed a financial opportunity in making public that which had been previously private, through detailed reports on the theatricals and the publication of the playbills.

**Tickets**

Despite the publicity generated by these playbills, it is worth remembering that these were, in fact, private performances, open only to members of the gentry and other persons invited by Sir Watkin. As was mentioned earlier in the chapter, members of the lower classes--Sir Watkin’s tenants, servants, local tradesmen, and their families--were welcome to attend special dress rehearsals, but not the actual performances. The theatricals themselves were ultimately exclusive affairs, and one mechanism for ensuring this was the use of tickets. The

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26 See the *World* 5, 7, 11, 13, 15, 18, and 23 Jan. 1790.
Wynnstay ticket policy is clearly stated at the bottom of every playbill: “N.B. No person admitted without a Ticket, which may be had of S. Sidebotham, at Wynnstay.” Sidebotham, the same Wynnstay steward who acted in many of the plays, also ran the theatre box office, and presumably requests for tickets would all be subject to approval. One ticket was used for all the plays during that season. This may have been a fairly standard practice for private theatricals, though unfortunately there are few existing tickets with which to make a comparison.

However, I have located a ticket for the theatricals at Hall Place in Berkshire, the seat of Sir William East, which contains the following verbiage engraved on the ticket: “Ladies and Gentlemen are requested to write their names on the backs of their tickets” (fig.8). The design of this ticket with the East family coat of arms and motto (Kimber 229) in the center and two figures representing the muse of tragedy, Melpomene, and the muse of comedy, Thalia, on either side could have been used for all the plays done at Hall Place. The plays performed, Young’s Revenge and Charles Coffey’s ballad opera The Devil to Pay (1731) are not listed on the ticket, rather the engraving states merely, “Hall Place Play to begin a half an hour after 6 o’clock.” The day of the week, Friday, the date, December 20, 1782, and the ticket number, 41, are all inscribed by hand. The written ticket number would have helped ensure an accurate tally of the number of tickets distributed.

The need to keep track of the number of tickets was clearly a concern at Wynnstay as well, for by 1779, the theatricals there had become so popular that it was necessary to place an announcement in the Adams’s Weekly Courant, clarifying the proper procedure for procuring tickets. Sir Watkin requested that “the Ladies and Gentlemen who intend honouring his Theatre with their Company, this Christmas” send for their tickets “at least the Day before they intend coming, in order that there may not be a greater Number issued for each Night than the Theatre
can conveniently hold.—Sir Watkin likewise begs that the Ladies and Gentlemen who send for Tickets, will specify the Name of each Person belonging to their Party, that it may be inserted on the Back of the Tickets, to prevent their being transferable” (28 Dec.1779). Hence at Wynnstay, the name of the spectator would have been written by hand on the back of the ticket. There is no indication, however, that a ticket number or the date of the performance to be attended was also specified in writing on the ticket as it was at Hall Place.

Some of the ticket designs included the year and the plays to be performed but others did not, making it possible to reuse ticket designs from previous seasons. The theatricals ran for a total of thirteen seasons. For these, six different ticket designs have survived, five of which were drawn by Sir Watkin’s friend Bunbury, who played a number of lead roles over several years in the Wynnstay theatricals. In addition to being quite a gifted amateur actor, he was a talented amateur artist and well-known caricaturist who emulated Hogarth’s style. The European Magazine described him as “the only legitimate successor to our inimitable Hogarth” (Feb. 1786, 72). Five of his tickets were published in the European Magazine during the 1780’s, which the periodical said allowed it to “have the opportunity of extending the knowledge and circulation of a few of them beyond the narrow limits to which they have hitherto been confined” since Bunbury’s works “are sought after with such avidity” (72).

While precious little research has been done on eighteenth-century theatre tickets, comparing Bunbury’s tickets for the Wynnstay theatricals to the types of tickets utilized for public theatres is enlightening, for as one of the many ways in which private theatricals chose to

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27 The other was John Evans’ drawing of the Wynnstay theatre shown in figure 4 which was discussed earlier in this chapter.

28 See figure 4 for the three tickets published in the European Magazine in Feb. 1786. One of these was designed by John Evans. The two tickets in figure 12 appeared in the European Magazine in May 1786. The ticket in figure 16 was printed in the European Magazine in Nov. 1787.
mimick public stage practices, it reveals cultural perceptions about theatricals. As such, a brief
digression into the types of admission tickets in use during the eighteenth century may prove
helpful. Charles Hogan presents the most thorough study of public theatre tickets available in the
The London Stage, 1776-1800: A Critical Introduction. He describes the various types of tickets:
“checks” which were sold to the general public for admittance to the pit and galleries, “orders”
and “bones” which were given as perquisites to actors and others who worked at the theatre as
well as to theatre share-holders, and “free list” tickets which were given to authors and other
friends of the management (xxvi, xxxiii, xxxv). Though Alwin Thaler in his article “The ‘Free-
List’ and Theatre Tickets in Shakespeare’s Time and After” focuses primarily on seventeenth-
century tickets, he does explain that throughout the eighteenth century the theatre tickets used by
the general public were not paper tickets at all, but round and made of metal (134). Hogan adds
that these tickets, which really looked more like coins, were also referred to as “checks” and
though they were most often forged of copper, occasionally they were made of brass or lead
(xxvii). They usually were embossed with the name of the theatre and a seating section—the
gallery, upper gallery or pit—but because they were not marked with the performance date or
any details about a specific performance, they could be used over and over again (fig.9). They
also did not indicate a specific seat (Thaler 134). Seats for the pit and gallery consisted of long
backless wooden benches which were not marked with a seat number because depending upon
the demand spectators would be forced to crowd together so that additional people could sit on
the bench (xxix-xxx). Theatre-goers who wanted to purchase tickets for the pit and galleries
needed to wait in line outside the theatre, often for upwards of an hour or more. Tickets were
then purchased at the “paying place” by the theatre’s inner doors (xxii). The metal tickets used
by ordinary theatre-goers were not used for entrance to the boxes, the most expensive places in the house, and the exclusive domain of the upper classes.

The only seats that could be reserved in advance were the boxes, and to do this one went to the “box office,” or sent servants, and the spectator’s name would be recorded in the “box-book” which listed everyone who had reserved a place in the boxes for that evening (xxiv-v). This would be available in the theatre lobby before the performance so that audience members could find their assigned box seats, but also so that others could see who would be sitting in various boxes (xxvi). Even though the view of the stage was less than optimal from the boxes, patrons seated there could be seen by everyone else. At Wynnstay, there was no need to demarcate seating areas by class. All the spectators sat in the area in front of the stage, which in the public theatres was called the pit. Since there was no class hierarchy among the audience members, everyone was part of the elite.

“Orders” represented a different kind of ticket, meant to be distributed by actors and other theatre employees to friends and family. Each actor received a group of tickets for every play, customarily for three seats in the boxes and four seats in the galleries. These tickets were handwritten on paper and given to the bearer, and from this comes the term “papering the house” or filling the house by giving away complimentary seats (xxxiv). Those who received these free tickets found, however, that they came with strings attached, for recipients were expected to purchase tickets for the actor’s benefit night, when he or she would receive a share of the house proceeds. In 1788 these written orders began to be replaced with a piece of ivory engraved with the actor’s name called a “bone” (fig.10). Each actor received one of these bones, which would only admit one person. The bone would then be turned in and reused (xxxiv). Understandably, the actors were not particularly happy about this change, for instead of being able to admit seven
people free, they were limited to only one. In contrast, both “renter’s tickets” and “free list tickets” were distributed by the theatre management: renter’s tickets to investors and free list tickets to friends and patrons of the management, members of the press, playwrights, and writers of prologues and epilogues. Some of these were paper tickets, like orders, and others resembled bones, but in every case they were inscribed with the investor or patron’s name and often were good for the entire season (xxxv).

Notably, the tickets to private theatrical performances mimicked the special paper tickets given to friends and patrons more than they do the metal “checks” used by ordinary theatre goers (xl). But their resemblance to the tickets used for benefit performances is even more striking. Benefits were an established custom in the eighteenth-century public theatres whereby special performance nights were set aside with the proceeds of the house going to a specific actor, author, or charity. Buyers did not purchase these tickets at the theatre, but rather from the actor or author, or their designated agent, and distinctive tickets which functioned as a way of advertising these special performances would be printed for each benefit (fig.11).²⁹ Often engraved, sometimes with images of a specific scene showcasing the actor or author, they designated the benefit as a different kind of performance. Thaler points out that printed tickets were probably first used for benefit performances (135), and Hogan notes that often "they were engraved with elaborate type and ornamentation" (xl). The use of such original and distinctive engraved drawings as tickets for the Wynnstay private theatricals advertised the performances and set them apart as exceptional. However, another significant effect was that the beautifully engraved tickets for the theatricals at Wynnstay became prized as mementos and consequently a number of them have survived through the years.

²⁹ This ticket was created for the 1747 Drury Lane benefit for Mme. Violette, the stage name for the Austrian dancer, Eva Marie Viegel. In 1749 she married Garrick and retired from the stage.
The drawings that Bunbury created for the tickets serve an additional purpose, beyond advertising and commemorating the event. For the subject matter that Bunbury chooses for these illustrations becomes an effective means of portraying and publicizing Sir Watkin himself, as well as his theatricals. For example, on the ticket that was used for the January 1780 season, Bunbury depicts Sir Watkin with the exaggerated features typical of caricature and a leek in his hat (fig. 10, bottom image). The Welsh tradition of wearing a leek in one’s hat on St. David’s day, March 1, stems from the legend that in a sixth-century battle against the Saxons, St. David (the patron saint of Wales) ordered the Welsh troops to place leeks on their helmets so they could be identified. The leek provides a way to display Welsh identity. Sir Watkin’s central role as the organizer and host of the theatricals is highlighted by his position in the center of the scene, his pockets stuffed with playbills. He holds one in each hand advertising four of the plays which were performed that year: *Cymbeline*, *The Spanish Barber*, *The Constant Couple*, and Foote’s *Devil Upon Two Sticks*. Framing the scene is a signpost, or “fingerpost” as it very appropriately would have been referred to in Bunbury’s day, that says “To Wynnstay” with a manicule at the end pointing the way and emphasizing the theatricals’ Welsh location. In the background looms the distinctive shape of Mount Snowdon, the tallest mountain in Wales. Next to Sir Watkin stands a goat, another traditional symbol of Wales. The presence of the goat could also be a joking reference to an oft-repeated story about Sir Watkin’s exuberant Welsh pride. Apparently in 1773 he had attended a masquerade at the Pantheon costumed as St. David and riding a Welsh goat. This tale continued to be related for many years, and was recounted over a hundred years later in a history of the family written by John Askew Roberts, *Wynnstay and the Wynns* (1876), for it epitomizes the way that Sir Watkin used performance and spectacle to draw attention to his
identity as a Welsh aristocrat (17). The ticket, thus, underscores the Welsh heritage of Sir Watkin and the unique location of his theatre in the Welsh countryside.

_Cymbeline_, one of the season’s plays, also contributes to this Welsh iconography. Performed at Wynnstay in 1780 and then again in 1787, a number of the pivotal scenes take place in Wales, and this may have been a key to its ongoing popularity in this Welsh context. Still the 1780 production evinced clear ties to the London stage, since both of the Colmans took part and Bunbury’s role of Posthumous was one that had been made famous by Garrick. Furthermore, the text used would almost certainly have been Garrick’s adaptation of Shakespeare’s play. A perennial audience favorite, it was presented 132 times from its opening at Drury Lane in 1761 until Garrick’s retirement in 1776, reports theatre historian George Winchester Stone Jr. in “A Century of Cymbeline” (311). Since Garrick’s adaptation appeared exclusively on the public stage until the end of the century, it would have been the only version of _Cymbeline_ familiar to theatre-goers of the time. Also of importance to those looking to produce the play in a private setting would have been the fact that the Garrick text, which went through seven editions between 1762 and 1795, was widely available for purchase (313). While Garrick’s alteration remains, in many ways, quite true to the spirit of the original for he does not attempt to rewrite Shakespeare’s verse, still he managed to clarify the plot by eliminating several minor characters and digressive storylines, to shorten the play considerably by cutting over 700 lines, and, perhaps most importantly, to reduce the number of scene changes by rearranging and

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30 The _Merchant of Venice_ was produced in 1778 and then performed once at the very end of 1781 season, as a revival of the earlier production with the lead roles done by the same actors. The mainpiece plays that year were _Richard III_ and _Rule a Wife and Have a Wife_. See Banks, 168-172. This pattern of alternating the mainpiece plays three times each over six nights and then adding a seventh night with a different mainpiece play occurred again in 1782, 1783 and 1785. In 1783 a revival of _Henry IV_ played on the last night. In 1785 _As You Like It_ was reprised from the previous season on the last evening. See Rosenfeld, _Temples_, 85-89.

31 Colman the Elder played Pisanio, Posthumous’ servant, and Colman the Younger played Guiderius, one of King Cymbeline’s sons being raised in Wales.
removing scenes (316-18). Although *Cymbeline*‘s fairly rapid movement from one setting to another would not have posed a problem in Shakespeare’s day with its very limited use of scenery, in the latter half of the eighteenth century when elaborately painted scenic backdrops were expected, and scene changes tended to be fairly lengthy and cumbersome affairs, this consolidation of scenes would have been the most crucial alteration from a production standpoint, especially at a private theatre.

Garrick’s alteration reworks the plot to highlight the play’s engagement with issues of British national identity. An import thematic concern in Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*, which, Marjorie Garber argues, “can usefully be considered a myth of national origin” (804), the message of British patriotism is strengthened in Garrick’s text. He discards much of the original’s focus on paying tribute to Rome and uses the character of the British king, Cymbeline, as a way of commenting on the rule of the recently crowned King George III, adding lines that “speak with pride about the British sovereign” (Stone, “Century” 317): “They have a king whose love and justice to them/May ask and have their treasures and their blood” (Garrick, *Cymbeline* 31). These changes lead Valerie Wayne in her article “*Cymbeline*: Patriotism and Performance” to comment that “this was a *Cymbeline* that those seeking to confirm their national identity could really get behind” (391). Hence, the choice of this particular play couples the theatricals, and by association, Sir Watkin, to Garrick’s celebrity as well as to a powerful sense of British national identity.

Nevertheless, it is the play’s Welsh scenes and references that would have held special significance for the predominantly Welsh audience at Wynnstay. The play depicts Wales as a place of pastoral refuge, what Northrup Frye termed the “green world” (85), a place of renewal and change, in contrast to the treachery and corruption of the court. This country/city binary
would have resonated with the provincial spectators, even those who like Sir Watkin spent much of their year in London, reinforcing the impression that the Welsh landscape has a kind of restorative power for those who need an escape from city life. A particularly telling example of this occurs when princess Imogen, in disguise as a boy, Fidele, escapes from the treachery of the court only to become lost in the Welsh mountains. She is offered food and shelter by Belarius, who many years ago sought refuge from the corruption and intrigue of the British court. Belarius was played by Mr. Nares, the Wynn children’s tutor, in his first appearance on the Wynnstay stage. As an illustration of how the distinctions between actor and role can begin to blur in such amateur productions, one can imagine him admonishing his real-life charges with the following lines: “Think us no churls, nor measure our good minds/ By this rude place we live in” (Garrick Cymbeline 50). As the speech continues, Belarius evinces true generosity and hospitality despite the wildness of his surroundings, “Well encounter’d!/’Tis almost night: you shall have better cheer/Ere you depart: and thanks to stay and eat it.” (50). In light of Sir Watkin’s celebrated hospitality during the theatricals these lines would have had carried more weight at Wynnstay than on the public stage. The image projected of Sir Watkin by both ticket and play identifies him as the organizer of the event and a gracious host, a staunchly British aristocrat who, nevertheless, takes great pride in his Welsh heritage and surroundings.

32 It is worth noting that Nares is listed as “Mr. Nares” in the playbill, indicating that his status was seen to be higher than that of a household servant.

33 These lines come from Garrick’s Cymbeline act 4, scene 2. The same lines appear in Shakespeare’s play in act 3, scene 6, lines 62-65. For more on the significance of these lines see Megan Lloyd, “Speak it in Welsh”: Wales and the Welsh Language in Shakespeare (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 116.
Falstaff and Punch, Images of Carnival and Misrule

In 1782 the amateurs at Wynnstay, sans the Colmans, presented another play in which Shakespeare uses a Welsh setting and characters, *1 Henry IV*. The play portrays Owen Glendower, the Welsh leader, as representing an alternate power to that held by the King in London, one that is tied to the land and nature. Wales is depicted as the realm of the imagination, the fantastical, and the mysterious, as evidenced by Glendower’s description of the cosmic portents that heralded his birth (3.1.34-41). The play also makes much of the fact that Mortimer has married Glendower’s daughter, and as a result the couple shares no common language, for she speaks no English and he speaks no Welsh (3.1.188-89). The Mortimers’ marriage, an English gentleman with a Welsh bride, thus is the mirror image of that of Sir Watkin and Lady Charlotte Williams Wynn, the thoroughly English daughter of the former prime minister, George Grenville.\(^34\) Yet despite his pride in his Welsh heritage, Sir Watkin, like most educated Welsh gentlemen of the time, could not speak the Welsh language,\(^35\) and thus when “the lady speaks in Welsh” (3.1.), it would have seemed just as strange and incomprehensible to Sir Watkin and most of his companions as it did to Mortimer. At Wynnstay, the play’s depiction of Wales and the Welsh language as wild, uncivilized, and unintelligible would have appeared both familiar and strange, the very definition of that which is “unheimlich” or uncanny. So the fact that the playbill does not list the parts of Glendower, Mortimer, and his wife proves extremely intriguing (Banks 174). Did the Wynnstay theatricals actually leave out the Welsh scenes rather than highlight that the aristocrats who take part in and attend the theatricals are simultaneously both Welsh and not-Welsh? While we may never know the answer, the production of *1 Henry IV* at

\(^{34}\) George Grenville was the British prime minister from 1763-1765.

\(^{35}\) See Thomas.
Wynnstay does reveal how the meaning of a play can change in dramatic ways when done in a private setting, and the way in which, in this situation, it exposes truths about the participants’ dual identification as both Welsh and British.

If the Welsh scenes did not provide the impetus for the choice of *1 Henry IV*, the character of Falstaff may have, and Sir Watkin’s own words seem to bear this out. In a letter sent to Garrick, imploring him to come to Wynnstay at Christmas-time, Sir Watkin attests, “I must own I do not know a better companion at that sociable season than old Falstaff” (Garrick, *Private* 2:177-78). That Falstaff was a favorite also seems borne out in the choice to perform the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, written by Shakespeare as a vehicle to showcase Falstaff, in 1773, the inaugural season for theatricals at Wynnstay. Two years later, on July 10, 1775, Sir Watkin and several companions dressed in their costumes from the *Merry Wives of Windsor* and cavorted on the streets of Chester in what may have been an early version of performance art, or a publicity stunt that reveals Sir Watkin’s passion for exhibition (Price 62). In any case, it had a powerful impact, for over a hundred years later, *The Cheshire Sheaf* (1880) a compendium of “Local Gleanings, Historical and Antiquarian” listed it as a memorable moment in Chester history (Sanders 251). Falstaff also plays a prominent role in *2 Henry IV*, the sequel written primarily because of the enormous success of this character. So it is hardly surprising that the Wynnstay troupe presented *2 Henry IV* in 1783 with Mr. Metcalfe reprising his role as Falstaff from the previous season (Banks 179). 36 That Falstaff channels the energy of the medieval Lord of Misrule and the spirit of Saturnalia may have been part of his appeal for Sir Watkin, explaining his fondness for Hal’s boon companion during the Christmas festivities at Wynnstay.

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36 They perform *1 Henry IV* in 1783 as well, with Metcalfe playing Falstaff. See Banks, 182.
As another reflection of the spirit of carnival and misrule, it seems fitting that every year during the five years from 1778-1782 at least one of Foote’s farces was presented. Over the course of this time, the Wynnstay troupe presented *The Author* (1757), *The Mayor of Garratt* (1763), *The Cozeners* (1774), *The Devil upon Two Sticks, The Lyar* and *Taste*. Part of the appeal of producing these plays must have been the sheer fun involved in mimicking Foote’s famous mimicry and the satisfaction that resulted from hearing the audience’s laughter in response to their efforts. Some of the roles that Foote made famous with his talent as a mimic are Cadwallader in *The Author* (played by Bunbury at Wynnstay), Major Sturgeon in *The Mayor of Garratt* (played by Carter), Aircastle in *The Cozeners* and the Devil in *The Devil upon Two Sticks* (both of these roles were played by Colman the Elder at Wynnstay). Notably, Sir Watkin himself never played these mimic roles, and in fact, did not appear in any of Foote’s farces, although he did act in Garrick’s comic afterpiece *Bon Ton* (Banks 168). Perhaps Foote’s pointed and often biting humor seemed a bit too audacious and unbecoming for the wealthy aristocrat, though he had certainly been known for indulging in antic behavior in his younger days. Yet while he avoided actually performing in the plays, he seems to have been happy to have put Foote’s hilarious physical and verbal mimicry on his stage. Foote has been described as the “licensed jester” of the age (Bevis 150), whose comedy, like Falstaff’s, seeks to both engender and expose folly. Through Foote’s mimic art, the Wynnstay theatricals tapped into this satiric and subversive comic spirit.

Yet another character who denotes the spirit of carnival appears on the admission ticket most likely used for the *1 Henry IV* performances in 1782, not as might be expected, Falstaff, but that most iconic, and irascible of puppets, Punch (fig. 4, top image). Though this ticket, again by  

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37 For more on Foote’s portrayal of these characters see Bevis, 155-59.
Bunbury, does not specifically state the date or plays, a clue as to the year of its use exists in the presence of a very small figure on the right side of the drawing, a character that could well represent the eponymous little hero from Fielding’s extremely silly farce *Tom Thumb* (1731) which was only performed at Wynnstay during the 1782 season. The drawing, however, does not clearly reference *1 Henry IV* or any of the rest of the plays done that year: Ben Jonson’s *Every Man in His Humor* (1598), Otway’s *Venice Preserved*, *Murphy’s Apprentice*, and Foote’s *Taste*. Instead at the center of the ticket is a large cask, such as would be used for wine or ale. Brandishing the word “Wynnstay” across the middle, the cask, with its ample bacchanalian associations to merriment, celebrations, and revelry proves to be quite an accurate signifier of the lavish hospitality of the Wynnstay festivities. Several theatrical masks ring the top of the cask, linked by ribbons as if to a maypole. To the left of the cask stands Punch, displaying the many distinguishing features delineated by George Speaight in his definitive study *Punch and Judy, A History* (1970): a hunchback, potbelly, googly eyes, beak-like nose, curved pointed chin and cone-shaped hat (67). On the other side of the cask is Punch’s wife, who was actually called Joan during the eighteenth century; she did not become widely known as Judy until the nineteenth century (85). Bunbury’s drawing reflects the fact that Punch and Joan puppets at this point in the eighteenth century were typically marionettes, rather than the more familiar hand puppet versions that became prevalent in the nineteenth century (61). The devil, complete with horns, forked tail, and cloven hooves, peeks from behind the cask, a representation of the conventional puppet show ending in which the devil came to carry off Punch (88). But this character is also evocative of an oft-told tale about an appearance at the theatricals by Satan himself.

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38 As I mention in chapter one, the character of Kitely in Jonson’s play was one of Garrick’s most celebrated comic roles and *Jaffeir* in Venice Preserved was one of his most famous tragic roles.

39 These afterpieces by Murphy and Foote were both discussed in chapter one.
English Theatre in Wales, Price aptly identifies the anti-theatrical bias of Welsh Methodism that the story evinces: “From mouth to mouth passed the dreadful tale that in the middle of the festivities at Wynnstay, the Devil had appeared and had been taken for one of the actors, in his element” (67). The legend was still circulating in Wales one hundred years later, appearing in Bye-Gones, Relating to Wales and the Border Counties (1875); according to this recounting, one Saturday night a gentleman dressed in black with a cloven hoof appeared at the theatricals, and the theatre had not been opened since (347).

The use of Punch on the ticket may simply be a reference to the fact that the Wynnstay theatre’s very first production, as discussed earlier in the chapter, was a puppet show. Perhaps an earlier version of this design served as the ticket for that inaugural marionette performance, or as the entrance ticket to Sir Watkin’s coming of age party in 1770, where a song written to celebrate his birthday was sung at the cask. It also could be that these caricatures contain a number of “in” jokes between Bunbury and Sir Watkin and maybe depict allusions that would have been known to the players or even to the audience as well. Bunbury could have, conceivably, intended to correlate Punch with Sir Watkin himself, as emblematic of diversion and merriment. Tellingly, the Victoria and Albert Museum labels the figure with a leek in his hat as Punch in its description of the ticket for the 1780 season (fig. 9, discussed in the previous section), thus completely conflating Sir Watkin and his pugilistic alter-ego.

Regardless of Bunbury’s intentions, the presence of Punch on the ticket is suggestive, for at this point in the eighteenth century, the puppet had transcended his Italian origins, “had assumed a distinctive English character” (Speaight 64), and had become a widely recognizable

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40 A manuscript of this song dated 19 April 1770 is in the National Library of Wales, MS. 116.
41 I discuss this ticket in the previous section, Staging Welsh Identity. See the description of this ticket by the Victoria and Albert Museum at http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O53353/wynnstay-theatre-print-j-sewell/
representative of English popular culture and an English popular theatre tradition (7). This ticket, then, underscores the Wynnstay theatricals’ contiguity with English popular culture. In *Puppets and Popular Culture* (1995), Scott Shershow delineates Punch’s cultural valance as “popular, carnivalesque, and authentically English” (181). The same description could easily apply to Falstaff, who embodies, albeit in a much larger form, an excessive, subversive vitality comparable to Punch. The ticket’s use of Punch may be a way of denoting that the theatricals reflect a kind of transgressive playacting, existing as they do outside of the laws regulating the patent theatres, but also flaunting Sir Watkin’s own penchant for exhibition and exuberance. Yet the ticket also presents the theatricals as a type of hybrid entertainment, combining Welsh and English, Shakespeare and puppets, aristocrats and actors, high and low culture.

**Shakespeare, Garrick and British Identity**

Though he was undoubtedly a proud Welsh Baronet, Sir Watkin also sought to portray himself as a legitimate member of the British aristocracy. From the very first, Sir Watkin used a devotion to Shakespeare as a means of representing himself as genuinely British as well as Welsh. The ticket by Bunbury, which was presumably used in 1773, the first year that a season of theatricals took place (fig. 13)\(^{43}\), provides evidence of this.\(^{44}\) Though there is no date engraved on the ticket, Rosenfeld states that the copy held by the National Library of Wales has “Nov: y\(^e\) 22\(^d\) 1773” written in what she describes as “a contemporary hand” (*Temples* 78). This ticket

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\(^{42}\) Helen Burke examines the way Punch was used for political purposes in Ireland. See *Riotous Performances* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2003), 170-172.

\(^{43}\) This ticket was one of three tickets published in the *European Magazine* in Feb. 1786. See figure 4, bottom image.

\(^{44}\) Bunbury did not act in the theatricals until 1778, but that does not preclude his drawing this ticket in 1773.
portrays several figures dancing in a ring around a bust of Shakespeare which is placed high on a pedestal so that it seems akin to a traditional maypole in a way that seems rather reminiscent of the circle of masks and ribbons in the Punch and Joan ticket described earlier. Some of these figures could conceivably represent characters, or Wynnstaw actors playing these roles, from Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, the mainpiece plays performed at Wynnstaw in 1773.45 One, with a rotund belly, jolly demeanor, and ruffled collar, appears to be Falstaff, the lead character in *Merry Wives of Windsor*. Another, distinguished by an enormous hat and sword, could well depict Benedick from *Much Ado About Nothing*. The two characters dancing directly in front of Shakespeare’s statue on the right side of the ticket are in all likelihood Sir Watkin and his young bride, Charlotte Grenville.46 Sir Watkin played the parts of Doggery in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Bombardinian in *Chrononhotonthologos*, and though his wife did not ever appear on the Wynnstaw stage, she was noted for her key role as hostess to the festivities. Bunbury depicts the young couple gazing at each other rather than at Shakespeare’s image, and the gentleman looks strikingly similar, leek and all, to that figure of Sir Watkin in the ticket for 1780 which I discussed earlier in the chapter. While the British Museum, in its description of the ticket, conjectures that the character with a leek in his hat could be Fluellen, *Henry V* was never performed at Wynnstaw, so this seems implausible. Rosenfeld’s contention that it is Hugh Evans from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (78) is possible,47 but based on Bunbury’s use of this same character on another ticket coupled with the fact that *Merry Wives of Windsor* was only done in 1773, it is more plausible that it represents Sir Watkin, with the

45 The afterpiece plays performed in 1773 were *Chrononhotonthologos*, and Murphy’s *The Upholsterer* (1758). See Banks, 153.

46 They married on 21 Dec. 1771. Charlotte Grenville was Sir Watkin’s second wife. Sir Watkin’s first wife, Lady Henrietta Somerset, had died two months after their 11 April 1769 wedding. See Thomas.

47 Rosenfeld says that the ticket was used for the performance of *Merry Wives of Windsor*. See Temples, List of Illustrations, n. pag. and illus. 12b.
leek, once again, serving as a marker of his Welsh heritage. Thus this ticket serves to highlight the Welsh identity of the players, but also the revelry, the folk traditions, and the focus on Shakespeare inherent in the Wynnstay theatricals.

The focal point of the ticket, the bust of Shakespeare, is encircled by the ring of Wynnstay actors, who are encompassed by a ring of laurel and a banner that reads “Wynnstay.” Bunbury’s composition mimics the bust of Shakespeare on a pedestal depicted in Thomas Gainsborough’s famous painting of Garrick in which the actor encircles the statue with his arm (fig.10). Gainsborough used Peter Scheemakers’ statue of Shakespeare (installed in Westminster Abbey in 1741) as his model. Dobson argues that this statue became the most recognized embodiment of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century, serving, in effect, as “the official portrait of Shakespeare as national poet” (Making 141). Fittingly, Gainsborough’s portrait of Garrick, the artist who embodied Shakespeare for the eighteenth century, embracing the much loved image of the one Garrick referred to as “the god of my idolatry” was created for the Stratford Jubilee of 1769.48 Garrick’s Jubilee, though marred at the time by shameless self-promotion, disorganization, and torrential rain, took on a more nostalgic glow in the ensuing years, eventually being seen as a national ceremony that, in effect, formally installed Shakespeare as the ultimate British literary icon, while simultaneously codifying Garrick as Shakespeare’s emissary, the champion and defender of his legacy in the national imagination. A number of scholars have presented convincing variants of this argument, as when O’Brien confirms that Garrick “linked his own professional image and success with his claim to be restoring Shakespeare to his rightful place” (220) in the English theatre, and Dobson attests that Garrick

48 The original portrait was destroyed in a fire at the Stratford Museum in 1947. See the website of the National Trust Collection for more about the painting http://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/533870. A mezzotint engraving based on the painting by Valentine Green was published in 1769.
himself becomes “the century’s definitive embodiment of Shakespeare” (*Making* 134). In this portrait he is doing that in a very literal way, for Shakespeare’s bust and pedestal is merging into the landscape, as if Shakespeare was one with the land and England itself, and Garrick, as his living embodiment, becomes the central focus of the painting.

He also becomes a central focus, along with Shakespeare, of the Wynnstay theatricals. Sir Watkin, an avid theatre-goer when he was in London, knew Garrick, a fellow member of the Society of Dilletanti, quite well, and after Garrick’s retirement from the stage in 1776, Sir Watkin was tenacious in trying to convince Garrick to take part in the theatricals at Wynnstay. Letters from Sir Watkin to Garrick written in 1776 and 1777 outline this ongoing attempt. In a letter dated 27 September 1776, Sir Watkin wrote to David Garrick from Wynnstay:

> Dear Sir,
> I am ashamed not to have thanked you before this time for your very obliging letter with the names of several plays fit for our performance, but I deferred answering it till after the opening of Drury-lane Theatre, when you might be better able to know your own engagements, and whether we might flatter ourselves with the pleasure of seeing you, Mrs. Garrick, and your nephew, at Wynnstay this year. I intend being in London for the meeting of the Parliament, and coming back here for the Christmas holidays; and if I could tempt you to return with us, nothing would make us more happy. I must own I do not know a better companion at that sociable season than old Falstaff. I will not now press it farther, but hope when we meet in London to have more conversation on the subject. My wife desires her compliments to you, and joins me in the same to Mrs. Garrick, and I am, dear Sir, your faithful humble servant,
> Wat. Wms. Wynn. (*Garrick, Private 2:177-78*)

Garrick had retired in June of 1776, so Sir Watkin was clearly hoping that, now that he was no longer tied to the London theatre season, he might agree to come to Wynnstay for the

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50 A letter sent to Philip Yorke who had recently inherited Erddrig, a neighboring country estate, states that Garrick had been invited to a “theatrical amusement” at Wynnstay in 1770; however, there is no evidence that he visited Wynnstay at that time. See Albinia Wherry, *The Chronicles of Erthig on the Dyke* (London: Lane, 1914), 145.
annual January theatricals. In previous years, Garrick would have been busy with his managerial obligations at the Drury Lane at that time of year, for the season for both Drury Lane and Covent Garden ran from mid-September until mid-June. Although their licenses allowed them to be open year round, these theatres closed during the summer for financial reasons, since the annual summertime exodus out of London by people of means, who preferred to spend those months at their country estates, made it unprofitable for the patent theatres to remain open. Those with a desire to attend the theatre during the summer, could, however, still attend plays at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket. Though the theatre’s patent had expired upon the death of Foote in 1777, thereafter, it was still allowed to operate, albeit only in the summer, via an annual license (Stone, *London cxxxi*). This explains why Colman the Elder, who took over the management of the Haymarket theatre after Foote’s death, was free to participate in the theatricals over the Christmas holidays. Nevertheless, Garrick did not attend the theatricals held in January of 1777, much to Sir Watkin’s disappointment. But, indefatigable, he tried again, and on 8 July 1777 another letter from Wynnstall appears in the Garrick correspondence:

> Dear Sir,
> I cannot avoid taking the earliest opportunity to inform you that our assizes (the only engagement that I shall have this summer) are fixed for the first and second weeks of August, and to assure you how happy we shall be to see you and Mrs. Garrick here, whenever it may be most convenient to you after that time. I was very much disappointed by a message you sent me by Sidebotham: I wish that you could be prevailed on to change your resolution, as nothing would flatter me so much as your honouring my theatre with your own performance. My wife desires her compliments to you, and joins me in the same to Mrs. Garrick;
> And I am, dear Sir, your faithful humble servant,
> Wat. Wms. Wynn. (*Private* 2:234)

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51 During the theatre season, the Lord Chamberlain required the theatres to be closed on 24 and 25 December for Christmas, on 30 January the anniversary of the martyrdom of Charles I, on Ash Wednesday, on Wednesdays and Fridays during Lent, and during Holy Week. For more information about the London theatre season see Stone, *London Stage: Critical*, cxxxi.
This letter achieved its intended effect, for Garrick finally attended theatricals at Wynnstay in October of 1777, a year after his retirement from the stage of Drury Lane. This was the only time that the theatricals occurred outside of their post-Christmas time frame, but Sir Watkin seems to have gladly dispensed with custom in order to accommodate Garrick’s scheduling preferences. Although Garrick refused to act in the plays, Sir Watkin was thrilled just to be able to finally host the celebrated English Roscius at his private theatre. Garrick, less delighted about the plan, at least initially, had apparently tried to get out of going once again, writing to Lord Camden, “Mrs G and I have endeavoured to put off our Welch journey to Sir Watkin . . . but all my wishes on that account are frustrated” (Little 1191). In the end, though, Garrick and his wife Eva Maria stayed several days as part of the large house party at Wynnstay, and it appears that they had a good time. Unlike the Colmans, who were brought in to Wynnstay as professionals, to help produce and act in the plays, Garrick was treated as a dignitary, who, though retired from the stage, was, in many respects, more celebrated and acclaimed than ever and viewed as a national treasure. Bratton explains how the yoking together of Garrick and Shakespeare, raised Garrick’s status as both an actor and as a gentleman, his identification “with Shakespeare in the public mind” also “project[ed] an image of himself as a member of the upper gentry, full of domestic virtue, as distant as possible from the notion of the dissolute and disreputable player” (86).

The thrill of having someone of Garrick’s fame and celebrity spend time in Denbighshire is apparent in the effusive way that Adams’s Weekly Courant kept its readers informed about the Garricks’ visit: “For the Fortnight past there have been a great Resort of Ladies and Gentlemen at Wynnstay, the Seat of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn, Bart., among whom are Mr. and Mrs. Garrick, whose affable and polite behavior to everyone challenges their highest
Mr. Garrick is in perfect Health, in great Spirits, and is the Life of the Company” (7 Oct 1777). Garrick clearly enjoyed the gracious hospitality of the Wynn’s, appreciated the displays of adulation, and admired the scenic beauty of Wales, writing to his elder brother Peter from Wynnstay on 26 September: “we are very happy here . . . these Welch scenes are quite new to us, and very well worth anybody’s Curiosity. . . . I little expected so much honour from Salopian Swains,\(^{52}\) and Welch Mountaineers” (Little 1193). A few days later he wrote again from Wynnstay and ended by commenting on one of the many pleasures he encountered there, John Parry’s exquisite traditional Welsh harp music: “I am writing in the dark and Mr. Parry the famous Harper is playing like an angel” (1194). Another letter, this one dated 20 October 1777, underscores his new-found regard for the Welsh countryside: “We are just returned from North Wales, a most divine Country” (1197).

North Wales clearly felt just as enthusiastic about Garrick. *Adams’s Weekly Courant* reported on the exuberant response which greeted Garrick as he entered the Wynnstay theatre: “On Thursday evening there was performed a play, or rather two Farces, in order to shew Mr. Garrick the Theatre . . . the House was most elegantly illuminated, and fill’d with a very brilliant Audience . . . the instant Mr. Garrick entered the Theatre, he was received with Peals of Applause!” (7 Oct. 1777). The amateurs at Wynnstay gamely performed Henry Carey’s *Chrononhotonthologos: The Most Tragical Tragedy which ever was Tragedized by any

\(^{52}\) “Salopian” is an old term for the inhabitants of Shropshire, near the Welsh border. The Garricks had stopped in the county town of Shrewsbury on their way to Wynnstay, and Garrick wrote that “the town was in an alarm at my coming and the Raven-Inn besieg’d.” See David Little and George Morrow Kahrl, *The Letters of David Garrick* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 1193.

\(^{53}\) Four days later Garrick wrote again with an invitation to Peter from Sir Watkin to join him in Wales and go fishing on the River Dee. See Little, 1194.

\(^{54}\) John Parry, renowned for his skill as a harpist, had been blind from birth. He resided at Wynnstay under the patronage of Sir Watkin for most of his life, but he also played for guests at Sir Watkin’s London home during the social season, performances that increased his fame. He inspired Thomas Gray’s poem “The Bard.” See “Parry, John” in *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Sidney Lee (New York: Macmillan, 1895), 43: 376.
Company of Tragedians (1734) in the “highest Stile of Burlesque” with a “Mock Procession, excelling any Thing of the Kind ever seen which kept Mr. Garrick and the Company in a Laugh the whole time” (Adams’s Weekly Courant 7 Oct. 1777). The decision to perform Carey’s completely ridiculous parody of overwrought tragedies and operatic spectacle before the greatest actor of the day, was, in Colman’s retrospective estimation, a wise one, for there was no possibility of such a performance being taken at all seriously (Random 2:55). As a result the amateurs could not be faulted for lack of acting prowess or talent, since the play was merely a vehicle for good-natured silliness and amusement. As for the afterpiece, Arthur Murphy’s The Upholsterer (1758)\textsuperscript{55}, the local paper smugly asserts that it “was sustained with a degree of Theatrical Merit beyond what could be met with in a private Performance anywhere” (Adams’s Weekly Courant 7 Oct. 1777). In any case, it probably helped that both of these plays had been previously performed at Wynnstey: Chrononhotonthologos in 1773 and The Upholsterer in both 1773 and 1775. On the playbill for 1773, Sir Watkin is listed as acting the part of Bombardinian in Chrononhotonthologos (Banks 153-4). There is no record of whether he reprised that role before Garrick. For the next night, October 8th, Sir Watkin and his wife continued the busman’s holiday for Garrick, arranging yet another exhibition of the stage culture of North Wales, for they requested a performance of Susanna Centlivre’s The Busy Body (1709) followed by Isaac Jackman’s new farce, All the World’s a Stage (1777) at the Theatre Royal in Chester, and Adams’s Weekly Courant commented that “Mr. and Mrs. Garrick will accompany him on the

\textsuperscript{55} The Upholsterer is a farce by Arthur Murphy, which Garrick had first produced at Drury Lane in with a cast that Bevis describes as “half a dozen of the best comedians in eighteenth century London,” 192. Garrick himself was acclaimed for his portrayal of the character of Pamphlet.
Occasion” (7 Oct. 1777). Unfortunately, there is no record of Garrick’s impression of this evening at a provincial theatre, or of his response to the Wynnstay theatrical.

We do, however, have a record of the feelings of the amateurs at performing in front of the most celebrated actor of the day. Adams’s Weekly Courant notes that before the theatrical began, “Mr. Griffit of Rual, came forward and spoke a most elegant and masterly Prologue, written by himself, complimenting Mr. Garrick on his great Attention to SHAKESPEAR’S [sic] Plays in particular, and echoing the regret of the Whole World that he had retired from the stage” (7 Oct. 1777; cap. in orig.). Fortunately, Griffith’s prologue has survived, for it illuminates both the tremendous thrill and the immense anxiety experienced by this group of amateurs who hoped to provide a night of entertainment for Garrick. Griffith highlights the actors’ Welsh heritage and admits that though their acting may not be of the highest quality, they appear on stage because of their loyalty to Sir Watkin, “Call’d from our Hills around our Chief we stand/A rude unpolished but a faithful Band/Who write and act because ‘tis his command” (Heard 27). Having Garrick in the audience motivates the amateurs to attempt to emulate his acting style and his devotion to Shakespeare, “No wild ambition no vain hopes of praise/Point to the Scene or prompt the humble lays/But that Keen wish that natural desire/To taste what Garrick’s presence must inspire/From each just motion some instruction draw/Feel Shakespeare’s Fire, and copy nature’s Law” (27). The prologue proceeds to lament Garrick’s retirement, but compares Garrick to the setting sun whose brightness remains even though it is no longer visible, “If like the Sun it from the World retires/Possessing tho’ unseen its native fire/May w tho’ dim to its indulgent

56 The Busy Body had been performed at Wynnstay in January of 1776 with Bob Aldersley in the title role of Marplot, the busybody, a character that Garrick had played many times at Drury Lane. Banks, 155. Jackman’s farce pokes fun at private theatricals and had premiered at Drury Lane in April of 1777. I discuss this play in detail in chapter four.

57 The Harvard Theatre Collection has a manuscript of the prologue with the date 1777 and the title “Prologue spoke at Wynnstay before David Garrick.” Heard reprints this prologue in its entirety, 26-27.
Day/Collecting humbly each converging Ray/Shine like the Moon from its reflected Sight/And
with our borrowed Beams beguile one night” (27). The Wynnstay actors hope that having
Garrick in the audience will allow their performance to be able to reflect back some of Garrick’s
theatrical genius.

Garrick never traveled to Wynnstay again, for he died on 20 January 1779. Sir Watkin
was one of ten pallbearers at Garrick’s elaborate state funeral (Parsons 371). Walpole, appalled
by such a show for a commoner, commented to the Countess of Ossory on 1 February 1779, the
day of Garrick’s funeral: “I do think the pomp of Garrick’s funeral perfectly ridiculous. It is
confounding the immense space between pleasing talents and national services.” He goes on to
say that for his writing Shakespeare himself “was not rewarded and honored like Garrick who
only acted” (Yale 86; italics in orig.). That same year Sir Watkin had Robert Adam design a
monument to Garrick that he proposed erecting on the grounds of his Wynnstay estate (fig.11).
The British Museum describes it as a “sarcophagus bearing the actor's portrait and a medallion
depicting Tragedy at the near end, with a broken column and portico, all around a pyramid-like
structure with broken top.” There is no evidence, however, that the monument was ever
actually built. Nevertheless, Sir Watkin’s interest in constructing such a permanent edifice
demonstrates his ongoing desire to cement, in a literal way, the association between Garrick and
Wynnstay.

58 It seems rather striking that this is the first season that the Colmans took part in the theatricals, almost as
if they became surrogates for Garrick, as representatives of the world of the London stage. In contrast to Garrick’s
brief stint as audience member, they, of course, were much more actively involved in the performances—acting,
directing, and organizing—and their participation lasted for several years.

59 Robert Adam, who had lived next door to Garrick in the Strand, had also designed Wynn’s London
home.

60 See British Museum number 1948,0214.1.
To this end, the theatricals continued a commitment to mount Shakespeare’s plays as well as to highlight plays made famous by Garrick, in what can be seen, perhaps, as a truly fitting memorial. Every one of the thirteen seasons of theatricals that occurred under Sir Watkin’s direction included at least one and occasionally two works by Shakespeare (table 1). In addition, the Wynnstay theatre presented plays Garrick wrote, *The Clandestine Marriage, Bon Ton*, and *Harlequin’s Invasion* (1759), and those he adapted, *Jealous Wife, Catherine and Petruchio* (table 2), along with some of his most celebrated roles, Richard III, Archer in *The Beaux Strategem*, and Don Felix in *The Wonder*, to name just a few (table 3). All told the amateur actors performed nine of Garrick’s famous roles, four of his original plays, and three of his adaptations. Just as Garrick did in his visit to Wynnstay, these performances brought the cosmopolitan world of the London theatre to the Welsh countryside. They also distinguish the theatricals as a bastion of culture in North Wales, while at the same time denoting Sir Watkin himself as ardently devoted to both Shakespeare’s art and Garrick’s legacy as representative of national preeminence and, thus, truly and incontrovertibly British.

In light of this, it seems fitting that the final Bunbury ticket, from the 1785 season, signifies the exalted status to which the theatricals aspired, for the engraver was the highly esteemed Francesco Bartolozzi (fig.12). Once again, Bunbury imbues the drawing with Welsh symbolism and theatrical images. This ticket consists of an oval design, framed by daffodils, the Welsh national flower, and interwoven with a banner proclaiming, “Wynnstay Theatre” along with “1785.” The mask of comedy leers out from the top of the drawing, and the mask of tragedy lurks at the bottom. At the center is a large tree, in all likelihood the famous Welsh oak

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61 This ticket was also printed in the *European Magazine*, Nov. 1787. Heard reprints it, 23. Russell includes it in “Private Theatricals,” 194.
called “Sir John Wynn” that held a central position on the Wynnstay estate. In the background is a windmill, a conventional set piece for pantomime, with the words comedy, tragedy, farce, and pantomime written on the blades. This was the only time that a pantomime was ever performed, and therefore it was the only year that featured all four dramatic genres, reflecting the increased scope and achievement of the players in their eleventh season. Depicting this, four actors circle the tree, each representing a different genre. A young woman holds a banner with the names of the two comedies presented that season: Shakespeare’s As You Like It and Vanbrugh’s The Confederacy (1705). Another woman holds a handkerchief in a tragic pose; draped in the tree above her is a banner emblazoned with Venice Preserved, the year’s tragedy. At the front, seated on the ground is a young boy, notable since two of the Williams Wynn sons acted this year, with a banner reading The Agreeable Surprise, a musical farce by John O’Keeffe (1781). Behind the tree lurks a shadowy Harlequin figure, representing pantomime; he holds a bat, the traditional prop for Harlequin, which has Invasion written on it, referring to Garrick’s Harlequin’s Invasion. It featured the song “Heart of the Oak” and portrayed the ultimate triumph of Shakespeare over Harlequin, who at Wynnstay was played by Bunbury himself. In the pantomime’s spectacular final scene, a giant statue of Shakespeare rises to dominate the stage, harkening back to the image of the bust Shakespeare high on a pedestal that Bunbury used in the earlier admission ticket, and reminding the audience of Wynnstay’s unwavering commitment to the Bard of Avon and his representative Garrick.

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62 This very large oak tree had a prominent position in the Park of the Wynnstay estate. It was named in honor of Sir John Wynn, the original builder of Wynnstay. For more information see John Preston Neale, "Wynnstay, Denbighshire," Views of the Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland (London: Sherwood, 1829), n. pag. In 1878 this tree was still standing and was said to have a circumference of 36 feet. See Henry Irwin Jenkinson, Jenkinson’s Practical Guide to North Wales (London: Stanford, 1878), 383.
Elegantly engraved tickets, professionally printed playbills, a beautifully appointed theatre, and plays that highlighted his Welsh and British identity provided Sir Watkin with abundant publicity and public visibility, even a certain celebrity, in London and in Wales, something he seems to have actively sought and much enjoyed. One result of this was to increase public awareness of this fairly remote estate in northern Wales, and to create the sense that even in such a place aristocrats were contributing to the cultural life of the nation. Under Sir Watkin’s guidance, the Wynnstay theatricals became something more than a mimic stage, as Bunbury’s artistic talent and the Colmans’ professional expertise in acting and writing contributed to an ongoing and successful image-making project. Shakespeare and Garrick’s positions as revered and celebrated national icons were an important element of this, and through his association with Garrick, and his commitment to celebrate and commemorate both artists through producing their plays, Sir Watkin enhanced his own standing as not only a Welsh aristocrat of great fortune and repute, but, more importantly, as a British aristocrat with significant cultural influence.

**Epilogue to the Wynnstay Theatricals**

The theatre’s final season took place in January of 1787 with Shakespeare’s *Tempest* and the revival of *Cymbeline*. There is no indication about whether Sir Watkin intended for these to be his theatre’s last plays, or if it just turned out that way. The desire to revisit the Welsh settings of *Cymbeline* seems telling; more poignant still, in light of the theatre’s engagement with Shakespeare for so many years, is the fact that the last mainpiece play done under Sir Watkin’s leadership (on 11 January 1787) was the *Tempest*, generally considered to be Shakespeare’s last play. The famous lines where Prospero gives up his art, which speak to the theatrical magic that

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63 The afterpieces were Murphy’s *Apprentice* and John Lee’s *Man of Quality* (1776), a three act farce adapted from Vanbrugh’s *Relapse* (1696). Banks, 195-96.
Shakespeare had staged during his career, also would have reflected the magic of the theatre that Sir Watkin had created in Wales for so many years:

... I have bedimmed
The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,
And ‘twixt the green sea and the azured vault
Set roaring war—to the dread rattling thunder
Have I given fire, and rifted Jove’s stout oak
With his own bolt; the strong-based promontory
Have I made shake, and by the spurs plucked up
The pine and cedar; graves at my command
Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let ‘em forth
By my so potent art. But this rough magic
I here abjure... (5.1.41-51)

Perhaps the last act’s pervasive sense of finality and its recognition of the inevitability of endings imbued the theatre at Wynnstay with a sense of foreboding that night. Whatever the reaction, the fact is that there were no plays in 1788, and after Sir Watkin died in 1789 at the age of 41, the theatricals came to an end.⁶⁴

⁶⁴He died of a disease which was called St. Anthony’s Fire in the eighteenth century, now known as erysipelas, a strep infection that presents as a bright red facial rash and which was dangerous in a pre-antibiotic era. Fourteen years later, his son and namesake, the 5th Baronet, who had acted in the theatricals continuously for seven seasons, revived the family tradition of Christmas holiday theatricals, though on a significantly smaller scale. These more domestic, intimate theatricals continued from 1803 until 1810. A sketchbook of drawings done by his sister Harriet depicts scenes from the theatricals that took place nearly annually through 1810, the year that Harriet got married. The sketches stop at this point, and while it is certainly possible that the theatricals may have continued, the historical record ends there. See Rosenfeld, 92-4.
CHAPTER THREE

"MIMIC SCENES": PERIPHERAL PERFORMANCES

Thus Thespis reigns and everywhere prevails
In England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales;
From Bedlam’s precincts quite to Snowdon’s peak
At every mile, you’ll hear some Roscius squeak.
—W. A. Madocks¹

Don't drop the curtain, sir! there yet remain
Some previous points to settle and explain.
The stated business of the drama o'er,
Tho' now we tread the mimic scene no more,
Possess'd of Power, and vested with a Crown,
Who would not grieve so soon to lay them down?
—Samuel Whyte, “Occasional Epilogue to Henry the Fourth”²

Private Theatricals and Public Patriotism

In a letter to Horace Mann dated 11 March 1748, Horace Walpole mentions a private theatrical performance of Young’s The Revenge: “Lady Dalkeith and a company of Scotch nobility have formed a theatre, and have acted “The Revenge” several times; I can’t say

¹ From a skit about private theatricals written by W.A. Madocks and performed at Bryn-y-Pys, Wales in 1808. See Price, 71.

² Lines 1-6 from an epilogue written and spoken by Samuel Whyte for a performance of 1 Henry IV at Drumcree House in County Westmeath, Ireland on 5 January 1773. The complete epilogue is printed in Whyte’s Poems on Various Subjects (Dublin: Marchbank, 1795), 57-59. Another use of the phrase “mimic scene” appears in an occasional prologue to John Gay’s Beggar’s Opera performed at Carton, the seat of the Duke of Leinster, in 1761. It was written and spoken by the Rev. Dean Marley, later the Bishop of Waterford, who played Lockit. The complete prologue is included in Whyte’s Poems on Various Subjects, 45-6. The prologue is also printed in The Private Theatre of Kilkenny (Kilkenny: 1825), 2-3. The phrase occurs again in the epilogue to Murphy’s All in the Wrong (1761) written by Miles Peter Andrews and spoken by Mrs. Lavinia Hobart at her home in Ham Common in Nov. 1782. It was printed in the Morning Herald, 12 Nov. 1782 and the Public Advertiser, 13 Nov. 1782. “Mimic scenes” appears in a verse written by Edward Nares to be sung at the conclusion of Frederick Pilon’s The Deaf Lover (1780) and William O’Brien’s Cross Purposes (1772) performed at Blenheim Palace on 28- 29 Dec. 1789. See Nares, A Versatile Professor (London: Johnson, 1903), 107.
excellently: the Prince and Princess were at it last night” (*Letters* 106). It is not clear from the letter whether Walpole was actually in attendance at this event, but he specifically notes the involvement of the Countess of Dalkeith, Caroline Scott, who was the eldest daughter of John Campbell, the second Duke of Argyll, and though he does not delineate what her role in the production was, his reference to her accentuates the fact that the aristocratic actors were Scottish. Despite Walpole’s dismissive rejection of the ability of the Scottish amateurs, he also notes their close association with English political power, through the presence of Prince Frederick, the heir to the throne, and his wife, Princess Augusta in the audience. Almost a hundred years later, an essay on the history of private theatricals written in 1839 for the *New Monthly Magazine* refers to Walpole’s letter and uses language that appears strikingly similar to his in its emphasis on the Scottish heritage of the amateur actors, but additionally credits Lady Dalkeith and her Scottish friends with helping to usher in the fashion for private theatricals in the eighteenth-century: “Lady Dalkeith, daughter of the great Duke of Argyle, was one of the revivers of English private theatricals. In 1748 she collected around her a company of Scotch nobility and formed a theatre; she commenced her theatrical campaign by performing the ‘Revenge,’ which attracted the visits of the Prince and Princess of Wales” (“Private” 254).

The same essay claims that “when the Prince and Princess of Wales were excluded from the court of their father, it became fashionable among the nobility, then in opposition, to give splendid entertainments for their amusement. For this purpose, the Duchess of Queensberry got up private theatricals” (254). Frederick, the Prince of Wales, the eldest son and heir to the throne of George II, had been banished from his father’s court in 1738 over political, personal, and financial disagreements with his parents (Brooke 17). An alternative court scene developed

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3 See letter number 264, dated 11 March 1748.
around him, with his supporters being those in opposition to the crown and current governmental policies. Among the active participants in this opposition circle were the Duke and Duchess of Queensberry. In 1729 they, too, had been banned from George II’s court: in their case for supporting the writer John Gay, author of the *Beggar’s Opera* (1728), when his sequel *Polly* (pub. 1729) was suppressed by government censors. During her lifetime, the Duchess of Queensberry, Catherine (Kitty) Douglas, was well-known for her strikingly eccentric behavior. The wife of Charles Douglas, the third Duke of Queensberry, an influential Scottish nobleman, she was not Scottish by birth, but came from English nobility. She, nevertheless, embraced her husband’s Scottish heritage to such an extent that she was notorious for appearing at London social events in the attire of a Scottish peasant woman. She created a scandal when she encouraged the Duke to appear at one of her London masquerades wearing Scottish tartan, a costume deemed not only offensive, but seemingly treasonous in the years immediately following the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 (Graham 131). The presence of the Prince and Princess of Wales at a Scottish theatrical, just three years after Charles Stuart and his Scottish supporters had threatened the English crown, points to the way in which theatricals at this time, just a decade after the passage of the Licensing Act, could signify opposition to hegemonic power structures, as in the state’s control of the theatres, while simultaneously laying claim to an alternative power and authority. Yet regardless of whether the focus is on the peripheral, as signified by the Scottish participants, or on theatricals as surrogate entertainment for an

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4 Colley says that the Duchess of Queensberry was banned from George II’s court for soliciting subscriptions for Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* which satirized Walpole. See Britons (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 200 and 401n13, which cites Lord Hervey’s diary as her source. However, the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* claims that the play in question was Gay’s *Polly*, a more plausible scenario given that *The Beggar’s Opera* opened at Lincoln Inn’s Fields in 1728, and *Polly* had been banned from performance on the stage and was published by subscription in 1729. This same article also states that the Duchess was received back at court in 1747. See Rosalind Marshall, “Douglas, Catherine, duchess of Queensberry and Dover (1701–1777).”
oppositional court scene, private theatricals, in this depiction, become a marker of opposition and otherness, a fundamentally peripheral and surrogate entertainment.

Lady Louisa Stuart, in a chapter of her memoir entitled “Some Account of John, Duke of Argyll, and his Family,” claims that it was not Lady Dalkeith but rather the Duchess of Queensberry who instigated the performance of *The Revenge*. In describing the theatricals, she writes that the Duchess of Queensberry “had always some rage, some reigning fancy, which she carried to excess. For one year she could think of nothing but the stage, and fitted up a small theatre in Queensberry House, where Otway’s ‘Orphan,’ a good deal clipped and pared, and Young’s ‘Revenge,’ were each acted three times. The performers were a family party of brothers and sisters, or cousins bred up together from childhood . . . the Duchess not acting herself, but indefatigably managing, prompting, and overlooking the whole” (39-40). Lady Louisa was the youngest daughter of John Stuart, the third Earl of Bute, a Scottish peer who also happened to be an aficionado of amateur acting, and who became Prime Minister under George III. Though these plays occurred ten years before she was born in 1757, she states that when she was young, old family stories “pleased my imagination and I had such delight in getting at all the details of former days that I believe I made my mother tell me every old story a thousand times, and teased her with a thousand questions about every little circumstance” (41). Among the cast members for these plays, given at Queensberry House in London, she lists Lord and Lady Dalkeith, Lord Frederic Campbell, and Sir Harry Bellenden along with her father, Lord Bute, and she states that the same cast also presented Thomas Otway’s *The Orphan; or, the Unhappy Marriage* (1680), with Lady Dalkeith as Monimia and Lord Bute as Castalio giving such notable performances that the Prince and Princess of Wales requested a command performance (40).
Following these theatricals, Lord Bute went on to become a great favorite of both the Prince and Princess of Wales.\(^5\) In 1751, the Prince of Wales died unexpectedly, predeceasing his father. When King George II died in 1760, Frederick’s son became George III, and his mother used her influence to get her longtime friend Bute named Prime Minister in 1762, the first Scot to hold that office since the Act of Union in 1707. That the theatricals came to represent something more than mere entertainment is apparent in Lady Louisa’s assertion that these two plays performed at Queensberry House were the only time that her father performed before the Prince and Princess of Wales and that they comprise “the whole and sole foundations of my father’s “having been used to act plays for the amusement of the Prince and his Court” (40, italics in orig.).\(^6\) In so doing she refers to a story that circulated widely about Lord Bute, but which I have not been able to verify with any convincing evidence from the historical record: that he frequently played Lothario in Rowe’s *The Fair Penitent* before the Prince and Princess of Wales at Queensberry House. Notably, *The Fair Penitent* is not one of the plays listed in Lady Louisa’s memoir. More recent historians, probably due to the dearth of evidence that Bute ever actually played Lothario, also do not mention the story. For example, the story is not included in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Lord Bute written by Karl Wolfgang Schweizer, an expert on him. John Brooke, in his biography of King George III (1972) says only that after his move to London in 1746, Bute “became acquainted with Frederick, Prince of Wales (they shared a love of amateur theatricals)” (45). Christopher Hibbert in *George III: A Personal History* (1998) acknowledges Bute’s interest in theatricals, but does not include any discussion

\(^5\) He was named Lord of the Bedchamber to Prince Frederick in 1750.

\(^6\) She cites Walpole’s letters (9:123-126) and complains that “had Lord Henry Fitzgerald became a Minister, some memoir-writer would tell the world he had performed *Varenes* and *Lord Trinket* at Richmond House, to pay his court to the present King” [italics in the original]. See Louis Stuart, *Lady Louisa Stuart: Selections from Her Manuscripts*, ed. James Archibald Home (London: Harper, 1899), 40n2.
of specific performances (22). James Lee McKelvey’s *George III and Lord Bute: the Leicester House Years* (1973) does not mention theatricals at all.

Yet the tale of Bute as Lothario seems to have taken on a life of its own; Thomas Moore includes it in his chronology of private theatricals in the *Edinburgh Review* (1827) as follows: “The performances at the Duchess of Queensberry’s, for the amusement of the royal personages of Leicester House, are only memorable, we believe, for having enabled the favourite, Lord Bute, to display his fine legs (of which he was so proud) in the gay character of Lothario” (“Private” 386). Later the *New Monthly Magazine* (1839) repeats nearly the same story (H.H., “Private” 254), and it continues to appear throughout the nineteenth century. In the only complete biography of Bute, *John Stuart, Earl of Bute* (1912), J.A. Lovat-Fraser relates details of the Queensberry House theatricals much as Lady Louisa Stuart does, but he adds “Bute was invited to join in the amateur performances at the Royal entertainments and, it is said, frequently played the part of ‘Lothario’” (6). However, the inclusion of the phrase “it is said” would appear to indicate that Lovat-Fraser did not find solid evidence to support the story, yet its repetition throughout the previous century may have compelled him to include it.

That this tale of Lord Bute playing Lothario and exhibiting his shapely legs recurs so often, despite probably not having any basis in reality, speaks to its efficacy in denigrating him and in reinforcing the meme that he achieved his position through deception and seduction. By describing Bute as an actor, the story alleges that he is merely playing a role and not really qualified for the position of power that he holds, while also intimating that a Scotsman, like an

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7 The entry for “Bute, John Stuart, third Earl of” in *The Penny Cyclopaedia of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* (London: Knight, 1836), 6:60-61 states that in the Duchess of Queensberry’s theatricals, “the part of Lothario fell to the lot of his lordship, in which he succeeded so much better than in his late performances in the character of a statesman, that he was greatly admired, and particularly by his late Royal Highness Frederick Prince of Wales.” Charles Dickens’ *Bentley’s Miscellany* (London: Bentley, 1852), 252, also describes Bute as Lothario. In William Wraxell’s *The Historical and the Posthumous Memoirs of Nathaniel William Wraxall*, ed. Henry Wheatley (London: Bickers, 1884), 1:320, the story is repeated almost verbatim from Thomas Moore.
actor, holds a diminished status in society, underscoring what was at the time fairly rampant anti-
Scottish sentiment in England. By emphasizing Bute’s vanity, and by focusing on his desire to
display his attractive legs, the story also feminizes him, tapping into the culture’s deep-seated
misogyny, bringing up issues of uncontrolled sexual desire, stemming from the pervasive belief
that actresses were invariably loose women and further augmenting the perception that Bute is
not fit for leadership. But even more telling is the role that Bute is alleged to have played:
Lothario, the character in the _Fair Penitent_ who seduces and betrays the innocent Calista, and
whose name became eponymous for a man primarily interested in seduction. Of considerable
import is the fact that Bute’s portrayal of Lothario is said to have occurred during an amateur
performance, where the domestic setting and personal relationships between participants make
the kind of professional objectivity and distance experienced by paid actors toward both their
roles and their audience nearly impossible. The private theatrical setting allows for the conflation
of the actor with the role, implicating Bute as a Lothario in real life, who charmed his way into
power and position by seducing the Dowager Princess Augusta. That this narrative recurred in a
number of nineteenth century surveys of amateur drama which attempted to delineate the role of
private theatricals in eighteenth-century society also underscores the way that it validated
cultural assumptions about the danger and power that private theatricals posed as a means of
staging surrogate identities.

This tale may well have originated in the contentious political milieu that developed after
Lord Bute was promoted to Prime Minister in 1762, more than a decade after the Queensberry
House theatricals actually took place. During this time, Colley explains, “Scots were acquiring
power and influence within Great Britain to a degree previously unknown” (121), moving from
the periphery to the center of power, such that “sycophancy to those in power, not Jacobite
treason, was now seen by Englishmen as the essential Scottish vice” (122). The attacks on Lord Bute reflect a growing anger and anxiety about Scottish access to English power structures, so that “the accusation that one Scottish minister was penetrating the mother of the King of England was symbolic shorthand for the real anxiety: namely that large numbers of Scots were penetrating England itself” (122). Thus, it is not surprising that the story of Bute playing Lothario was probably created by John Wilkes, one of Bute’s most vocal opponents, and the leader and spokesman for a particularly vicious and vitriolic Scottophobia. In 1763, he published an edition of an obscure play, William Hatchett’s The Fall of Mortimer (1731), which he dedicated to Lord Bute. The play concerns a fourteenth-century scandal, the affair that Sir Roger Mortimer, who had been a favorite of King Edward II, had with the Dowager Queen Isabella. Wilkes clearly meant for the play to be understood as an allusion to Bute’s rise to power, his position as “the favorite” of King George III, and the rampant rumors, fueled by Wilkes and others, of an affair between Bute and King George III’s mother, the Dowager Princess Augusta. But the satirical preface, written by Wilkes in the form of a letter to Bute, makes the connotation explicit and includes sarcastic comments about Bute’s tenure as an actor in private theatricals “a few years ago at the Duchess of Queensberry’s, where your Lordship so frequently exhibited. In one part, which was remarkably humane and amiable, you were so great, that the general exclamation was, here you did not act” (Hatchett viii). Here Wilkes does not name plays

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8 Colley does not include the story of Lord Bute playing Lothario in her analysis.

9 William Hatchett is primarily remembered today as the life partner of Eliza Haywood. Hatchett adapted The Fall of Mortimer from King Edward the Third with the Fall of Mortimer (1691) attributed to John Bancroft and William Mountfort.

10 In number 5 of The North Briton (3 July 1762): 11-13, a periodical in which Wilkes’ animosity toward Bute was constantly displayed, Wilkes had first utilized the history of Mortimer and Isabella to satirize and defame Lord Bute.
or roles, but instead seems merely interested in using satire to highlight the commonly held view that Bute was, in fact, perpetually acting a part in his public life.

This letter to Bute was reprinted in another satiric tome, this one of letters purportedly written by Wilkes to a number of politicians and powerful personages who had figured in his trial and sentencing for seditious libel in 1764. The book, written in 1769, was an attempt to ameliorate the many debts that he had accrued when he fled to France to avoid prison. The timing here seems telling, however, for just three years earlier, in 1766, the Duke of York, George III’s younger brother, had actually played the part of Lothario in a private theatrical of The Fair Penitent opposite the woman rumored to be his mistress, Lady Stanhope. It may be that the wonderful satiric possibilities inherent in this performance of Lothario led Wilkes to conflate it with Bute’s own interest in theatricals and attribute such a performance to Bute himself, via the addition of this footnote: “Lord Bute was fond of acting Lothario. It was the expression of Frederic prince [sic] of Wales, ecchoed [sic] by the public, Here Bute does not act” (155). This is the version that endures into the next century, such that whether or not the theatrical actually occurred seems less important than what it implies about Bute and about private theatricals, for it reflects the ways that private theatricals could be deployed as a tool for political purposes.

Theatricals were used as a political tool by Prince Frederick himself. On 1 August 1740, just three years after the passage of the Licensing Act, he sponsored a private performance of a new play, the Masque of Alfred, with music by Thomas Arne and libretto by James Thomson and David Mallet. This performance took place at Cliveden, his country house, as part of a

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11 I comment on this performance in chapter one.
celebration of his daughter Princess Augusta’s third birthday,\textsuperscript{12} with professional actors from the Theatre Royal Drury Lane (Burden 32). Thus it was not exactly a private theatrical, but was rather more akin to the play-within-a-play depicted in Shakespeare’s \textit{Hamlet}, a performance in a royal home by professional actors before an invited and select audience. The masque celebrates Britain’s glorious military history, something that would have been well received at a time when the country was involved in a naval battle with Spain.\textsuperscript{13} However, its primary purpose was to present a tribute to the Prince of Wales, which it does by depicting his future reign as a patriot king and comparing it favorably with that of Alfred the Great. In the masque, Chippenham has fallen to the Danes, causing Alfred to retreat to the country, where he waits until he can return to power. The masque, thus, correlates Alfred’s exile with Prince Frederick’s own situation on the periphery, in his country retreat, exiled from the center of power. According to music historian Michael Burden in \textit{Garrick, Arne and the Masque of Alfred} (1994), “the masque is a detailed blueprint for an ideal of kingship. Moreover, it is one that is in opposition to the style of the rule of George II and the politics of his chief minister, Robert Walpole” (3). Private theatricals had become a means of opposing the Licensing Act at this same time, and through this masque at Cliveden as well as the theatricals given by the Duchess of Queensberry, they become even more closely associated with political opposition.

The performance has additional significance, though, beyond this largely forgotten play and its homage to a man who never became king, because it marked the premier performance of the song “Rule Britannia.” The song’s origination at Prince Frederick’s private performance

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\textsuperscript{12} Thomas Busby in \textit{Concert Room and Orchestra Anecdotes} (London: Clementi, 1825), 3: 133 notes that though Princess Augusta’s birthday was 31 July, the actual day of the performance was 1 August, which was the anniversary of the accession of George I and the House of Hanover to the British throne. I am indebted to Michael Burden for the reference; see his \textit{Garrick and the Masque of Arne} (Lewiston: Mellon, 1994), 22.

\textsuperscript{13} The war was fought from 1739-1743 to maintain Britain’s right to the \textit{asiento}, the slave trade with the Spanish colonies in America. It became part of the larger conflict known as the War of Austrian Succession.
serves to associate it with oppositional and peripheral politics, and this is amplified by Thomson’s famous lyrics for the chorus, “Rule, Britannia, rule the waves; Britons never will be slaves,” which articulate a vision of power, empire and national identity defined by both imperative and opposition. However, the song endured as an anthem to British patriotism, and throughout the rest of the century, it was often sung in the public theatres as a display of patriotism by both actors and audience. The singing of “Rule Britannia” then became a regular feature at private theatricals as well, in mimicry of the practices of the public theatres, but, more significantly, providing a powerful way to exhibit patriotic sentiment.

On 4 January 1749, about a year after the Queensberry House theatricals, Prince Frederick organized a another private performance with potent political implications, this time at Leicester House, his London residence, which had become the center of the opposition to King George II’s court. The play he chose was Joseph Addison’s Cato (1713), and this time the actors were children, including his own.14 His sons, Prince George and Prince Edward played the parts of Portius and Juba, respectively, and his daughters Princess Augusta and Princess Elizabeth played Marcia and Lucia. Cato was popular on the London public stage,15 and James Quin was celebrated for his portrayal of the lead character. Theatre historian Harry William Pedicord notes that in preparation for their performance, the royal children had attended a production of the play at Covent Garden starring Quin twice, once on 25 October 1748 and again on 21 December (29). Quin was brought in to instruct the young royal actors, an association that, understandably, gave him great pride, and, purportedly, resulted in a pension later in life. It also led him to make the

14 This performance has been discussed by several scholars, among them Dobson, Shakespeare, 35-36; Rosenfeld, Temples, 11; and Jason Shaffer, Performing Patriotism: National Identity in the Colonial and Revolutionary American Theater (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 36.

oft-quoted comment, on the occasion of George III’s first royal address, "Ay, I taught the boy to speak" (Life 91). The theatrical itself was viewed as an educational experience for the children, a means of training the young princes “to speak with freedom, dignity, and ease,” in the words of the prologue, and of developing fundamental skills in oratory and declamation, seen as necessary for effectively demonstrating political authority.

Yet the prologue, written specifically for the occasion, and spoken by Prince George, age ten, attests to an additional function of the theatrical: educating the audience along with the royal children, through a staging of national allegiance and identity. Hence the following lines that describe the boy who would eventually be King George III: “What, tho' a boy! It may with pride be said,/A boy, in England born, in England bred” (“Spoken” 37, italics in orig.). The prologue underscores the “Englishness” of the young Prince George, in direct contrast to his grandfather, George II, and great-grandfather, George I, who were both born in Germany and maintained strong ties to their homeland throughout their lives (Brooke 12). Though the Prince of Wales had also been born in Germany, he realized the importance of representing himself and his family as fundamentally British. As such the staging of Cato was an astute choice politically, for the play was widely seen as a representation of British patriotism, even though its meaning, over the course of the generation since it had been written, had proven to be ambiguous enough.

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16 Mrs. Lybbe Powys mentions this anecdote about Quin in her diary. See Passages from the Diaries of Mrs. Philip Lybbe Powys, ed. Emily Climenson (London: Longmans, 1899), 90. Jesse repeats it in Memoirs, 4.

17 It is not completely clear who authored this prologue and epilogue which were also printed in the January 1749 issues of the London Magazine, 37 and the Universal Magazine, 34. None of these periodicals list the author of either prologue or epilogue, and the authorship does not appear in other eighteenth-century sources. This omission seems curious and might point to Prince Frederick himself as the author. One would assume that another author would desire to receive credit for the honor of writing this prologue and epilogue. William Oxberry, New English Drama (London: 1823), 17:xv, says that the prologue and epilogue are by David Mallet. This seems somewhat unlikely given that Mallet had lost his position as undersecretary for the Prince of Wales a year before the theatrical took place, however, both Rosenfield, Temples, 1 and Dobson, Shakespeare, 36 attribute them to Mallet. Jesse says that the prologue and epilogue “were apparently composed by their royal father, and certainly they are of sufficiently indifferent merit to render it probable that they were his productions,” 5.
that both Whigs and Tories could claim that it represented their own ideals. However, the play also encapsulates the oppositional spirit of the Leicester House cohort, for Cato has severed ties to Caesar in defense of republican values, and this aspect of the play is highlighted when performed at Leicester House by the children of the acknowledged leader of the opposition to George II.

* Cato was rarely performed on private stages by adults; it was, however, a frequent choice for school theatricals according to Motter in *The School Drama in England* (67). Though Motter does not attempt to analyze why *Cato* was a particular favorite for school settings, there do seem to be several possible factors. The theme of the play would have been an appealing one from an educational standpoint, emphasizing as it does the importance of duty, loyalty, and bravery. Certainly Addison’s own project in the *Spectator* and *Tatler* of seeking to develop a culture that valued politeness and taste would also resonate with educators, as would his belief in the didactic role of the theatre. While the play’s rather heavy-handed emphasis on the theme of tyranny and liberty may have made it seem all the more appropriate as a learning experience for young boys, it may well be that it was those very didactic, and overtly political, qualities that made it a less than appealing choice for adult amateur performance. Still a play that defends liberty against tyranny would be a powerful choice for performance by the children of Prince Frederick.

The play also portrays the inherent theatricality of political self-fashioning, as Jason Shaffer has noted in *Performing Patriotism* (2007) (36). Thus the casting of Prince George as Portius, Cato’s loyal son, demonstrates one of the striking effects of private theatricals, the identification that can resonate between actor and role, amplifying both the meaning of the play

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and the real-life identity of the actor. Though plays acted by royal children certainly represent a unique set of circumstances in terms of their ability to exhibit pomp and generate publicity, this play, in particular, seems to have provided a powerful display of the efficacy of theatricals as a means for staging political statements.

_Cato_ was the play of choice for another amateur production almost thirty years later, this one on 11 May 1778 by American soldiers at Valley Forge with George and Martha Washington in the audience. Like the one at Leicester House, it, too, differed significantly from most private theatricals of the period: one done by royal children for a courtly audience, the other by soldiers in wartime for the entertainment of fellow soldiers. Yet while these are not typical private theatricals, they still contain many of the elements shared by such productions, and comparing these two strikingly different _Cato_ performances serves to illuminate another salient aspect common to all of these amateur productions: the way in which the play’s meaning is amplified or altered depending on the cast, the audience, and the location in which it occurs. With professional actors at a patent theatre, this may happen to some extent, as current events and contemporary issues may color the way that a play is understood or viewed by a specific audience. In other cases, elements of a well-known actor’s personality or temperament may also influence the audience’s perception of the role being played. But, for the most part, a certain level of objective distance comes into play, such that audiences at public theatres tend to be able to separate actor and role, company and play, to a much greater degree than transpires at private theatres where close social and familial relationships between audience and actors seem to preclude the possibility of that kind of aesthetic distance.

Theatre historian Mark Evans Bryan, in a recent article, develops a convincing argument that this presentation of _Cato_ at Valley Forge was, in many respects, quite similar to a country
house theatrical, for the audience was limited to “senior officers, their families, and friends of one administrative department (who, it seems, required a ticket for admission)” (127).19 In their performance, the American colonists appropriated for their own cause the play’s depiction of liberty, portraying themselves in opposition to tyranny just as Cato’s troops were, but in this case the tyranny is that of George III and British rule, rather than Caesar’s dictatorship. Shaffer in his detailed reading of the meaning of Cato in the American colonies, expands the play’s import to include the audience, specifically Washington, whose “tacit approval of this performance, signified by his attendance at the celebration, attests not only to his fondness for the theater in general and Cato in particular but also to his skilled manipulation of his own image” (61).20 After a winter of suffering and misery, the play must have provided a rare bit of pleasure and entertainment, (plays having been banned by the Continental Congress; this one was done in violation of the edict), but the play’s message about the worthiness of fighting for an honorable and just cause must have also strengthened the resolve of both actors and audience. Though those involved with this production were probably not aware of the fact that George III had acted in the same play three decades earlier, portraying himself, his father—as the banished but rightful heir to the throne—and their allies as analogous to Cato and his followers, these productions, read in tandem, provide a remarkably cogent illustration of theatricals as a powerful means of displaying political principles.


Military Theatricals

The association of theatricals with politics and patriotism can be found in a play that appeared on the London stage a year before the future George III acted in *Cato*, and not long after the Licensing Act had gone into effect. On 31 December 1739, the playwright Edward Phillips’ farce, *Britons Strike Home: or the Sailors’ Rehearsal*, was performed for a benefit night at Drury Lane (Scouten 2:812). It depicts a rehearsal of an amateur theatrical, described as “a little diversion for a select company of friends” (Phillips 2), enacted on board a vessel in the English Channel with sailors and family members as actors. The play’s title, *Britons Strike Home*, is derived from a very popular patriotic song. Originally written by Henry Purcell for the opera *Bonduca* in 1695, it was regularly played aboard British naval ships as they went into battle during the eighteenth century, and Gay included the familiar tune in *The Beggar’s Opera* (“Britons”). Philips’ play does not include Purcell’s lyrics, but instead reworks them, while still appropriating the song’s title, its widespread name recognition, and its immediate associations with patriotism and British naval power. A character in the play, Kitty, acknowledges that “Tunes and Songs have a very great effect on Publick [sic] Affairs” (6), adding, “there’s a great deal in having Politicks [sic] set to a proper Tune; Thank our stars they’ve lately been set to the tune of *Britons Strike Home*; and there’s not an *Englishman* in the Kingdom but thinks it the best Tune that has been played these several Years” (5). Through the song, the play links shipboard theatricals, and private theatricals in general, to patriotic expression, in what may be the first instance of using amateur theatricals as a marker of British patriotism.

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The short farce contains eight songs, a significant number from a legal standpoint, for according to the Licensing Act, which had been in effect for two years when *Britons Strike Home* premiered, any show with at least five songs over the course of three acts was not designated as spoken drama, and hence it could be performed at unlicensed venues like the booths at the Fairs (Bevis 100). In fact, the next year, on 23 August 1740, Phillips’ farce played at Fawkes, Pinchbeck and Terwin’s booth at Bartholomew Fair (Scouten, 2:845). Adding songs to plays, whether they made any dramatic sense or not, something theatre historian Richard Bevis in *The Laughing Tradition* (1980) aptly refers to as “gratuitous musicalization” (66), became standard practice during this time period, for it represented yet another means of dealing with the restrictions posed by the Licensing Act. The play, thus, not only represents a shipboard theatrical, but it also demonstrates the contiguity between patriotic songs, amateur theatricals, and illegitimate forms of theatre.

Drawing on the tradition of the rehearsal play established by George Villiers, Second Duke of Buckingham in *The Rehearsal* (1671), the play reflects a long-standing tradition of theatricals performed by British sailors on board ships. In this case, the ship, the St Joseph, had been confiscated from the Spanish fleet, for the play portrays a contemporary situation, the war.

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24 Gillian Russell, “‘Mars and the Muses’: the Army and Navy as Actors,” in *Theatres of War: Performance, Politics, and Society, 1793-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995) 122-157, has documented a number of these naval theatricals from the end of the eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. I am not aware of any studies that examine naval theatricals from earlier in the eighteenth century.
between Britain and Spain in 1739, which would later come to be known as the War of Jenkins’ Ear. The play, described in the prologue as a “Tribute of a British Heart” (Phillips n.pag.), expresses the patriotic fervor that gripped Britain at the war’s start, to such an extent that Genest’s dismissal of the plot for being “full of claptraps” (605) seems justified. The play’s patriotic bent is not subtle, with one-dimensional characters and allegorized names: Captain Briton, a British sea captain, who represents, in a heavy-handed way, not only British naval superiority but the nation itself; Mr. Export, a conventional English merchant, who depicts the power of commercial and mercantile interests in the construction of British Empire, and Donna Americana, a role played at Drury Lane by Kitty Clive, who portrays the importance of the American colonies to British empirical interests. Lacking any obvious aesthetic virtues and rooted as it was to a specific period in time, it is not too surprising that Britons Strike Home did not appear again on the patent stage for forty years, until it was revived on 27 March 1779 for another benefit at Drury Lane (Hogan, London 1:244). Its reappearance at this time was most likely due to the flourishing of the fashion for private theatricals and to the great success that another play about private theatricals, Jackman’s All the World’s a Stage, was currently experiencing at Drury Lane. Like Jackman’s play, Britons pokes fun at the “private Representation” (Phillips 11): the amateurs struggle with costumes and props, the scenery depicting a seascape blows overboard into the sea, and confusion ensues as distinctions blur between the sailors and their roles on stage, but ultimately the play lauds the theatrical embedded within as a patriotic performance by “a Crew of brave English Sailors” (3). In so doing, the play

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25 It was first called the War of Jenkin’s Ear by Thomas Carlyle in 1858.

26 The Public Advertiser, 6 March 1779, claims that it was revived for the “first time in these 50 years.” See also John Genest, Some Account of the English Stage: From the Restoration in 1660 to 1830 (Bath: Carrington, 1832), 3:605.
conflates the actual theatre of war and the private theatrical, underscoring that the battle itself, of course, was also a performance of brave English sailors.

As Britons Strike Home illustrates, private theatricals provided a welcome diversion from routine for soldiers and sailors in military and naval settings throughout the British Empire. Through the process of choosing, rehearsing, and producing a play for their own entertainment, theatricals became a way for soldiers to experience a bit of home. In areas far from the cultural center of London, and especially in those places that lacked public theatres, theatricals provided the only source of such entertainment. The geographical distance of many of these locations from England certainly must have contributed to a sense of being on the periphery of the British Empire, at least in terms of location. In such a place, the impetus to recreate pleasures and diversions that carry reminders of home takes on an almost nostalgic quality.27 Producing a play, with all the rich cultural resonance that the theatre signifies for British citizens, becomes an act that Roach, in Cities of the Dead, has dubbed “surrogation,” (2) filling “a vacancy created by the absence of an original” (36). Thus it is not surprising to find that in attempting to recreate this familiar pastime, participants chose to perform the same plays that were perennial favorites at theatricals in the British Isles, and mimicked those theatricals in other respects as well: by incorporating prologues and epilogues written for the occasion, presenting both a mainpiece and afterpiece, and publicizing the event through playbills and newspaper reports.

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In *Theatres of War*, Russell examines late Georgian-era British military theatricals occurring from 1793-1815. But such theatricals also proved particularly popular with British troops stationed in the American Colonies during the American Revolutionary War, and several notable studies have explored theatre in the American colonies during the eighteenth century, including Brown’s *The Theatre in America During the Revolution* (1995), Shaffer’s *Performing Patriotism: National Identity in the Colonial and Revolutionary American Theater* (2007), George Seilhamer’s *History of the American Theatre: During the Revolution and After* (1968), and O’Quinn’s *Entertaining Crisis in the Atlantic Imperium* (2011). Despite all these adroit analyses, however, the fact remains that scholars have not examined British military theatricals in light of their civilian counterparts during the decades when private theatricals were at the height of fashion in British society, the 1770s and 1780s. Such a comparison serves to further illuminate the role that private theatricals played in constructing an image of British power and authority within a military or colonial setting.

Whether done in military camps or on the deck of naval ships, military theatricals became an effective means of staging British culture and performing British patriotism. A particularly striking example of this impulse occurred during the blockade of Boston in 1776, when British troops under the command of General John Burgoyne turned Faneuil Hall into a temporary theatre where they performed several plays that were often seen on private theatrical stages back home: Hill’s *Zara*, Nicholas Rowe’s *Tamerlane* (1701), and Centlivre’s *The Busy Body*. As in civilian theatricals, the actors were all amateurs; the male roles were played by soldiers, and especially in the case of officers, they may well have enjoyed taking part in previous private theatricals or school theatricals back home. Unlike naval theatricals in which all the parts were
typically played by men, here young women were found to play the female roles. Though the playbill pointedly states that the performers are “A Society of Ladies and Gentlemen,” the identities of the ladies seem not to have been recorded, perhaps in a deliberate attempt to preserve their reputations through anonymity (Jared Brown 25). Presumably, they were British loyalists, but considering the prevailing attitudes about respectable women appearing on the stage, it seems likely that, as was the case in later colonial military theatricals, these women were, in fact, mistresses of the officers. In any case, whatever their other roles in life, the presence of these amateur actresses seems to have been greeted with general approbation by the good ladies of Boston (26). The theatricals violated more than Bostonians’ sense of propriety, however, for in 1750 the Massachusetts General Court had passed “An Act to Prevent Stage-Plays, and other Theatrical Entertainments” in the belief that “public stage plays” led to “many and great mischiefs” not least of which were “immorality, impiety, and a contempt for religion” (Massachusetts 780). Puritan animosity towards the theatre did not just extend to public performances, but also to amateur theatricals, which, notes Heather Nathans, in *Early American Theatre from the Revolution to Thomas Jefferson* (2003), Increase Mather, Puritan leader and President of Harvard College, had labeled “a danger to the souls of men” (20). Additionally, in 1774 the Continental Congress had imposed a ban on “shows, plays, and other expensive diversions and entertainments” both as an expression of wartime frugality and anti-theatrical bias. Nathans observes that in contrast to earlier rulings, “the edict proscribed theater on both

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28 For more on sailors playing the parts of women in shipboard theatricals see Russell, *Theatres*, 147-48.

29 Brown presents evidence of officers’ mistresses acting in military theatricals in New York, 43.

30 This was his reported response when in 1687 a tavern owner had attempted to start an amateur theatrical society.
financial and patriotic grounds (rather than religious ones)” in an attempt to “sever all cultural connections with Great Britain” (37; italics in orig.).

For the opening performance of Zara at Faneuil Hall on 2 December 1775, Burgoyne wrote a prologue that compares the colonies’ injunctions against theatrical performances to the laws passed during Cromwell’s Protectorate which banned all theatre in England.31 The Puritan values exhibited in Boston are described as limiting freedom, and especially artistic expression: “In Britain once (it stains th’ historic Page)/Freedom was vital struck by Party Rage . . . . midst her groans sunk every liberal art/Which polished life or humaniz’d the heart./Then sunk the Stage, quell’d by the Bigot Roar,/ Truth fled with Sense & Shakespear charm’d no more” (Seilhamer 18-19). Allying his cause with the British value of liberty, along with truth, reason, and, of course, Shakespeare, Burgoyne makes the theatrical performances by his troops no less than an essential expression of British freedom. Charity provides yet another justification for the theatricals, with the monies raised to be donated to the widows and orphans of fallen British soldiers. Lord Thomas Stanley, who attended the production of Zara, notes in a letter sent to a friend in London that “I hear a great many people blame us for acting, and think we might have found something better to do,” but he defends the theatricals by mentioning their charitable purpose, claiming that one hundred pounds had been raised (qtd in Jared Brown 26).

A month later, on 8 January 1776, Burgoyne’s military theatricals in Faneuil Hall continued with Centlivre’s The Busy Body along with an afterpiece written by Burgoyne specifically for the occasion entitled The Blockade of Boston. Perhaps revealing the author’s

31 The Massachusetts Historical Society has a copy of this prologue which may be in the hand of the officer who read it that night, Lord Francis Rawdon Hastings, along with a copy of the playbill. George Seilhamer includes the complete prologue and playbill in The History of the American Theatre: During the Revolution and After (New York: B. Blom, 1968), 18-19, but does not provide citations for them. For more information see Seilhamer, 16-21, and Brown, 22-27.
view of the British military’s current engagement in Boston, this farce parodied the real life blockade being enacted by the British troops, blurring the lines between actor and role for the soldiers who took part in it (Russell 27). Seilhamer describes the derogatory way in which it depicted General Washington and his troops: “In the opening scene Washington was represented as an uncouth figure, awkward in gait, wearing a large wig and a rusty sword. He was attended by a country servant carrying a rusty gun” (20). Though no copy of this farce has survived, the farcical situation that it created for Burgoyne’s amateur actors has entered into the lore of the Revolutionary War. This oft-repeated story, according to the Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser’s recounting of it for its London readership, begins when a soldier “dressed in the character of a Yankee sergeant (which character he was to play)” appears on the stage during the farce and “informed the audience the alarm guns were fired; that the rebels had attacked the town, and were at it tooth and nail over at Charlestown” (24-27 Feb 1776). The audience started to applaud what they took to be an especially inspired parody of one of Washington’s soldiers, but eventually the realization dawned that this alert was not being staged for theatrical effect, but was, in fact, an announcement of an all too real enemy attack. At that moment, the actual war and the staged burlesque of one collided, as the actors abandoned their pretend roles, wiping off grease paint as they fled, to take up their places as real soldiers. An article that appeared soon after the performance in a paper loyal to the colonist’s cause, the New England Chronicle; or the Essex Gazette, describes in gleeful detail how the British actors and audience themselves became the farce, saying that the audience, “the deluded wretches, at first took this to be merely farcical, and intended as part of their diversion”; however, they were “soon convinced that the actor

32 Seilhamer does not provide a citation for the source of this description.

meant to represent a solemn reality” and “the whole assembly left the house in confusion” (18 Jan 1776, 3).

This farcical confusion about the British military’s role in the war, as well as the conflation of the actual “theatre of war” with that of “theatre performed during war,” was continued later that year in New York City, which British troops under General William Howe occupied for seven years beginning in September of 1776. Howe, who at a fundamental level disagreed with the British military’s objectives in the colonies, perhaps to the point of viewing the war as a farce (Sonneck 53), preferred brokering peace to staging battles, and so during his time in New York, he turned his focus to staging plays. Recognizing the necessity of providing the soldiers under his command with diverting entertainment while they were garrisoned in winter quarters, he encouraged his officers to embark upon a program of military theatricals.

To that end, they commandeered a building that had previously served as a playhouse and christened it the “Theatre Royal” (Jared Brown, 30), and in so doing created a truly mimic stage. Most of the roles were played by officers, with their mistresses filling the women’s parts, although young soldiers drawn from the lower ranks were also frequently drafted to play female roles (43). As was typical of both the London public stage and British private theatricals, these amateur military productions included a mainpiece and an afterpiece, as well as prologues and epilogues, often written specifically for the occasion (35). A newspaper loyal to the British cause, The New York Gazette; and the Weekly Mercury, made a point of printing notices of upcoming plays as well as commentary on the performances, and thus provided this imitation “Theatre Royal” with publicity similar to that of the legitimate London patent theatres. Like those commercial theatres, the military theatricals in New York charged the audience for admission, (places in the boxes cost one dollar, the pit was three shillings, and the gallery two
something that was, of course, illegal for amateur theatricals to do in England under the terms of the Licensing Act. But the publicity emphasized that these plays were benefit performances for charity, with the money going, as it did in Boston under Burgoyne, “for the Benefit of the Orphans and Widows of Soldiers &c, &c” (*New York*, 27 Jan. 1777). 35

The military theatricals in New York mimicked the practices of the London patent theatres, but they also mimicked the private theatricals which were increasingly fashionable in Britain. The New York “Theatre Royal” opened on 25 January 1777 with Fielding’s *Tom Thumb*, and the following week that play was repeated along with Foote’s *The Lyar*, both staples of the amateur theatrical repertoire back in England. Howe’s soldiers took his commitment to providing theatrical entertainment very seriously and began an ambitious series of weekly performances, always with at least one new play, that lasted until the end of May, when the British troops suspended their playacting to take up the fight against the American troops once again. The New York “Theatre Royal” continued for five more seasons, presenting an impressive and varied repertoire of plays over that time. 36 The lengthy list, which includes over seventy plays, reads like the greatest hits for British private theatricals: *Othello, Zara, Jane Shore, The Fair Penitent, Douglas, Venice Preserved, The Jealous Wife, The Upholsterer, The Mayor of Garratt*, and *High Life Below Stairs*, among many others. But these same plays also appeared regularly on the public stages during the London theatre season, so that the New York playhouse’s season would have seemed very familiar, and, one can assume, nostalgically comforting to many of the British troops, and also a means of forgetting about the war, at least temporarily.

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34 See notice in the *New York Gazette* for 27 Jan 1777, 3.

35 See also Jared Brown, 34.

36 The plays continued for four years after General Henry Clinton had taken over command from Howe in 1778. Jared Brown includes a catalogue of these plays, 173-179.
Yet even given the limited rehearsal time that was the norm for most eighteenth-century actors, including amateurs, such a demanding show schedule would appear to have required an almost fulltime engagement from the participants. Thus some historians have claimed that the British military’s focus on theatricals and other amusements may have ultimately been a factor in its defeat. O’Quinn writes that “Howe and his officers were generally held in contempt for the reckless pursuit of luxurious entertainment and diversion during the occupation” (*Entertaining* 146), while Seilhamer argues that “America owes much” to “Howe’s Thespians” whose theatrical endeavors contributed to “the enervating indolence that made the achievement of independence possible” (32). The case can certainly be made that both Howe and Burgoyne had more success in their theatrical endeavors than in the theatre of war. Under Burgoyne’s leadership, British troops suffered a catastrophic defeat at Saratoga in 1778. In that same year, Howe resigned his command and returned to England where he faced charges of incompetence. Indeed, Colley argues that “the most immediate way in which defeat in America proved devastating was that it called into question the competence of the British governing elite” (148); however, she does not consider the role that the theatricals may have played in this perception of incompetence. Yet there is an unmistakable irony in the fact that while the theatricals in New York and Boston may have undermined British national identity by contributing to a lack of confidence in the judgment of their aristocratic leaders, those same theatricals also worked to strengthen a sense of British identity among the troops who took part in them, helping to define, from a position on the periphery, what it meant to be a British soldier and a British citizen.
Theatricals in Scotland

Though many of the participants in the Duchess of Queensberry’s theatricals, examined at the beginning of this chapter, were Scottish, public theatre was actually forbidden in Scotland during the first half of the eighteenth century, just as it was in the American colonies. As was the case in the colonies, this ban was at the behest of religious leaders, not Puritans as in New England, but powerful clerics from the Kirk, the Church of Scotland. Ian Brown, a professor of Scottish drama, claims the religious establishment’s "anxiety about drama was based on not only doubts about theatre's morality, but drama's power to interrogate politico-religious values" (24). While theatrical performances were viewed as disruptive because of their potential to cause spectators to question church teachings concerning both religious dogma and established order, theatres were also threatening because they provided an alternative public space, competing with the church for people’s time and attention. Another concern was that theatrical entertainment would prove a detrimental diversion, luring hard-working citizens away from jobs and responsibilities. To this end, Lisa Freeman argues that the Kirk’s main argument against the theatre was actually an economic one, couched in concerns that commerce would be adversely impacted by workers spending valuable time at the theatre (“Cultural” 227).

Yet despite the general disapproval of Kirk leaders, amateur theatrics were a fairly common part of rural village life, where plays would be performed as part of celebrations or festivals, a continuance of old theatrical traditions like mumming and folk plays. Scottish theatre historian Alasdair Cameron in an essay titled “Theatre in Scotland 1660-1800,” which is included in The History of Scottish Literature (1987), attests that “amateur acting in schools, in villages and amongst the upper and professional classes was very widespread in the Lowlands in the eighteenth century” (203). Yet in the absence of any public theatres, private theatricals would
have served a very different purpose in Scotland, though, than they did in England or Wales, forming not an alternative stage, but rather the only stage. While village celebrations may have included plays that were part of Scottish folk tradition, plays performed by upper-class actors would have, presumably, involved bringing drama seen in London or at the English provincial theatres to the Scottish countryside, a way of importing English culture into the Scottish periphery. Unfortunately though, few artifacts of these amateur performances seem to have survived through the years. This may be due, at least in part, to the anti-theatrical precepts of the Kirk. For while amateurs may have chosen to participate in theatrical performances despite the condemnation of the Kirk leaders, they also may have decided that publicizing these dramatic activities through playbills, tickets, or newspaper accounts would not be in their best interest. If these plays had to be performed somewhat surreptitiously to avoid a confrontation with the church hierarchy, then it should not be too surprising that few traces remain of them today, and that they have not received any attention from scholars.

The Kirk did allow some plays to be performed in school and university settings as an educational tool. These school plays, aside from their didactic value, introduced students to theatre, who may otherwise never have experienced it, and, this experience, contends Ian Brown, “embedded drama in the pupils’ and presumably their parents and the community’s consciousness” (23). The fact that one of the schoolmasters most committed to encouraging student theatricals, John Leslie, taught in Dalkeith, the seat of Francis Scott, the Earl of Dalkeith— who, along with his wife, was one of the key participants in the Duchess of Queensberry’s theatricals—would seem to support Brown’s assertion that the presence of school theatricals may have led to an increased interest in or, at least, greater tolerance for dramatic

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37 In 1731, when Scott would have been about ten years old, Leslie organized a performance of The Provok’d Husband.
performances within a community (24). It certainly seems likely that many of those who participated in amateur theatricals as adults would have initially been introduced to acting in school plays.

Nevertheless, any sort of public theatre was actively vilified by the Kirk, to the extent that “theatres were attacked both verbally and physically” and “actors were forbidden to play in many towns, and were often arrested as vagrants” (Cameron 191). In spite of this, traveling companies of actors would also occasionally appear in rural areas, providing the villagers with their only experience with professional theatre (Ian Brown 30). In addition to the Kirk’s ongoing animosity toward public theatre, the Licensing Act of 1737 made it illegal to perform spoken drama for profit except at a licensed theatre in Scotland, just as it did in England. Yet though public performances were not condoned, many people, at least among the nobility and upper classes, nurtured an interest in the theatre, viewed it not as a corrupting influence but as an enlightening one, and pushed back against the Kirk’s strictures. In 1747 a theatre was built in Edinburgh with the support of wealthy patrons; however, because of the Licensing Act, the building was not officially called a theatre, but rather it was known as Canongate Concert Hall (Brown 34). The spectators were charged for attending a concert and a play was performed gratis as part of the evening’s entertainment, the same method that had been utilized so effectively by Foote (and many others) in London to evade the Licensing Act.

It was in this rather surreptitious fashion that Douglas, a play based on Scottish history by John Home, a minister in the Scottish Kirk, had its opening performance in Edinburgh on 14 December 1756 (Cameron 198). The play created tremendous controversy, in great part because it was written by a clergyman. The Kirk issued a strident “Admonition and Exhortation” against the play, read from all the pulpits in the Edinburgh Presbytery, proclaiming that “Stage Plays and
Players” were "prejudicial to the Interests of Religion and Morality," asserting that theatres distract "servants, apprentices and students . . . from their proper business," and calling them “Seminaries of Folly and Vice” (Scots 18-19). Yet the play, which promoted a strong moral code, reinforced through its powerfully sentimental portrayal of Lady Randolph, ultimately served to counteract the Kirk’s anti-theatrical stance by demonstrating to Scottish citizens the positive social benefits of theatrical performances. Lauded by the Scottish people as a cultural achievement, it created a strong sense of national pride, as in the story that was told of a spectator who called out at the end of the play, “Whar’s yer Wully Shakespeare noo?” (Morgan 39). Douglas subsequently became a huge success on stages throughout the British Empire, and the lead character, Lady Randolph, would prove one of Sarah Siddons’ most celebrated roles. Due in large part to the success of Douglas, Edinburgh eventually received a royal patent for a theatre in 1767, and by the end of the century both public and private theatre became more widely accepted.

Douglas was performed in the Scottish Highlands at a private theatrical held at Dunkeld House, a country house belonging to John Murray, the fourth Duke of Atholl. The Duke and Duchess of Atholl played the parts of Lord and Lady Randolph in a scene from the first act of the

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38 In 1757, after the opening of Douglas in Edinburgh, Kirk leaders passed a decree stating that an “Admonition and Exhortation” against the theatre be read at church services. This “Admonition and Exhortation by the Rev. Presbytery of Edinburgh to all within their Bounds,” was printed in the Scots Magazine, (Jan. 1757): 18-19, but Home also included it as a preface to his published version of the play. See Alasdair Cameron, “Theatre in Scotland, 1660-1800,” in The History of Scottish Literature, ed. Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), 2:191-205, and Ian Brown, Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 22-40 to whom I am indebted for this overview of Scottish attitudes toward the theatre in the eighteenth century.


40 Her first appearance in the role was at Drury Lane on 22 Dec. 1783. Her final performance at Covent Garden on 9 June 1819 was in this role.
play. This scene would have been especially charged with meaning in such a setting, for in it Lady Randolph avers that “war with foreign foes,/Whose manners, language, and whose looks are strange,/Is not so horrid, nor to me so hateful,/As that which with our neighbors oft we wage./A river here, there an ideal line/By fancy drawn, divides the sister kingdoms./On each side dwells a people similar,/As twins are to each other, valiant both” (Home 15). The lines seem telling given lingering tensions between Scotland and England since the Act of Union in 1707 and the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745. Yet when spoken by a Scottish Duchess, they also stress the desire to emphasize similarity over difference, and connection rather than division, an important point for the Duke and Duchess to make at this time, for a few months after the theatrical occurred, the Duke was given a seat in the English House of Lords.

So while the play certainly may have been chosen for the opportunity it offered for the Duchess to mimic Siddons’ famous portrayal of Lady Randolph, it would also have proved a chance to display the Duke’s pride in his Scottish heritage alongside his British patriotism, for this scene from Douglas was performed as part of what the playbill refers to as a “tragi comic pasticcio,” along with the final scene from King Lear and speeches from Julius Caesar and Jane Shore. Beginning this pastiche with a Scottish play followed by bits of iconic English tragedies provides a dramatic demonstration of the links between the two countries as described by Lady

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41 This performance appears on an undated playbill in the Banks Collection, 40. Handwriting that presumably belongs to Sarah Sophia Banks includes the names of the performers on two undated playbills from Dunkeld and a handwritten note lists the dates of performance as 6 and 7 January 1786, Banks, 38-40.

42 The scene performed presumably encompassed the play’s opening lines since this is the only dialogue solely between Lord and Lady Randolph in the first act.

43 The Scottish Highlands, the epicenter of support for the Jacobite cause, was commonly depicted and perceived as a wild and uncivilized place, peripheral in terms of both culture and geography. Samuel Johnson contributed to this perception, but so did Scots like James Boswell and Tobias Smollett.

44 He was named 1st Earl of Strange and given an English Peerage and a seat in the House of Lords in August 1786.
Randolph. However, the patchwork nature of the performance also ensures that it will not be taken too seriously, and in this case, since all the scenes are taken from tragedies, the comic element in the “tragi comic pasticcio” may have stemmed from the amateur acting itself, a kind of real-life version of *Pyramus and Thisby* from *Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Theatricals thus afforded the opportunity of importing a bit of London culture, amusement, and diversion to areas far distant from its cultural and geographic nexus, but they also provided a way of staging patriotism, both through the choice of play and in the singing of nationalistic songs like “Rule Britannia” and “God Save the King.” In this way, theatricals, such as one that occurred in 1792 at Gordon Castle in the Scottish Highlands, became a way of affirming British patriotism, especially on the periphery. In it, Alexander Gordon, the fourth Duke of Gordon, joined his wife, Jane, family, and friends in Stephen Storace and Prince Hoare’s *No Song No Supper* (1790), a two-act opera. The theatrical brings a current hit from the London stage to the Scottish periphery, but since the playbill was reprinted in the *Times* and the *Courier*, these amusements from the periphery enter into cultural circulation among the newspapers’ London readership. Under the headline, “Gordon Castle Theatricals,” the *Times* states, “the Theatrical Mania has reached Scotland, where the bonny Duchess is enlivening the Society of her Friends” (28 Sept 1792). The printing of the cast list in the papers publicizes exactly which elite personages are participating, and the *Courier* describes the company as “very

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45 Further, by providing the chance to do well-known scenes and speeches from famous tragedies without the burden of producing the entire play, this pastiche would have been much like the kind of performances engaged in by spouters, whose aim was to mimic famous actors. The similarity to spouting is overtly acknowledged in the choice of opening prologue, for it was originally written by Garrick for Murphy’s *Apprentice*. I examine this play, its prologue, and the popularity of spouting in chapter one.

46 *No Song No Supper* with libretto by Prince Hoare and music by Stephen Storace was first presented at Drury Lane on April 16, 1790 as a benefit for the actor Michael Kelly with *The Beggar’s Opera* as the mainpiece play. The opera went on to become one of the most popular afterpieces during the remainder of the decade.
brilliant” in the castle’s “pretty little Theatre” and compares the elite amateurs in Scotland to London professionals not in terms of acting ability, but rank, saying, “it is almost needless to add, that this Comedy was never honoured with a set of actors so truly respectable” (2 Oct 1792). The newspaper reports make special mention of the fact that “God Save the King” was sung at the performance “with a Grand Chorus by the Audience,” marking the occasion as an opportunity for performing aristocratic patriotism and British loyalty. The Duke of Gordon, known as “the Cock of the North,” was a Tory, whose loyalty to the King would have been understood, but even so, in the time soon after the French Revolution, publicizing a grand chorus of family and friends singing “God Save our Gracious King. Long live our Noble King” was still probably a wise political move.

In any event, the origins of the song are connected to Scottish history, for the musical arrangement of “God Save the King” was by Arne, the composer of the music for the Masque of Alfred and “Rule Britannia,” and it was first performed at the Drury Lane on 28 September 1745, as Charles Stuart and his Jacobite army were marching toward London, making a public display of unity and loyalty to George II all the more imperative. Singing it in the Scottish Highlands, as the Duke of Gordon did, would have, therefore, sent a particularly powerful message, despite the fact that nearly fifty years had transpired since the ‘45. As a display of patriotism in times of instability and uncertainty, it is not surprising, then, that accordingly to Colley, the song became increasingly popular at the patent theatres in the years after the American Revolution (209). Jeffrey Richards, in Imperialism and Music, states that during King George III’s illnesses in the 1780s and 1790s it was sung as a show of support and sympathy for him, and it was during this time that it became accepted as the British national anthem (90). Along with “God Save the

47 While it has never been officially designated as the national anthem, its usage as such stems from longstanding tradition.
“Rule Britannia” was also sung with gusto at private theatricals, and this practice both mimicked that of the public theatres and also marked the aristocratic participants as loyal and patriotic subjects.

Similar exhibitions of British patriotism took place at many private theatricals, but on the periphery and in colonial settings demonstrating loyalty to the crown carried special resonance. An example of this can be seen in an Irish theatrical that occurred at Dromana, near Lismore, in County Waterford, the seat of the Earl and Countess of Grandison. On 14 December 1787, *Venice Preserved* and William Shield’s comic opera, *Rosina* (1782), were performed in the private theatre there, with His Royal Highness Prince William Henry⁴⁸ in the audience. The *Dublin Journal* reported that his presence “inspired both the Audience and the Performers with feelings of gratification not to be described . . . . The Royal Visitor was saluted on entering the Theatre by the customary tributes of respect, the House standing, and the Band playing ‘God save the King.’ At the close of the Tragedy, the other national strain of ‘Rule Britannia’ was sung in full chorus by everyone present” (qtd in *Private 7*). The newspaper report turns this display of patriotism by Irish aristocrats into a public staging of loyalty to the British monarch, even as the presence of Prince William Henry at this private theatre in Ireland serves to demonstrate the close ties between the Irish elite and British power.

**Irish Theatricals**

Exhibiting such British loyalty and patriotism carried a more contested meaning in Ireland, in light of colonialism and British rule. Nevertheless, the fashion for aristocratic private

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⁴⁸ Born in 1765, he was the third son of George III and Queen Charlotte. He was made Duke of Clarence in 1789, and was crowned King William IV in 1830 upon the death of his oldest brother, George IV. Their brother Prince Frederick who had been next in line for the throne had died in 1827, leaving Prince William the heir since George IV’s only legitimate heir, Princess Charlotte had died in childbirth in 1817.
theatricals took hold in Ireland as it did in England during the eighteenth century. Despite their prevalence in elite society, though, these theatricals have not, for the most part, been investigated by scholars. In her detailed examination of the public theatre in Ireland, Dublin Theatres and Theatre Customs (1938), theatre historian La Tourette Stockwell mentions that in the second half of the eighteenth century “many private theatres had been built by persons of means throughout Ireland and performances given on a very elaborate scale” (165), but she does not discuss theatricals further. 49 Rosenfeld’s Temples of Thespis does not include any Irish theatricals. In fact, very little has been written about them since 1850 when a retrospective look at eighteenth-century private theatricals in Ireland appeared in an article entitled “Private Theatricals” in the Dublin University Magazine. It correlated the fashion for private theatricals with the ascendance of the Irish aristocracy and a corresponding increase in cultural activity, claiming

the age of private theatricals in Ireland was contemporaneous with that expansion of our society which took place between 1750 and 1782. The consequences of the civil wars began to pass away; property became settled and the state was strong . . . . Lord Charlemont gave a decided impulse to the arts of civilization and the Irish aristocracy, under his auspices, became an aesthetical body. The drama was cultivated with great success and the elegant diversion of private theatricals became a fashionable amusement. (714) 50

Much of this essay, it turns out, was actually appropriated from an introduction written by James Corry for the Private Theatre of Kilkenny, a small volume privately published in 1825, which chronicles the performances that took place there from 1802-1819. 51 Since only fifty copies were printed and distributed, it was most likely written as a memento for those who, like Corry, had been involved with these amateur productions in Kilkenny. However, Corry’s introduction

49 She does include several newspaper descriptions of private theatricals in an endnote. See La Tourette Stockwell, Dublin Theatres and Theatre Customs, 1637-1820 (Kingsport, TN: Kingsport Press, 1938), 354n22.

50 The Lord Charlemont referred to here is James Caulfield, 1st Earl of Charlemont, an Anglo-Irish politician who was a preeminent Irish art connoisseur and collector, as well as a participant in amateur theatricals.

51 Dobson discusses this company’s productions of Shakespeare’s plays in Shakespeare, 46-64.
focuses on the antecedents to the Kilkenny theatricals and lists a number of eighteenth-century Irish private theatricals, and as a result it is a valuable source of information about them.\textsuperscript{52} Corry, a member of the Irish House of Commons and a talented amateur actor in his own right, claims that theatricals were quite prevalent during that time:

theatrical representations in private houses . . . or private theatres, where professional actors would not be allowed to assist were once very general in Ireland. Domestic gaieties of this kind used to grow out of one another, and there have been times in the last half century in which they were remarkable not only for their number, but for the importance of the persons concerned in them. (1)

In 1827 the Irish poet Thomas Moore, who had himself taken part in the Kilkenny productions as well as other aristocratic theatricals, reviewed the \textit{Private Theatre of Kilkenny} for the \textit{Edinburgh Review}. Though he asserts that “this curious volume . . . will, one day or other, be a gem in the eyes of the bibliomaniac” for the detail that it presents about the plays done at Kilkenny, and he references Corry’s summary of earlier theatricals, his primary objective is to delineate a truly comprehensive chronicle of private acting going back to classical antiquity. Lamenting the changes that he has observed taking place in Ireland after the Union with England, changes which he feels have brought “the Social Era in Ireland” to an end, he bemoans the fact that aristocrats no longer open “their mansions, as of old, to such innocent and ennobling hospitalities,” such “classic and humanizing amusements,” as he believes theatricals once were (175).

Both Corry and Moore are solely concerned with recording the theatrical activities of the Anglo-Irish upper class, the group that would be referred to as the Protestant Ascendancy by the end of the eighteenth century. This is not to say that other groups did not participate in

\textsuperscript{52} James Corry was attributed with the authorship of the introduction to \textit{The Private Theatre of Kilkenny} by the \textit{Dublin University Magazine}, June 1850, 714. This same article states that only fifty copies of the book were printed and privately distributed. Stockwell states that she believes Thomas Moore was the author, but that others attribute authorship to Richard Power, see 354n 22.
theatricals, but if they did, newspaper reports and the Kilkenny memoir do not mention them. Due to its colonial status, Ireland’s situation was significantly different than that of Scotland, where the Act of Union in 1707 had created a formal political bond between the countries. In Ireland, though, the Ango-Irish “was the ruling class that achieved total control after the triumph of William of Orange in 1690” (xvii), explains Irish theatre historian Desmond Slowey in The Radicalization of Irish Drama (2008), and “the founding myth of the Anglo-Irish was the taming of a savage country and bringing it to civility and laws” (105). The Anglo-Irish nobles and gentry were mostly of English descent, for they or their ancestors, in many cases, had been rewarded with peerages and lands in Ireland for loyalty to the English crown, or such lands were part of marriage settlements. Though they had strong ties to Ireland, and saw themselves as both English and Irish, they were Protestants, and religious differences constituted a fundamental and insurmountable division, leading them to consider themselves to be separate from the Irish Catholics who made up the majority of Irish society. Instead, the Anglo-Irish existed as a discrete group with an isolated culture, and though their patriotism and love for Ireland ran deep, they also felt and displayed loyalty and connection to England. Taking what historian Martyn Powell describes as “an increased sense of national pride in its cultural achievements,” the Anglo-Irish as a group also influenced “a burgeoning cultural scene” in Ireland, “where culture was publicly and patriotically consumed by a populace ever more aware of the political significance of their activities” (75). Thus Irish private theatricals took on a political valance, and through them the Anglo-Irish sought to defend their legitimacy as the Irish ruling class, while at

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53 Yet Slowey emphasizes that “not all of the Anglo-Irish belonged to the upper classes. In Dublin there were tradesmen, place-seekers, and hangers-on” (xvi) as well as members of the “military, clerical, professional, and administrative strata” (xvii). To a great extent, though, the theatricals that I examine in this section were products of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy.
the same time emphasizing their membership in the British aristocracy, underscoring their allegiance to Britain, and defining their identity as fundamentally British.

Corry correlates the origin of private theatricals in Ireland with this Anglo-Irish hybridity, writing that theatricals “commenced in 1759, at Lurgan, the seat of the Right Honorable William Bronlow” (Private 1),54 where the Irish playwright Kane O’Hara composed a new work for the occasion, Midas, which he described as an “English burletta.” Burlettas, hybrids imported from Italy that blended the genres of operetta and burlesque, first appeared on London stages in 1748 (Bevis 68). They proved to be a commercial success with audiences, but were dismissed by critics as a peripheral form, a view acknowledged by Kitty Clive in her play The Rehearsal; or Bays in Petticoats (1750) about an actress who has written a burletta, which she defines as "a kind of poor Relation to an Opera" (15). Theatre historian Allardyce Nicoll defined them as “burlesque comic operas,” and, like the operas they burlesqued, they were performed in Italian (Late 194). In Midas, the first English burletta, O’Hara transformed the genre by using English lyrics set to popular British melodies, to satirize both opera and Italian burlettas according to Phyllis Dircks in the Eighteenth-Century English Burletta (45). It seems significant that, at least in Corry’s version of the history, the origin of theatricals in Ireland is concurrent with the first appearance of an English burletta, for an assertion of “Englishness” and English identity proves to be one of the overarching themes in Irish private theatrical performances.

However, the English burletta’s origins on the periphery--at a private theatrical in Country Armagh, in northern Ireland--underscore its position as a peripheral form, in terms of

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54 Lurgan House was located in County Armagh near Belfast, where Brownlow’s seventeenth-century ancestors were English lords who received Ulster lands during the Plantation period. In the eighteenth century, William Brownlow developed a successful linen manufacturing industry in the town of Lurgan. See Linde Lunney, “Brownlow, William,” in Dictionary of Irish Biography, eds. James McGuire and James Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
both genre and legitimacy. Nonetheless, encouraged by the Brownlow family’s response to his creation, O’Hara expanded *Midas* from one act to two and, making its way from the periphery to the center, it opened in Dublin in 1762 and at Covent Garden two years later. It was so popular there, that Garrick had to come up with an English burletta to present at Drury Lane in order to compete with it. Though the burletta was welcomed on public stages due to its strong commercial appeal, on unlicensed public stages burlettas became increasingly popular as a way of circumventing the licensing act, for they did not qualify as spoken drama. Moody in *Illegitimate Theatre in London* states that "the foreign origins of burlesque, burletta, melodrama, and pantomime had ensured their cultural position as genres carelessly dispossessed from definitions of legitimate culture. To some extent, then, illegitimate genres shared a common institutional marginality” (79). Yet notwithstanding the taint of illegitimacy, *Midas* endured as “one of the favorite productions in the English repertory during the period 1766-1800," playing 226 times by the end of the century (Dircks viii), its popularity suggestive of the interchange that existed between public stage and private theatricals. Still the success of this Anglo-Irish creation, an English burletta, a hybrid of a hybrid, also signals the ascendancy of such non-traditional, or illegitimate, genres on the public stage, a development that would ultimately serve to increase participation in private theatricals.

For in Ireland, the public stage began to acquire additional political significance and, along with concerns about national and cultural identity, class tensions at the playhouse became amplified, so that despite the ruling class’ increasing interest in drama, attendance by the nobility at the Dublin public theatres steadily declined. In *Riotous Performances: The Struggle for Hegemony in the Irish Theater, 1712-1784* (2003), Helen Burke states that though the professional theatre of the time was clearly “a colonial institution” (219), “between 1754 and
1779 audience members, playwrights, and players used these spaces to challenge English hegemony” (243), and as a result, public playhouses in Dublin became “more representative” and “more Irish” (250) in terms of both repertoire and audience during this period. Burke cites a number of newspaper reports from the time that claim that “fear of an increasingly politicized theater audience” resulted in “Persons of Distinction” (245) choosing to stay away from the theatres (250). With Dublin theatres catering to a more predominantly middle and lower class audience, aristocrats found an enjoyable, and often preferable, alternative in private theatricals. Stockwell argues that theatricals were the cause, rather than the result, for waning “interest by the nobility in the public theatre,” contending that “this was due partly to their own preoccupation with amateur theatricals, and partly to the fact that Dublin’s era of social grandeur was drawing to an end” (188). Both points seem valid, for while a growing interest in private theatricals may have served to keep more elite patrons away from the public stage, increasingly violent disruptions in the playhouse and hostile responses towards some aristocrats when they did attend the public playhouses seem to have resulted in their finding theatrical pleasure in their own private and well-regulated theatres.

Burke relays a telling example of this in a story told by James Fitzgerald, Earl of Kildare: when he appeared at the theatre with the Lord Lieutenant, the King of England’s official representative in Ireland in 1755, the spectators in the upper gallery at Thomas Sheridan’s Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin unabashedly expressed their patriot political views (244). Tensions at the playhouse continued to escalate and attendance by the elite ebbed even further during the next decade (249). Thus it is not surprising that in 1761 the Earl of Kildare hosted a grand private theatrical performance of the The Beggar's Opera at his palatial Irish country home.  

55 Burke cites reports in the Hibernian Journal (1774, 1782) and the Freeman’s Journal (1777), 248-49.
house, Carton. Though the Earl of Kildare’s name does not appear on the cast list, his wife, the Countess of Kildare, played Mrs. Peachum; her sister, Louisa, played Lucy; Louisa’s husband, Thomas Conolly, played Filch; and other notable names include James Caulfeild the first Earl of Charlemount as Peachum, and the Rev. Dean Marley, who would later become the Bishop of Waterford, as Lockit. As the most oft-performed play of the eighteenth century, *The Beggar’s Opera* may have been chosen by the aristocrats at Carton for its sheer familiarity alone. The play had, moreover, proven exceptionally popular during the previous London theatre season (1759-60), with, as John Brewer observes in *Pleasures of the Imagination* (1997), a rather astonishing seventy-six performances (444). Thus it is not at all unlikely that many of the actors at Carton would have seen the play multiple times in London or Dublin, a contributing factor to the relative ease with which they would be able to mimic those previously witnessed and remembered performances in their own production.

In addition to playing Lockit, The Rev. Dean Marley wrote and spoke the prologue, which was reprinted in the introduction to the *Private Theatre of Kilkenny* along with the playbill and a brief description of the theatrical (3). Like other prologues and epilogues written for private theatricals, this prologue provides a window into how the participants viewed the theatricals and how they desired others to see them. Given the paucity of other information about these Irish performances, close readings of these paratexts become all the more useful. In this case, as the play was so well-known to both actors and audience, Marley admits, “Our Play, to-night, wants novelty, ‘tis true” but “That to atone, our Actors all are new” (*Private* 3, ll.1-2). His prologue emphasizes the way that private theatricals invert hierarchies and established order, by giving Lords and Ladies a chance to play low characters like Mr. and Mrs. Peachum, but also to

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56 It also appears in Samuel Whyte’s *Poems on Various Subjects*, ed. Edward Whyte, 3rd ed. (Dublin, 1795), 45-46.
assume the roles of actors and strollers, denizens of a much lower rank and class as well, “And sure, our Stage than any Stage is droller;/Lords act the rogue, and Ladies play the stroller” (ll.3-4). Still a performance in which Marley, an Anglican priest, acts the part of Lockit—the corrupt Newgate jailor in cahoots with the thief-taker Peachum—proves not simply entertaining because of its amusing absurdity, but, he argues, also profoundly edifying: “Thus, virtue’s friends their native truth disguise,/And counterfeit the follies they despise,/By wholesome ridicule proud vice to brand,/And into virtue laugh a guilty land” (ll.33-36). Acting grants an outlet for impersonating characters and imitating behaviors that would not be possible, or at least not condoned, in real life, exposing the performativity inherent in class roles, and demonstrating the actors’ ability to relate to, and perhaps even empathize with, those who are of a different class and rank. The theatrical allows aristocrats to mimic characters who differ in moral conduct and social status, and such dissimulation can be exhilarating albeit ephemeral, a point Marley makes in regards to himself: “But, when this busy, mimic scene is o’er,/All shall resume the worth they had before;/Locket himself his knavery shall resign,/And lose the gaoler in the dull divine” (ll.33-40). Through acting the part of the “other,” the players define the boundaries of their actual identities, clarifying who they are in contrast to who they are not. Pretending to be lower class characters, they regale their fellow aristocrats in a grandiose country house far removed from the more plebian atmosphere at the public playhouse. *The Beggar’s Opera*, which Jonathan Swift described as a “Newgate pastoral,” seems singularly well-suited for this kind of amateur performance, as the hybridity expressed in the very nature of ballad opera serves as a fitting descriptor for these Anglo-Irish private theatricals, combining English and Irish, home and theatre, private and public, aristocrat and actor, high and low.
The performance of *The Beggar’s Opera* at Carton denotes the significance of insular social networks and elite family connections among aristocrats as a crucial aspect of these private theatricals. In this case, the Countess of Kildare, the former Emily Lennox, was one of the daughters of the Duke of Richmond. Though she had been born and raised in England, she settled in Ireland after her marriage in 1747 to James Fitzgerald, where, in addition to her own nineteen children, she raised her three younger sisters after the death of their parents in 1750. Back in England, the eldest of the Lennox sisters, Caroline, inaugurated her own series of private theatricals at Holland House during the same year, 1761, as the one at Carton, and Sarah, one of the younger Lennox sisters who was raised by Emily at Carton, participated in them. Two Fitzgerald sons, Lords Henry and Edward Fitzgerald, also took part in theatricals in both Ireland and England. Henry Fitzgerald, in particular, was lauded as one of the most talented amateur thespians, and he appeared to great acclaim in theatricals given by his uncle, Charles Lennox, third Duke of Richmond, in London. The Lennox siblings’ shared interest in private theatricals originated in the experience that Emily, Louisa, and Charles had acting as children in a private theatrical at their English country home, Goodwood. As a result, they appear to have played a pivotal role in promulgating the fashion of private theatricals among the aristocracy in both Ireland and England, for as influential members of the aristocracy, their decisions to host and act

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57 A powerful Irish aristocrat, James Fitzgerald, Earl of Kildare, became the Duke of Leinster in 1766.

58 The Holland House and Winterslow theatricals are discussed in chapter one of this dissertation.

59 They appeared at theatricals at Shane’s Castle in 1784 and Shaw’s Court in 1785. The 4 January 1788 edition of the *World* says that Lord Henry Fitzgerald was planning to play in *Venice Preserved* at the Attic Theatre in the spring of 1788, but there is no record of that play actually being performed there during that time, and there is no evidence showing that he ever acted at the Attic Theatre. These theatricals are discussed later in this chapter. Fitzgerald did act in the theatricals at Richmond House from February to May of 1788. The theatricals at Richmond House are discussed in chapter four.

60 The play performed in September of 1740 at Goodwood was *Le Dehors Trompeurs* (1740) by Louis de Boissy.
in theatricals as adults may have encouraged other aristocrats to pursue amateur acting themselves.

Family ties such as these link Irish and English aristocratic private theatricals, which become a way of celebrating and performing those powerful familial connections and reinforcing an Anglo-Irish cultural hegemony. Another Lennox sister, Lady Louisa Conolly, along with her husband Thomas Conolly, was actually the first Lennox sibling to host a private theatrical; at Castletown House, their country estate in county Kildare, the Conollys produced *Henry IV* in 1760, a year before they both acted in the *Beggar’s Opera* at Carton. The Conolly family had possessed enormous wealth and influence in Ireland for generations; Thomas Conolly, a member of the Irish Parliament, was widely recognized as the wealthiest commoner in Ireland at the time, and Castletown was, and is still, the largest Palladian house in the country. Focusing on the elite and privileged status of the amateur actors at the Castletown performance, Samuel Whyte, who wrote the epilogue for the performance, highlights the incongruity of those of high rank appearing on stage, exclaiming, “Senators, Nobles, Privy Counsel,--Actors!” (48, l. 28). Whyte’s epilogue was spoken by Lord Baron Walter Hussey Burgh, who played the part of Hotspur. Burgh was renowned as one of the greatest Irish orators of his day, and in the epilogue Whyte refers to Burgh’s well known talents for arguing a case, saying that the other players have sent him “forth in their behalf to plead” the case for aristocratic acting (47, l.5), and

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61 Despite inheriting his uncle’s large fortune, he had also inherited tremendous debts from his father.

62 The Conollys were married in 1758 and moved to Castletown the following year. Castletown House is now a museum and heritage site managed by the Irish government whose website [www.castletown.ie](http://www.castletown.ie) contains useful information about the history of the house. The website states that theatricals were held in the Long Gallery.

63 As I discuss in chapter one, epilogues in the public theatres were the domain of actresses, but the private theatres were not bound by that convention. Even the established practice at the public theatres of women speaking the epilogue gets inverted at this private theatrical.
to “say that we deem’d it no inglorious part/To raise the genius, and to mend the heart” (49, ll.55-58). This last line, taken directly from the second line of Alexander Pope’s prologue to Cato, becomes a way of justifying amateur acting, using the famous words that were once employed to validate acting on the public stage.

Whyte, the author of this epilogue, was an Irish schoolmaster and erstwhile poet, and his connection to aristocratic theatricals derives from both of these roles. The English Grammar School that he founded in Dublin in 1758 drew students from many of Ireland’s most prominent families. He was a firm believer in the power of theatrical performances as a pedagogical tool, producing annual productions at the school, and many of his former students went on to become enthusiasts of amateur acting. Whyte was also an avid amateur actor in his own right, taking part in numerous private theatrical performances. He wrote poetry in addition to his teaching and often contributed the prologue and epilogue for these productions. Ten of these pieces were eventually compiled in his Poems on Various Subjects (1794), and since he notes performance dates and locations, and in some cases even a list of the cast, his book comprises a useful compendium for the study of Irish private theatricals during this time period, albeit one that has not garnered much in the way of academic attention.64

Whyte remarks that in his prologues and epilogues “the question of private plays is taken up and examined in [sic] different points of view” (i). He presents his own perspective on private theatricals, along with the participants’ attitudes about them, and, in addition, attempts to shape the way they are viewed by others. A recurring theme in these paratexts is that instead of attempting to mimic and reflect the public stage, Irish theatricals become a way to renounce and

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64 The only example I am aware of is Helen Burke, “Samuel Whyte and the Politics of Private Theatricals in Late Eighteenth-Century Ireland,” (paper presented at the annual meeting of ASECS, Vancouver, Canada, 19 March 2011).
reject the Dublin theatres. In a prologue to Hill’s Zara that he both wrote and spoke for a theatrical at Waterstown House in County Westmeath, Whyte places amateur acting in a classical tradition, claiming that in ancient Athens, where “reason in all directed their regards” (51, l.29) and “in sense, not sensuality, their joys they plac’d” (l.21), “sage legislators…the sock and buskin wore;/Nor would the foremost matrons of the age/Then blush to tread the unpolluted stage” (ll.25-28). Construing it as an activity based on reason and good sense, rather than vain self-indulgence, Whyte depicts acting as a suitable and edifying pastime for Irish peers and their wives. Of equal importance to the poet and teacher is the desire to preserve traditional drama, which, Whyte says, is “quite out of fashion in the sickening town,/Neither tragic scenes, nor comic will go down,” (50, ll.1-2). Theatre-goers have even lost interest in farce and spectacle, “and yawn at Crow-Street—as they yawn at Church” (l.10), and thus, he argues, performances like this one provide a much needed corrective to the Dublin playhouses like the Crow Street Theatre.

Whyte expands upon the contrast between private and public stages in another epilogue to 1Henry IV, this one for an amateur performance on 5 January 1773 at Drumcree in County Westmeath. He laments that in the “heart of this degenerate land” (58, l.15) “full the shrines of Folly stand,” (l.16) where “ill-adopted taste” for “foreign modes” (l.19) prevails. Presumably, the public theatres are these temples of foolishness, bad taste, and alterity, where Italian imports like opera and pantomime hold sway, drawing huge, albeit increasingly unsophisticated crowds. This private theatrical, Whyte argues, provides a useful model, standing in stark contrast to those culturally corrupt, morally debauched, and, most importantly, not traditionally English

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65 This performance took place on 7 January 1769.
66 The seat of William Smyth, who played Falstaff.
diversions. For in re-creating Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*, the amateur actors at Drumcree also manage to revive the “sense and merit” of traditional English culture, for “such is the magic power of Shakespeare’s muse;” (59, l.51) that “here the golden age restor’d we see,/And sense and merit cherish’d at Drumcree” (57, ll. 21-22). Just as in *Zara*, he spoke the epilogue himself, this time while still in character as King Henry, and he acknowledges the intrinsic appeal of a lowly schoolmaster being allowed to mimic those in power and authority, "Possess'd of Power, and vested with a Crown,/Who would not grieve so soon to lay them down?" (57, ll.5-6). He utilizes his royal role to add clout to his argument, which is that while private theatricals confer a kind of surrogate power to those who act, the plays themselves have the power to remake a culture and society sorely in need of refashioning.

This cultural power and influence was on display, when over a dozen years later, the Countess of Ely organized a group of amateur actors who began performing plays for the entertainment of Anglo-Irish aristocrats in Dublin. The force behind the theatricals, the “convivial” Countess of Ely, *(Stuart’s Star and Evening Advertiser* 14 April 1789), was born Anne Bonfoy, the daughter of Hugh Bonfoy, an Officer in the Royal Navy, and raised in Cornwall. In 1775 she married an Irishman, Henry Loftus, a widower who had been named the Earl of Ely in 1771 (Mosley 1: 1324). He died in 1783, and while Ireland remained the Countess’ primary residence for the rest of her life, she was also a key player in the London and Bath social scene and a friend to King George’s daughters, moving easily within this world of English and Irish aristocratic sociability. In 1786, three years after the Count’s death, the Countess built her “Attic Theatre,” the name alluding to the acclaimed theatrical tradition of ancient Greece, as well as to its location on the top floor of Ely House, her Dublin mansion.

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67 This quote appears as part of the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter.
With a troupe of amateur performers drawn from the highest levels of society, the Attic Theatre became a significant part of the Dublin social scene (Private 6), and the social prominence of its performers contributed to its preeminence in the world of English and Irish private theatricals. A London newspaper of the time, the Gazeteer and New Daily Advertiser, goes so far as to assert that “The Attic Theatre of the Countess of Ely is confessedly the first private theatre in either kingdom, both in the rank and excellence of the performers, and in accommodation and scenic appointments” (16 June 1791). Such reports appeared with notable frequency in the London newspapers, which had regular columns devoted to “Private Theatricals” and “Ton Theatricals.” In 1789 an entire column labeled “Irish Bon Ton Theatricals” in the London Morning Star was devoted to the Attic Theatre production of Shakespeare’s King John saying that

all exhibitions at this receptacle of delight [have] been perfect in the extreme; but we must acknowledge that, on the present occasion, it is absolutely impossible to convey the idea of exquisite perfection that this play fully demonstrated. Every character was better supported than any stage, public or private, ever produced before . . . . The Lord Lieutenant was present, and declared he never beheld so perfect a performance in his whole life. (29 May 1789)  

Through such extravagant, and frankly, excessive praise, emphasizing the “exquisite perfection” of the performance as the epitome of elite theatrical success, the London newspapers help to fashion a powerful image of Anglo-Irish cultural identity, positioning the Countess and her Attic Theatre as central players in what increasingly comes to be identified as a British aristocracy.

In Britons, Colley briefly notes the dramatic nature of political performance during this time period, something she claims has not been investigated sufficiently, and as examples mentions “the Earl of Chatham collapsing in the House of Lords as he made his last manic and

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68 In addition to King John, Every Man in His Humor and Lethe were performed in May of 1789. On 8 June 1789 the Morning Star reported that a performance of Twelfth Night had also been intended, but was cancelled because some of the principal players had other commitments.
incoherent speech against war with America in 1778” and “Charles James Fox bursting into tears” on the floor of the House of Commons in 1792 (151). Not surprisingly, though Colley does not make the connection, both men were ardent amateur actors. This contiguity between private theatre and public politics is not unique to England; Corry notes that throughout Ireland “many of the names, most distinguished in the Parliamentary and Political transactions of the Country, during the best and brightest periods of her past History, will be found in the list of Performers in private Plays” (Private 1). At the Attic Theatre, Sir Robert Langrishe, was a member of the Irish Parliament, as were fellow actors Sir Cromwell Price and Sir Charles Powell Leslie. Indeed, an examination of Irish private theatrical playbills reveals that Henry Flood, Henry Grattan, and the aforementioned Lord Edward Fitzgerald are among the many prominent and powerful figures of the day whose passion and talent for performing on the public political stage carried over to acting on the private theatrical stage. While their skills as thespians were displayed in their roles as politicians, their roles in private theatricals provided a means for the performance of political alliances and allegiances.

The aptly named periodical The World and Fashionable Advertiser, in yet another article on the Countess’ Attic Theatre, declares, “Thus does the fashionable rage of acting pervade the World” and “while it gives birth to lettered festivity and the display of talent, where is that morose Critic who shall say—Private Acting has not its use?” (4 Jan. 1788). Private theatricals were, after all, primarily a way to entertain family and friends, to indulge a passion for acting, and to escape from the roles that needed to be played, socially and politically, on a daily basis. However, they provided a means for aristocratic amateurs to deploy their thespian talents on familial, social, and political stages as well, demonstrating the fundamental truth of the famous lines that Jacques speaks in Shakespeare’s As You Like It; “all the world” really “was a stage” for
the British aristocracy at this time, yet as the fashion for private theatricals spread across the
British periphery of Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, and throughout the British empire, the private
theatrical stage also seemed to encompass all the world.
CHAPTER FOUR

“MIMIC POWER”: PUBLICITY AND POLITICAL THEATRE

Then if my sportive Task, and Mimic Pow’r,
Have help’d to while away the lessening hour,
Spare the poor Culprit—be not hard upon her,
But rise and say—“NOT GUILTY, on my Honour!

—Miles Peter Andrews, “Epilogue to the Jealous Wife”\(^1\)

Private Stage and Public Square:
The Private Theatricals at Richmond House

On 20 April 1787 an illustrious group of aristocratic amateur actors presented Arthur
Murphy’s *The Way to Keep Him* (1761), the first in what would come to be a series of private
theatricals at the Duke of Richmond’s London home. As a result of these performances at
Richmond House, theatricals are no longer seen as merely peripheral performances, in terms of
both geography and significance, instead they begin to be portrayed and perceived as more
culturally salient and socially central. Theatricals like these reflect the power, prestige and
influence of the aristocrats who participate in them, but they also evince the general public’s
increasingly voyeuristic interest in these exclusive activities. In part this stems from the sheer
number of aristocratic private theatricals that had occurred during the previous three decades, for
in the aggregate they wield a greater influence and claim a stronger significance than any
individual performance could. As a result, the cultural valance of theatricals takes on a different
resonance, and their mimic power becomes a potent way to shape the public perception of the
elite performers and to publicize aristocratic power and influence.

\(^1\) *European Magazine*, March 1788, 226. The last four lines of an epilogue to the *Jealous Wife* written by
Miles Peter Andrews and spoken by Mrs. Hobart for a series of private performances at Richmond House which
opened on 11 Mar. 1788.
A key factor in the cultural centrality of the Richmond House theatricals was their actual location in central London. Many other theatricals had been held at a distance from the city center, in the provinces, in country houses, and thus they could be dismissed as merely provincial and peripheral amusements. However with the Richmond House theatricals the calculus changes, for they took place in on the grounds of the former Whitehall Palace, home to Tudor and Stuart monarchs until it was destroyed by fire in 1698.\(^2\) During the eighteenth century, a number of aristocratic mansions were built in the area that had been part of the palace’s extensive formal private gardens, the Privy Garden.\(^3\) As one of London’s most exclusive addresses, it was fitting that Charles Lennox, the third Duke of Richmond, resided there when in town, for he was a powerful aristocrat whose grandfather, the first Duke of Richmond, was the “natural” son of King Charles II. The location provided a striking contrast to the area where the two main patent theatres, the Theatre Royal Drury Lane and Covent Garden, were situated, which was near the Covent Garden market and known for its brothels and crime-filled streets.

Russell, in *Theatres of War*, claims that the location of the public theatres in “less salubrious environs” and “at an inconvenient distance” (123) from the polite and fashionable neighborhoods where elite patrons lived, in conjunction with the rise of private theatricals, ultimately had a negative impact on their attendance at these theatres. She argues that the popularity of private theatricals among the upper classes had “profound implications for the patent theatres, confirming the withdrawal of the fashionable élite from the political and social space of the public playhouse” (122). Though she does not refer to the Richmond House theatricals here, she does mention them briefly in her chapter titled “Private Theatricals,” in *The

\(^{2}\) James II was the last king to live there. The Banqueting House is all that remains of it today.

\(^{3}\) In 1747 Canaletto painted two scenes from Richmond House, *Whitehall and the Privy Garden from Richmond House* (Duke of Buccleuch, Bowhill Collection) and *The Thames and the City of London from Richmond House* (Birmingham Museum).
Cambridge Companion to British Theatre 1730-1830, stating that “private theatricals reached their glittering apogee in the late 1780s” due in part to the theatricals at Richmond House which “marked a development in the thespian mania” precisely because they occurred “at the very centre of the metropolis at the height of the social season” (198). On the face of it, this seems like a reasonable assertion in many ways, but the available evidence from the London Stage does not seem to bear this out, for there is no data to indicate an overall decline in the numbers of spectators in the boxes, the seating area of choice for wealthy audience members, during the years of the Richmond House theatricals (Hogan, 2:xxxi-xxxiii, 909-910). We do know that the 1786-87 season was a profitable one overall for both Drury Lane and Covent Garden (912,915); Covent Garden recorded a profit again in 1787-88 (1001), but Drury Lane shows a loss (998). At Drury Lane, total receipts do appear to be lower for some of the nights of Richmond House performances, but not for others, yet since this does not seem to be the case at Covent Garden, it is impossible to draw any clear conclusion. There are many conceivable reasons for profitability, or lack thereof, in the theatre: the repertoire, the actors, expenditures, and the weather, among many other factors. The theatre at Richmond House could only seat 125 people, and the boxes at Covent Garden alone could seat 860 (915), so while the presence of elite theatricals in the city center may have been unnerving to the managers of the patent theatres, in

4 Though, as is the case with all of these theatricals, the Richmond House theatricals have not received a great deal of attention from scholars, Rosenfeld designates them “the most fashionable and exclusive of the private theatricals of their time” and includes a chapter on them in Temples, in which she provides, as is her wont, a wealth of detail about which plays were given when and by whom, 34-52. Jonathan David Gross includes a chapter on Anne Damer’s involvement in the Richmond House theatricals which also provides a general overview of the plays performed and the performers, The Life of Anne Damer: Portrait of a Regency Artist, (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2014), 106-131. Howard Hunter Dunbar mentions the performance of The Way to Keep Him in the Dramatic Career of Arthur Murphy, (New York: MLA, 1946), 98-100.

5 As I discussed in chapter three, there does seem to have been a decline in the number of elite audience members at the Dublin public theatres during this time period. See Burke, 245-50 and Stockwell, 188.

reality they probably did not pose a serious threat to the public theatres’ bottom line. In light of this, it seems reasonable to suggest that though these elite theatre-goers enjoyed attending private theatricals, and certainly would have appreciated the safe and elegant surroundings in which they occurred, they also continued, by and large, to attend the public theatres as well.

The theatricals did, however, pose a very real threat to the public stage, but in relation to publicity rather than finances. Their proximity to the center of London entertainment, politics, and journalism meant that they were effectively competing for the attention and notice of theatre-goers, newspaper readers, and coffee house devotees, rivals in the contention for promotion and hype. And in this, the Richmond House theatricals proved very successful. The Morning Herald went so far as to claim that the theatricals had become “the subject of all fashionable conversation” (15 Mar. 1788; italics in orig.). While this is most likely the sort of fawning hyperbole that the press routinely used with those in power, still the cultural impact of the theatricals was such that the playwright Frederick Reynolds considered it to be worth noting decades later. In his memoir, written in 1826, he reflects upon the influence that the Richmond House theatricals had in their day, recounting that upon returning to London after a trip to Switzerland in 1788, “I found the whole town infected with another mania—Private Theatricals. Drury Lane, and Covent Garden, were almost forgotten in the performances at Richmond House” (3). According to Reynolds, the public seemed both fascinated and engrossed by these aristocratic theatricals, which had become a central enough part of cultural life in London, that, he claims, interest in them even began to eclipse enthusiasm for the patent theatres.

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7 Reynolds’ importance as a playwright in the late eighteenth century has mostly been lost to time and his plays all but forgotten. Susan Bennett notes that Elizabeth Inchbald’s 10 volume collection entitled The Modern Theatre (1811) which claims to be a “collection of successful modern plays, as acted at the Theatres Royal, London” contains 12 plays by Frederick Reynolds, compared to one by Richard Sheridan. See Bennett, “Making of Theatre History” in Representing the Past: Essays in Performance Historiography, eds. Charlotte Canning and Thomas Postlewait (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2010), 75-76.
Though both took place in London, the Richmond House theatricals differ in a number of important ways from the Delaval performance of *Othello* on the stage of the Drury Lane in 1751. Though the Delaval theatrical provides an early example of aristocrats trying to literally assume center stage, commanding the attention of London theatre-goers as well as the notice of the London press and its readership in the process, one key distinction is that the Delavals used the actual stage of the Drury Lane. By taking it over for the evening and paying a hefty fee for the privilege, they really were not competing with any other Drury Lane production that night. The hype surrounding the event may have had an impact on ticket sales at Covent Garden, but since many of those who desired tickets to the *Othello* theatrical were unable to procure them, it is also very possible that they ended up watching a play at Covent Garden instead. The fact that the Delavals only performed the play once also seems significant. As an isolated and remarkably singular event, it mostly served to reflect the individual predilections and passions of the Delaval family, especially those of Sir Francis Delaval. The private theatricals that occurred a generation later seem more emblematic of the role of aristocrats in shaping and controlling the culture of their day.

The increasing attention that the Richmond House theatricals received in the London press, can also be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that they were not, as the Delaval performance was, just a one-night event. Instead *The Way to Keep Him* was presented on six different nights during April and May of 1787, one of them a full dress rehearsal two days before opening night. After that play’s unprecedented success, the troupe went on to produce four more plays the next year, each presented on several evenings: *The Wonder, The Jealous Wife*, Edward Tighe’s

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8 Discussed in chapter one of this dissertation.
adaptation of Nathaniel Lee’s *Theodosius* (1786),\(^9\) and *False Appearances*, a new translation and adaption by General Henry Seymour Conway from the French play *Les Dehors Trompeurs* (1740) by Louis de Boissy.\(^10\) This 1788 season ran from February to May, adding to its cultural impact and providing ongoing rivalry to the London patent theatres. The time of year in which they were held was also a factor: February through June, during the height of the London theatre season. Country house theatricals were often held during the Christmas season, as they were at Wynnstay, tradition dictating that the holidays were celebrated with family and friends at rural retreats, and thus at a time of year when elite patrons would not normally be in attendance at the London theatres anyway. So whether performances of plays comprised part of the holiday entertainment at country houses made no difference at all to the managers of the public theatres.

Yet since the Richmond House theatricals took place in London, during the London theatre season, the fact that they were not subject to the regulations of the Licensing Act becomes especially salient. Because they did not charge admission and the event was not open to the general public, the Richmond House theatricals could present the same plays that the patent theatres did, upending the power of the patent’s monopoly over spoken drama. While the patentees had no legal recourse against the private theatricals at Richmond House, when an actor named John Palmer attempted to circumvent the Licensing Act by opening a new theatre near the Tower of London in 1787, the patent theatres wasted no time invoking the full weight of the law. Palmer had received the permission of the local magistrate, under the Act of 1752 which regulated all entertainment venues, but, rather than presenting pantomimes, burlettas, acrobatics, and the like, all of which would have been perfectly legal, he proceeded, against the law, to

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\(^9\) Tighe’s adaptation of Lee’s play (1680) was first performed in 1786 at the private theatre in Shaw’s Court Dublin with Lord Henry Fitzgerald in the role of Varanes, a role he reprised at Richmond House, see *Private Theatre of Kilkenny* (Kilkenny, 1825), 7.

\(^10\) De Boissy’s play premiered in Paris.
produce spoken drama, advertising a performance of Shakespeare’s _As You Like It_ followed by Garrick’s _Miss in Her Teens_ (1747). The patentees derided him in the newspapers and threatened to have the whole company arrested as vagabonds if he went through with the play as planned. Palmer, recognizing that this was a fight he could not win, donated his earnings to charity in the hopes of getting back on more solid legal footing, and went back to a repertoire of “tumblers and dancing dogs” (Brewer 386).  

When faced with a subscription theatre in Tottenham Street organized by the amateur actors of the PicNic Society, the patentees also fought back to defend their monopoly, for soliciting paying subscribers placed the scheme in a legally vulnerable position (Brooks 7-8).  

Such strong-armed responses make the patent theatres’ complete impotence in the face of the Richmond House theatricals all the more striking.

The newspapers reported on the theatricals because of public curiosity about them, but by the same token, if the theatricals were a topic of interest, it was to a great extent due to the tremendous amount of press that they received. So while the newspapers capitalized on the commercial value of the Richmond House theatricals, sustaining the demand for information about them, they also helped to create that very demand. During the weeks that the theatricals were being presented, the London papers ran almost daily reports, covering any detail about the production, no matter how trivial, under headings that proclaimed “Theatrical of Ton: Richmond House,” “Richmond House Theatre” and, simply, “The Duke of Richmond.” The amount of press coverage steadily increased after the first performance, so that by the following December the press was already discussing the plans and rehearsals for the upcoming plays, followed by articles that described the costumes, the scenery, and all manner of minutiae pertaining to the

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11 See also Moody, *Illegitimate 22* and Hogan, *Critical Introduction* cxxix.

12 I discuss this theatre in more detail in the conclusion.
theatricals. These frequent, even daily, and detailed reports fueled interest in the Richmond House theatricals and resulted in an increasing amount of attention by the press towards other theatricals as well. Much of this press coverage was flattering, and whether or not these positive reviews actually resulted from “puffery,” encomiums written by the participants themselves who then paid to have them included in the paper, it certainly it would have been in the newspapers’ self-interest to keep such a powerful and wealthy group of people happy. It may well have been that one of the main reasons the Duke of Richmond and other aristocrats sponsored theatricals was to receive this extensive and positive press coverage. The publicity increased their celebrity, and the positive press that they received may have also improved the public’s view of them. Ultimately, the impact of the publicity was to make an experience that had ostensibly been private, limited to a specific and exclusive audience, into one that the general public, or at least, that segment of the public who read newspapers, could share. The effect of this was necessarily somewhat voyeuristic, as those people who were excluded from participating in the actual event inside the theatre were allowed a view of it from their vantage point outside the private space, peeping, as it were, via the papers.

Unlike Sir Francis Delaval, whose personal desire to act and be seen on stage was the driving force behind his theatricals, the Duke of Richmond did not act in the plays given at his private theatre. Instead the Duke and Duchess, the former Mary Bruce, used the theatricals to display themselves in a social role, such that the publicity generated by the plays made a point of emphasizing their sociability and generous hospitality, as does this report in the Evening Post: “The Duke and Duchess of Richmond played the Host and Hostess with a respectful politeness which charmed every individual” (8 May 1787). Also to this end, the Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser rhapsodizes about the “noble and magnificent Duke, who gave the splendid festival,”
who could be found “presenting himself everywhere, looking into everything, the superintendent and soul of the feast” (23 Apr. 1787). The Duke’s sociable performance encompassed more than just the play, for as the *Morning Post* notes, “after the play was concluded, the company were entertained with a supper” epitomizing “the first style of elegance,” and as a result “an universal festivity seemed to diffuse itself through the company” toasting and singing followed, and the party went on until four the next morning (23 Apr. 1787).\(^\text{13}\) According to the *World*, the Duke’s “amiable assiduities” continued with the next year’s plays (5 Apr. 1788), and in this he was not alone, for at a number of other theatricals which occurred at the houses of the elite during the last years of the 1780’s, Blenheim Palace, Eaton Hall, and Hinchingbrook among them, the noble hosts chose not to act in the plays, but rather chose to play a traditional sociable role, all the while displaying their wealth, power and influence.\(^\text{14}\)

The beneficiaries of this noble hospitality were society denizens, political powerbrokers, and artistic luminaries, a veritable catalog of nobles and notables. At Richmond House, the invited and very exclusive audience, drawn from the highest ranks of society, included the Prince of Wales, the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland, the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, the Duke of York, the Duchess of Atholl, the Duke of Gloucester, the Duke and Duchess of Argyll, and the Hon. Horace Walpole, among many others (*World*, 21 May 1787).\(^\text{15}\) *The London Packet* asserted that, eventually, the entire Peerage would have been in attendance at one of the Richmond House plays (20-23 Apr. 1787). The luster surrounding the Richmond House plays

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\(^\text{13}\) The *European Magazine*, Monthly Chronicle, April 1787, 293 also commented that “after the play his Grace gave a grand supper, which was served up about twelve o’clock and consisted of two courses with a dessert.”

\(^\text{14}\) Initially Sir Watkin Williams Wynn embraced both roles, as actor and host. However during the last three years of his theatricals, which ended in 1787, he no longer acted on his own stage and being a successful host became his primary role.

only increased with the appearance of the King, Queen and Princesses for the final performance of *The Way to Keep Him* on 17 May. A special box was constructed for their Royal Highnesses, new scenery and costumes were added, and the prologue and epilogue were rewritten to include laudatory remarks about the Royal Family (*World* 21 May 1787). The presence of the Royal Family intensified the already tremendous amount of attention being paid to the theatricals and enhanced their social prestige.\(^16\)

The papers included lengthy lists of the attendees, but newspaper reports also focused attention on those in the powerful position of issuing the invitations. The *Morning Post* and the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* each published a list meticulously delineating exactly how many tickets each performer was allocated for distribution (23 Apr. 1787): The Duchess of Richmond and all the actresses were given twelve tickets, the male actors each received six, Elizabeth Farren was given one, the Earl of Abingdon had two, and the Duke of Richmond had twenty for a total of 125 seats.\(^17\) The Banks Collection contains a handwritten note that lists a number of the ticket distributers, among them the Earl of Derby, Mr. and Mrs. Campbell, and Major Arabin, and records who received their tickets. If this was the work of Sarah Sophia Banks, then she too had become caught up in the fervor over these very exclusive invitations (86). The *Morning Chronicle* reported that "such interest is making for places, that several of the nobility are happy, if they can get even the promise of reversion, in case of illness or other casualties" (18 Apr. 1787).\(^18\) Although for the 1788 season the Duke of Richmond had a new

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\(^{16}\) The King and Queen also appeared at the 6 May 1788 performance of *Theodosius*. See the *World*, 5 May 1788 and 7 May 1788.

\(^{17}\) A copy of the printed form letter used by the Duke of Richmond for allocating tickets to the performers, in this case to Mr. Goodenough who received four tickets for the *Wonder*, is in the Banks Collection, 107.

\(^{18}\) It had also erroneously stated that each actor had six tickets and that the total number of spectators would be 150. *The Public Advertiser* contained a similar notice on 18 Apr. 1787.
theatre constructed in an adjoining building (World 16 Jan.1788), it did not provide any more seating so that the demand for tickets still far exceeded the supply, with the World reporting prior to opening night of The Wonder, “admission tickets are very scarce” (6 Feb. 1788). The limited number of tickets available fueled the voracious demand for seats at the Richmond House theatre, making it a much more desirable venue than the public theatres, for though no admission fee was charged, the currency, elite social connections, put the performance out of reach for most of the London public.

When the fortunate and fashionable ticket holders gathered at Richmond House, on time and bareheaded, for the tickets warned that no one would be admitted late and requested that ladies “come without hats, bonnets or feathers,” their “brilliancy . . . was scarcely to be paralleled,” gushed the Morning Post (23 Apr.1787). The audience thus became an integral part of the spectacle, a point that was accentuated through a novel addition to the scenery. Portraits of several women in the audience—the Duchess of Richmond, the Duchess of Devonshire (fig.17), Lady Elizabeth Foster, Lady Duncannon, Sarah Siddons, and Elizabeth Farren (fig.18)—were prominently displayed as part of the set for Mrs. Lovemore’s dressing room. They were painted by John Downman, considered to be one of the most fashionable portrait artists of the day. The set thus became a veritable portrait gallery, alluding, perhaps, to the famous “picture scene” in Richard Sheridan’s School for Scandal (1777). Exhibiting the faces of those women who formed an integral part of the Richmond House inner circle, but who did not appear on stage as

19 Unlabeled newspaper clipping from the Banks Collection, 102.


21 Sheridan, too, was in the audience for the Richmond House premier. In this scene, (School for Scandal, act four, scene one) Sir Charles Surface auctions off his collection of family portraits, to hilarious effect, but much to the chagrin of his uncle Joseph Surface. Gil Perry writes about the way that Sheridan’s scene “signals the important symbiotic relationship between the visual and dramatic arts during the period,” The First Actresses, 13.
actresses, allowed these women, powerful as they were behind the scenes, to attain a place of prominence on center stage. That the faces of both aristocratic women of fashion and professional actresses were displayed alongside each other disrupts the class boundaries that would normally separate them. The resulting effect parallels the circumstance that Jessica Munns describes in “Celebrity Status: The Eighteenth-Century Actress as Fashion Icon,” in which “the fashionable actress and lady of fashion are barely distinguishable from each other” (82). Since the women featured in the portraits were actually seated in the audience, the portraits also function as mirrors, the spectacle reflecting the visages of the spectators. Moreover, bringing the audience into the scene in this way has the effect of merging the fictional world of the play with the real world of the audience, blurring the distinction between the house and the stage.

Later these portraits were made available to the public as a series of engravings advertised in the *World* and touted to be “the exact resemblances of the *Original Drawings*” (8 Feb. 1788, italics in orig.), allowing purchasers to bring a piece of the Richmond House theatre, and an image of these fashionable women, into their own dressing rooms or drawing rooms. The state-of-the-art engraving technique used makes it difficult “to ascertain the original drawing from the copied engraving,” and the sales pitch avows that “those who are fortunate enough” to buy these prints “will possess a treasure, which the curious will value hereafter at a high rate” (20 May 1788). This underscoring of the similarity between copy and original serves as more than just a marketing ploy. Portraits like these create the impression of what Joseph Roach, in *It* (2007), labels “public intimacy” or “the illusion of proximity” to something or someone who would otherwise be unattainable (44). That such “images circulate widely in the absence of their

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22 In her essay Munns contends that the eighteenth-century public theatres also became a place for the exhibition of celebrity and fashion by both actresses and aristocratic women, “Celebrity Status,” in *Women, Popular Culture, and the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Tiffany Potter (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2012), 70.
persons” is, according to Roach, “a good working definition of celebrity” ("Public" 16). The power of the image in creating public intimacy is derived from both its close resemblance to the subject and the fact that one can possess it. These engravings thus represent not only a commercial venture, but an image-making project. By creating the illusion of access to and intimacy with the fashionable women that they portray, the prints enhance their celebrity and enable the public, or at least those with the necessary means, to “possess a treasure” and acknowledge their value.

The Richmond House theatricals inspired another portrait, this one of Lord Henry Fitzgerald, heir to the Duke of Leinster, in the role of Don Felix from The Wonder (fig. 19). It, too, was made available for purchase as an engraving, and as such it articulates similar issues regarding celebrity and public intimacy. In addition, though, the portrait, depicting Fitzgerald costumed for the part, replete with ruff and sword, serves to mimic the vogue for theatrical portraits of professional actors. Shearer West, in an essay titled “The Visuality of the Theatre” observes that one function of such portraits was to provide a lasting memento, “a monument for posterity” for “an actor whose stage performances were by definition ephemeral” (275). This would certainly seem to be just as valid a reason for an aristocratic actor to commission such a work. But the portraiture is, ultimately, more complex than that. By depicting actors portraying roles, these paintings create layers of meaning and significance between actor/role/portrait, something that Gill Perry, in Spectacular Flirtations (2007) refers to as “double mediation” (21). In The First Actresses: Nell Gwyn to Sarah Siddons (2011), Perry explains that rather than being “mirror ‘reflections’ of the sitter” such images reveal truths about the subject, the artist, and the viewer (27). In this case, Fitzgerald appears as both himself, a young, handsome, rich and

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powerful aristocrat, and as Don Felix, the play’s love interest who, aside from being Portuguese, reflects qualities remarkably similar to those of the aristocratic actor himself. Through this “doubleness,” a compelling bit of aristocratic image-making, the painting serves to increase Fitzgerald’s visibility and celebrity, and by extension, that of aristocrats in general, while offering a voyeuristic glimpse into the rarified world of the theatricals.

The press reports exacerbated this voyeuristic effect through their focus on the lavish spectacle created by these aristocratic theatricals, describing the private stage as replete with an array of scenery, costumes, and, especially, jewelry that the patent theatres could not begin to replicate. For instance, the Town and Country Magazine expounded on the tremendous wealth and opulence exhibited at Richmond House, noting that Mrs. Damer wore a “diamond necklace of prodigious value, wheatsheaf ornaments of diamonds in her hair, a girdle of diamonds, and stars of the same in festoons for the dress,” Mrs. Hobart displayed “diamond flowers in festoons, a diamond girdle necklace, and various ornaments in her hair,” and the men sported “very rich” embroidered velvet coats and “quantities of rings, seals and diamond pins” (19:26). The Morning Post directed attention to these sparkling markers of the class differential between the private stage and the public ones, enthusing about the display of “splendid” costumes and the “profusion” of jewels which ensured that the “Noble Personages” were “inimitable beyond description” (21 Apr. 1787).

The actors themselves comprised a share of the spectacle that constituted much of the appeal of the Richmond House theatricals. Hailing from the upper echelons of London society, they included the sculptor Anne Seymour Damer, daughter of General Henry Seymour Conway and the step-sister of the Duchess of Richmond, Lords Henry and Edward Fitzgerald, the Duke of Richmond’s nephews and sons of the Duke of Leinster, acclaimed for their amateur acting in
Ireland, Mrs. Lavinia Hobart, one of the Duchess of Devonshire’s coterie, and the Hon. Richard Edgcumbe and Major Arabin, both serious devotees of private theatricals. Perhaps most significantly, one of the principal actors was the nephew of General John Burgoyne, Edward Smith-Stanley, twelfth Earl of Derby. Regarded as one of the best amateur actors of the day, he was, however, better known for carrying on a longstanding affair with Elizabeth Farren, the celebrated professional actress who did not perform on the Richmond House stage, but instead functioned as manager and acting coach, and the titillation provided by the very public scandal concerning their ongoing, illicit liaison, for Lord Derby was still married at the time of the Richmond House theatricals,\textsuperscript{24} certainly helped to fuel London society’s insatiable interest in these theatricals.

The play chosen for the premier performance, Murphy’s five act comedy \textit{The Way to Keep Him}, also added to the sense of scandal, for the Earl of Derby played Lovemore, a husband beguiled by the charms of another woman, the widow Bellmour, a role in which Elizabeth Farren had appeared with much acclaim during the past five years at Drury Lane.\textsuperscript{25} The play had been a perennial favorite at the London patent theatres since it first played at Drury Lane in 1760 with David Garrick in the lead role (Emery 55-56), yet when done as a private theatrical by

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item His wife was the former Lady Elizabeth Hamilton. In celebration of their wedding in 1774, General Burgoyne had written and produced a “fête champêtre,” at the Oaks, the Earl of Derby’s country house in Surrey. This outdoor extravaganza included a variety of dramatic entertainments and can be seen as a variant form of private theatrical. For more information, see O’Quinn, \textit{Entertaining}, 43-89 and Russell, \textit{Women, Sociability and Theatre in Georgian London} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 141-150.
\item Murphy had first written the play as a three act farce which premiered at Drury Lane on 24 Jan. 1760. He reworked the play into a five act comedy adding the character and subplot of Sir Bashful Constant. The five act version opened at Drury Lane on 10 Jan. 1761, see Dunbar, 85-90. The Richmond House production must have been the five act comedy since the cast lists include the character of Sir Bashful, played by Major Arabin, see Banks Collection, 87. Farren played the character of Widow Bellmour for the first time on 29 Oct. 1782, see Hogan, \textit{London}, 1:564.
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The story in brief is that the rake Lovemore has neglected his wife, choosing instead to partake of London’s endless variety of amusements, one of which is paying calls to the Widow Bellmour, which he does disguised as Lord Etheridge. In effect, he is performing a role in his own private theatrical, played out in the Widow Bellmour’s parlor. Eventually Mrs. Lovemore and the Widow Bellmour combine forces, with a plan that entails Mrs. Lovemore’s also learning to act, performing a variety of roles in order to regain her husband’s affection. The Widow Bellmour explains: “A wife should throw infinite variety into her manner. She should, as it were, multiply herself, and be, as it were, sundry different women on different occasions. The tender, the affectionate, the witty, the silent, all in their turns, all shifting the scene” (3.1.275-79). This theatrical aspect of the play, revealing the characters as actors who perform roles for one another, is magnified when it is performed in the context of an actual private theatrical.

The prologue for the performance at Richmond House, written by General Conway and spoken by Mrs. Hobart who played the Widow Bellmour, accentuates the differences between public and private stages in terms of audience. The prologue presents a brief chronicle of theatre through the ages, placing the amateur actors within that history. The current state of affairs at the public theatres is lamented as hostile and chaotic, because of the composition of the audience: “‘Tis such a concourse, such a staring show!/Mobs shout above and Critics snarl below” (World 21 May 1787). Portrayed as threatening, the audience “vents its full rage on Players or on Play.” Private theatricals, in contrast, allow the actors to “scorn the noisy plaudits of the crowd/The dull, the vain, the fickle, and the loud/Blest in the Candour of a chosen few/Whose

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26 This performance was recreated for the third in a series of conferences on private theatricals titled What Signifies a Theatre held in London on 12 July 2012. The actors were from the theatre company Artifice, directed by Kate Napier.

27 All of the following quotations from both prologue and epilogue are from this source.
hearts are partial, tho’ their judgments true.” These “chosen few” spectators provide encouragement to even novice amateur actors: “here in this fair Garden’s calm retreat/At once the Virtues and the Muse’s seat/Where friendly suns their kindest influence shed/Each tender plant may dauntless rear its head.” The *fair garden* can be seen as a reference to Richmond House’s Privy Garden location, but it also posits the edenic nature of the private stage and its audience, as kind, supportive, and friendly, whereas that of the public stage seems post-lapsarian, for there “rankling thorns infest the genial soil/ and keenest tempests blast the  planters toil.” This prologue set the stage for the performance to follow, a performance which highlighted the tensions between the public and private stage, and provided a stage on which the aristocratic actors asserted their political power and cultural influence.

The epilogue to *The Way to Keep Him*, which also directs its focus toward the audience, was written by General John Burgoyne, who, after surrendering at the battle of Saratoga, had returned to England and rekindled his passion for amateur theatricals. Spoken by Anne Damer who played Mrs. Lovemore, the epilogue speaks to the play’s contention that aristocratic women need to wield their marital power, saying “‘Tis in ourselves our Empire to maintain.” Looking specifically at the women in the audience, Damer pointed out traits that exemplify aristocratic character, at least for women: good temper, vivacity, wit, sentiment, truth, discretion, delicacy, sensibility, and the desire to please. The domestic empire of marriage and home is aligned with national empire, as such a statement also emphasizes that the aristocrats in the audience, leaders with political and social power, needed to assert that power and authority. The epilogue thus becomes a way of reflecting a portrait of aristocratic strengths and virtues. There were three different versions of both prologue and epilogue, one for the opening night when the Prince of Wales and the Duke and Duchess of Cumberland attended, another for nights without royal
spectators, and the third for the closing performance when the Royal Family was in the audience, with the last few lines altered in homage to them. It stated that their greatness, as well as their long and successful marriage, emanated from their immutable virtues; “Unchang’d by fashion, unimpair’d by time,” and that those in the audience should emulate their example. This message was ultimately also disseminated among those who were not part of the elite audience, as both the prologue and epilogue were printed and distributed as mementos of the evening, and then reprinted in the London press.28

Another epilogue written specifically for Richmond House, this one for the March 1788 production of *The Jealous Wife*,29 makes an overt comparison between the political events of the day with the performance on the Richmond House stage.30 The impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, on charges of corruption and mismanagement of the East India Company, had begun a month earlier at Westminster Hall31 and, like the Richmond House theatricals, was the talk of the town.32 The epilogue implies that both political activity and the justice system are a form of theatre: “Where high-born Culprits, if they’ve acted ill,/Must dread that Judgment, which they honour still;/Where if the part perform’d stands free from Blame,/Impartial Justice will secure

28 For some examples, see the *World*, 21 May 1787, and “Prologue to the Play of The Way to Keep Him,” *Town and Country Magazine*, May 1787, 231-33. Original printed copies of all three versions of the prologue and epilogue can be found in the Banks Collection, 87-97.

29 The Richmond House performances opened on 11 March 1788, see *World*, 12 March 1788.

30 The epilogue was written by Miles Peter Andrews Esq. and spoken by Mrs. Hobart who played Mrs. Oakley. It was printed in the *European Magazine*, March 1788, 226. A copy of this was preserved as an unlabeled clipping in the Burney Collection of Theatrical Materials, 63. The epigraph for this chapter comes from the last lines of this epilogue.

31 The trial began on 13 Feb. 1788. Charles James Fox and other members of the Whig coterie surrounding the Richmond House theatricals were on the side of the prosecution.

32 Frances Burney, in a journal letter to Susanna Phillips dated 13 February 1788, writes about her experience at the trial after receiving a box ticket for it from the Queen, see *Journals and Letters*, eds. Peter Sabor and Lars E. Troide (London: Penguin, 2001), 256-263. The socialite Mrs. Lybbe Powys wrote in her diary about going to see the trial in person on 6 June 1788. She was pleased to find herself in a front row seat, but writes about being terribly disappointed in Sheridan’s performance, 232-33.
their Fame” (European 13: 226). At Richmond House, the high-born audience will be the ultimate “Judges of Taste and Arbiters of Wit” in regards to the aristocratic actors (226).

Underscoring the correlation between public politics and this private performance, Mrs. Hobart declares, “GREAT things, they say, may be compared with small;/ This little stage, with WESTMINSTER’S VAST HALL!” (226; cap. in orig.). The trial at Westminster Hall may well have represented a form of political theatre, but ultimately so did the theatricals at Richmond House.

In fact, the “little stage” at Richmond House had actually taken precedence over “Westminster’s Vast Hall” during the previous year’s production of The Way to Keep Him. The theatrical, declared the Morning Post, was “an event not only of magnitude sufficient to interest the volatile taste of the great, but to suspend even the more serious and solemn movement of the political machine itself” (20 Apr. 1787). For in an astonishing decision, an important vote on the country’s finances scheduled for Friday, 20 April was postponed in order that members of Parliament would be able to attend the theatrical at Richmond House that evening. As the Morning Post explains, “We understand that a motion concerning the finances of the country, intended to have been made this day in the House of Commons, is actually deferred till Monday, in consequence of the irresistible influence of this laudable offering to the shrine of the dramatic Muse” (20 Apr. 1787). The contiguity between the political stage and the private one was accentuated when the European Magazine for April 1787 listed the Richmond House performance of The Way to Keep Him in its “Monthly Chronicle” section, alongside updates on recent decisions in the Irish House of Commons regarding trade agreements and details of the voting for six directors of the East India Company, rather than in its “Theatrical Journal” section where information on the public stage appeared (293).
Russell claims that party loyalty played a role in the politics of the theatricals, as “many leading Whig families were identified as enthusiastic thespians; in this respect amateur acting can be regarded as part of a repertoire of behavior—including libertine flamboyance, female exhibitionism, and the cultivation of public celebrity—that was used to define the Prince of Wales’s party in defiance of the ‘Farmer George’ probity associated with the King” (*Theatres* 125). While this argument is apt to a point, it would, however, be incorrect to imply that interest in amateur acting was confined to members of the Whig party. The fashion for private theatricals transcended political affiliation; Tories such as the Duke and Duchess of Gordon, George Hamilton-Gordon, fourth Earl of Aberdeen, and John Hamilton, first Marquess of Abercorn among many others, were also keen amateur actors. Though many of the participants in the Richmond House theatricals were influential in Whig politics, the theatricals seem to have been more about aristocratic image making and publicity creating than about party politics. For, along with a plethora of aristocrats, the Prince of Wales, the Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger, and Charles James Fox, the leader of the Whig party, were all part of the audience at Richmond House. According to the *European Magazine* one of the “most wonderful” moments of the evening occurred when “Mr. Fox and Mr. Pitt came in together!” (11:293). The coming together socially of such bitter rivals politically as Fox and Pitt, as noteworthy as that must have been, emphasizes the way that this theatrical becomes a performance by both actors and audience, a way of performing social superiority and political power which is not played out on the stage, but rather in the London press before a much larger audience.

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33 Their theatricals at Gordon Castle were discussed in chapter three.

34 Rosenfeld notes that Bentley Priory, John Hamilton’s “noble mansion” was “the centre of Tory society as Devonshire House had been that of the Whigs,” *Temples*, 154.
However, this wider audience made up of the general public did not always respond as positively toward the aristocratic theatricals and their exhibition of power and influence as the social elite, or even the newspapers, did. One example of this occurred towards the end of the performance of *The Wonder* on 7 February 1788, when a mob rioted outside of Richmond House. It was quickly quelled and little damage was done, as the *World* reported: “Before the conclusion of the performance a mob who had gathered around the outskirts of the theatre broke some of the windows with stones but were soon dispersed” (8 Feb. 1788). Before the next performance, the Duke took preventive measures, constructing “an outdoor building for servants and constables—in the case the mob should again be abusive and disorderly” (*World* 16 Feb. 1788). Though the reason for this riot by “the mob” is unclear, it could have been animosity to the Duke’s politics, or diffuse outrage about the imminent impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, or it may have been that the theatre, which had been the focus of so much publicity, provided a convenient focal point for class resentments and anger over the immense wealth and power such a place represented, by people who would never be invited to one of the plays occurring within. As such the outside of Richmond House became a site for staging an alternative performance to the one going on inside on the stage. Though the *World* noted that “there was not either Prologue or Epilogue” actually spoken during the performance, this scene that took place outside the Duke of Richmond’s house “before the conclusion of the performance” (8 Feb. 1788) seems to provide external commentary, a kind of epilogue, on the proceedings within.

Another type of response to the theatricals took place a few days after the premier theatrical, via an engraving of the performance which was printed and sold by Hannah
Through caricature, it depicts the key moment of revelation during the final act of *The Way to Keep Him*, when the aristocrat Lovemore is exposed as having acted the part of Lord Etheridge. The caricature shows Derby as the central figure in the scene. As the climactic episode in the play, the blurring of the lines between actor and role becomes all the more potent in light of Derby’s own infidelity, as Derby, the aristocrat, plays the part of Lovemore, who adopts the guise of Etheridge, and the caricature thus reflects the scene as one that exposes not only Lovemore’s shameful behavior, but also the scandal surrounding Derby. Depicted as portly and small of stature, he is physically dwarfed by Damer, playing his wife, Mrs. Lovemore, on one side, and Hobart, playing his paramour, the Widow Bellmour, on the other. The women are portrayed as nothing but fashion, erased by layers of coiffure and couture. They are contrasted by the ridiculously thin figure of Lovemore’s friend and fellow rake, the fop Sir Brilliant Fashion, played by Edgecumbe. Two spectators, probably the Duke and Duchess of Richmond, who is all muff and headdress, sit in a box on the side, as much a part of the scene as the actors themselves. The figures of the women dominate the composition, completely absorbed by fashion to the point of being strangely distorted and puffed-up, dramatizing one of the primary objections to theatricals, the potential disruption to traditional hierarchies and power structures that could ensue when high-born women exhibit themselves on

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35 At the bottom of the print is the following: “Pubd Aprl 23 1787 by H Humphries Bond Strt London.” The British Museum says the publisher was Hannah Humphrey, who specialized in expensive satirical prints. The artist is not designated. The color was added by hand after the engraving process. The print was donated to the British Museum as part of the collection of Sarah Sophia Banks.

36 According to the British Museum’s description of the image, the actresses’ lines were transposed, most likely by the engraver: “This is Lord Etheridge Madam” and “No Madam this is Lord Lovemore.” For more information, see http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?assetId=86889&objectId=1461182&partId=1.

37 Above this character is printed Sir Brilliant Fashion’s line from Murphy’s play, “As the man says in the play Your Lordship is right welcome back to Denmark” an allusion to the line spoken by Osric, another ridiculous fop of a character, in Hamlet, 5.2.83.
the stage. The criticism, though, is somewhat blunted through the use of humor. However, by employing exaggeration and burlesque, the drawing depicts the actors as foolish and exposes the theatricals as inane, making the aristocrats look ridiculous rather than influential and powerful.

In the drawing, a motto written on a pink medallion hovers above the actors’ heads and proclaims “Veluti in Speculum,” or “as in a mirror.” In actuality there is no other evidence that the Richmond House theatre had this motto over the stage, and since this drawing was done for satirical effect, it would be a mistake to take it to be an accurate representation. However, this phrase has a certain legitimacy in terms of the theatre, for it really was displayed over the stage at Covent Garden, as shown in a design for the proscenium arch done by Giovanni Battista Cipriani in 1777 (fig.21). Earlier in the century, it had also been the motto at the patent theatre at Lincoln Inn’s Fields, and Hogarth includes the phrase in his celebrated depiction of that stage’s greatest success, *A Scene from the Beggar’s Opera* (fig.22). So it certainly seems plausible that it could have graced the front of the Duke’s stage. Nonetheless, even if it was not really part of the decoration of the theatre, the fact that the caricaturist includes it as part of the satire is worth noting. It not only implies that the private theatre was a reflection of the public one, but also indicates that the actors are, as Hamlet advised, holding a mirror up to nature, reflecting their true nature and the reality of their own lives in the play. Moreover, it also suggests that the audience sees itself and its experiences being mirrored on the stage. In addition, the intimation is there that the print itself purports to provide a mirror of the performance. The

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38 For more about this design see Nicoll, *Garrick*, 54.


40 *Hamlet*, act 3, scene 2, line 20.
very nature of caricature, though, suggests that all reflections are not necessarily accurate ones, but can be distorted in the representation.

Yet another response to the Richmond House theatricals appeared in the *Town and Country Magazine* in May 1787. Seeing the potential for mirroring and mimicry inherent in private theatricals as detrimental, especially for the lower classes, it contends, “Theatres are the first schools of morality and virtue; but it is the spectators not the actors who receive instruction” and “as the subordinate orders of mankind, will, on every occasion, imitate the conduct of those in superior life, private representations must operate in a contrary manner, by promoting idleness and dissipation” (“Richmond” 19:226). The magazine goes on to assert that “should the exhibition of private plays become fashionable” there is the potential for “those who became actors for amusement” to harm the livelihood of “those who are actors by profession” (226). Despite its awkward syntax, the judgment rendered in the final statement is quite clear, “therefore, considering private plays upon their general influence on the public, or their particular effects upon individuals, they should not be encouraged” (226). Notwithstanding its harsh assessment of the consequences of aristocratic private theatricals, the inescapable irony is that the *Town and Country Magazine* proceeded to run numerous, and really quite obsequious, articles about these very performances, the magazine’s editors ultimately more concerned with profits than either the public good or the public theatres.

In any case, the private theatricals were, to a great extent, still modeling their performances on those at the public stages, and the amateur actors continued to emulate successful professionals in their roles. For instance, a number of the plays done at Richmond House were ones in which Farren and Siddons had played starring roles at Drury Lane: Siddons had played Mrs. Lovemore to Farren’s Widow Bellmour four times during the 1785-86 theatre
season, including a command performance for the King and Queen on 6 February 1786 (Hogan 2:821, 845, 860). Farren also had appeared as Violante in the Wonder on 24 October 1787 (Hogan 2:1015) and in the Jealous Wife as Mrs. Oakley on 7 December 1787 (1025), about the time that decisions, according to the newspapers, were being made about which play to produce in the spring. Both women also functioned as acting consultants and coaches, the amateurs looking to them for much needed advice and instruction. Furthermore, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, accompanied by his wife, attended the premier performance, as did Mrs. Garrick, the great actor’s widow, and though their appearance would have been primarily social, nevertheless, as the manager of the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, Sheridan was also a representative of the public theatres, and his presence gave the theatricals additional credibility (Morning Post 21 Apr. 1787).

Though this sort of collaboration between professional and amateur actors was clearly not unique, for Macklin and Foote had helped the Delavals, and at Wynnstay the Colmans acted and Garrick was in the audience, the association of professionals with Richmond House appears to be somewhat different, for the professionals were not merely doing the amateurs a favor by lending their expertise, but instead their presence reflected their desire to be associated with these fashionable and powerful aristocrats. In fact, while Siddons enhanced her reputation as a respectable lady by these interactions, Farren eventually became an aristocrat herself, marrying Derby in 1797 (Perry, First 53,57). For actresses looking to elevate their status, it did not hurt that the theatricals were widely depicted as the pinnacle of fashion: as the World declared, “So, where could there be more of what is Fashionable, or more that deserves to be so?” (11 June

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41 Their first performance was on 26 Nov.1785, the same cast appeared again three days later, and another performance took place on 18 May 1786 as a “Benefit for a Fund for the Relief of those who from their Infirmities shall be obliged to retire from the Stage” the receipts for which totaled 211 pounds, see Hogan, 2:846, 887.
1788). The public theatres also seem to have attempted to profit from the publicity generated by the private theatrical, for Farren played the Widow Belmouir in *The Way to Keep Him* at Drury Lane on Monday 21 May 1787 (Hogan 2:913), just four days after the final Richmond House performance had generated an extraordinary amount of publicity because the King and Queen were in attendance. She also appeared at Drury Lane in the *Jealous Wife* as Mrs. Oakley on 3 April 1788, one day before the final Richmond House performance of it (Hogan 2:1052).42 Covent Garden staged the *Jealous Wife* twice following the Richmond House performance, and it appeared twice at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket that April as well.43 As a result, the Richmond House theatre not only provides an interesting example of how the private stage mimicked the patent stages, but illustrates how the London theatres ended up mimicking the aristocrats.

Horace Walpole, who counted a number of relatives and close friends among the participants, was a staunch advocate of the Richmond House theatricals, writing to Anne Fitzpatrick, Countess of Upper Ossory, on 14 June 1787: “I am very far from tired, Madam, of encomiums on the performance at Richmond House; but I by no means agree with the criticism on it that you quote, and which I conclude was written by some player from envy” (*Yale* 33:563).44 A month after the last performance of *The Way to Keep Him*, it was clearly still a prime topic for discussion and Walpole argues in favor of the aristocratic actors: “Who should

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42 For more on the last performance of the *Jealous Wife* at Richmond House, see the *World*, 5 Apr. 1788, and Rosenfeld, *Temples*, 48. In addition, *The Wonder* with Farren playing Violante appeared at Drury Lane on 9 Apr. 1788, see Hogan, 2:1054.

43 See Hogan, 2:1054, 1058, 1061,1068.

44 It is not clear what criticism Walpole is referring to here, as the letter that the Countess of Upper Ossory wrote to Walpole has not survived. W.S. Lewis states in footnote that it could be a column in the *World* from April 21, see *Yale Edition of Walpole’s Correspondence*, ed. W.S. Lewis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), 563n14. But given the numerous press reports on the theatrical, it seems difficult to speculate about what, specifically, Walpole alludes to in this letter.
act genteel comedy perfectly but people of fashion that have sense? Actresses and actors can only guess at the tone of high life and cannot be inspired with it” (563; italics in orig.). For evidence of this, he turns to the professional actress, Frances Abington, who had once sold flowers at the Covent Garden market. Though she had achieved great success on the stage, and had been acclaimed in the role of the Widow Bellmour (Nussbaum, *Rival* 245), Walpole is dismissive of her ability to play fine ladies, saying, that despite her fame in *School for Scandal*, “Mrs Abington can never go beyond Lady Teazle, which is a second-rate character” (564). In his estimation, professional actresses from lower class backgrounds, like Abington, will never be able to portray a woman of “quality” accurately, for they cannot really understand, or emulate, the essence of aristocratic character. “That rank of women” he scoffs, referring to actresses, “are always aping women of fashion without arriving at the style” (564).

A few months later, Walpole continued the same line of discussion with the Countess. On 17 December 1787, after attending a rehearsal for the upcoming performance of *The Wonder* with Lord Henry Fitzgerald in the lead role, he wrote to her enthusiastically, “I was at a rehearsal last night and amazed. Lord Henry is a prodigy, a perfection--all passion, nature and ease; you never saw so genuine a lover” (33:588). The appeal, for Walpole, in Fitzgerald’s performance is that he is able to portray Don Felix, a Portuguese nobleman, in a natural and authentic way. Walpole asserts that Fitzgerald’s manners and behavior are completely believable, since he “is so much the man of fashion, and is so genteel” (588). As he had done earlier, Walpole then makes an explicit comparison to actors on the public stage, saying, “Garrick was a monkey to him in Don Felix” (588). This provocative statement suggests an

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45 Others also described Fitzgerald’s performance using these terms. On 8 Feb 1788 the *World* exclaimed that “tones more true to Nature . . . have not we will venture to say ever been witnessed in the memory of the stage.”
inversion of the way that amateur actors had usually been viewed, as well-intentioned but lacking in execution on the stage, destined to merely mimic the celebrated performances of the much more accomplished professionals. That Walpole chooses to use Garrick’s portrayal of Don Felix as his point of comparison is especially surprising, for this was the role that he chose for his final performance at Drury Lane.\textsuperscript{46} Over a decade after his retirement, Garrick still commanded iconic status among British actors, and his performance in the role remained legendary. Yet Walpole’s use of the word “monkey” here is perhaps even more startling, and in conjunction with his derogatory statement about actresses “aping women of fashion,” it reveals the implication that it is the actors who are the real mimics, attempting to imitate those of higher rank and status, but not getting it exactly right. Carrying the point further, he clarifies, “In short, when people of quality can act, they must act their own parts so much better than others can mimic them” (588). In Walpole’s view, the significant class divide between most professional actors and the aristocratic amateurs means that no one can play aristocrats as naturally as the aristocrats, for he argues that class ultimately trumps acting ability and professional skill. In this conception of it anyway, the designation of original and copy is inverted, so that it is the professional actors who are doing the imitating, and it is the public stage that takes on the character of a mimic stage.

\textbf{“New and Occasional Dramas for Private Exhibition”}\textsuperscript{47}

In 1787, the playwright Richard Cumberland published the essay “Remarks upon the Present Taste for Acting Private Plays” in \textit{The Observer: Being a Collection of Moral, Literary,}

\textsuperscript{46} 10 June 1776, see Stone, 3:1985

\textsuperscript{47} The quote is taken from Cumberland, “Remarks,” 292.
The date suggests that his inspiration may have been the success of the first season of Richmond House theatricals. As one whose livelihood was connected to the success of the patent theatres, he expresses serious misgivings about the current fashion for aristocratic theatricals, feeling that no good can come of the fact that “new-made players are now as plentiful as new-made peers” (282) and warning that “if the present taste for private plays spreads as fast as most fashions do in this country,” Britain could soon expect to be “one entire nation of actors and actresses” (280). He maintains that theatricals should not mimic the public stage, to the extent that “nothing ought to be admitted from beginning to end, which can provoke comparisons” to professionals (288). For “an exhibition so ennobled by its actors,” he argues, “should not condescend to imitate, and cannot hope to equal” (285) the “veterans of the public stage” (284). Instead theatricals “should be planned upon a model new, original and peculiar to themselves; so industriously distinguished from our public play-houses, that they should not strike the eye, as now they do, like a copy in miniature, but as the independent sketch of a master, who disdains to copy” (286). Not surprisingly, he feels most strongly about the amateurs’ choice of plays, “so nice and difficult a part of the business” (288), and contends that the play “should be part only of the projected entertainment, woven into the device of a grand and splendid fete” and that “the drama therefore must be purposely written for the occasion” (289).

Ostensibly, he posits this as being in the best interest of the amateurs, a way of avoiding falling short of the standards set by the professionals, but the essay as a whole suggests that

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48 A truncated version of the essay was reprinted in the *European Magazine*, August 1788, 115-18. Dobson discusses this essay in both *Shakespeare*, 50-51 and “Theatre for Nothing,” 186-7, and focuses his analysis on Cumberland’s disapproval of young women acting in theatricals. Helen Brookes refers to a 1791 edition of the essay and argues that Cumberland’s main contention was that theatricals had “demystified” the art of acting, see “‘One Entire Nation of Actors and Actresses’: Reconsidering the Relationship of Private and Public Theatricals,” *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film* 38, no. 2 (2011): 5. Saying “there is sense here as well as snobbery,” Rosenfeld concludes that Cumberland was correct in advising the amateurs not to copy the professionals, see *Temples*, 13-14.
Cumberland’s motive actually stems from a concern that “the public professors of the art” are at a fundamental disadvantage when compared to “people of fashion, who act for their amusement only” (282). His conviction that the amateurs would be best served if they adopted a completely different approach, with innovative and original plays and staging, seeks to limit correlations between them, especially those which might be unfavorable to the patent theatres, and to minimize any potentially negative impact of theatricals on commercial performances.

Indeed, for its final play, the Richmond House theatre ventured into this territory envisioned by Cumberland, and instead of yet another imitation of the public stage’s repertoire, premiered Conway’s *False Appearances*. The original French version of this play by De Boissy had been presented previously as a private theatrical by members of the Lennox family: when they were children, the Duke of Richmond along with his two oldest sisters, Caroline and Emily, took part in *Le Dehors Trompeurs*, performed in French, on 17 September 1740 at the family’s country estate, Goodwood (*Morning Herald*, 3 June 1788). The Duke’s past history with the play may have been the reason that General Conway decided to rework it for the Richmond House theatricals. As both the French and English titles imply, the play explores how misleading appearances can be, by focusing on two men, members of the Ton, who woo the same young woman in a series of mistaken meanings and misunderstandings. The lead character, the Baron, played by Lord Derby, seems to be the consummate gentleman in public, with perfect manners and fashionable friends, but in private he is harsh and tyrannical to both family members and servants. Miss Campbell acted the part of his fiancée, Lucille, who despises the Baron and speaks to him as little as possible. The Baron assumes that she is of limited intelligence, but in fact she is in love with another man, the Baron’s friend the Marquis, played by Lord Henry Fitzgerald. Anne Damer acted the part of the Baron’s fashionable female companion, the
Countess, who encourages him to neglect his domestic responsibilities to take part in the entertainments of the town, in much the same way that Lovemore does in *The Way to Keep Him*. The division between public and private amusements, as well as public and private personas, is a recurrent theme in plays done at private theatricals; examining how characters act in both private and public acquires additional significance when the play is enacted in the context of a private theatrical.

The presentation of an original script led to an increase in what was already extensive publicity. The *Morning Chronicle* proclaimed that “the production of a New Piece at the Duke of Richmond’s Theatre” was an “auspicious event,” and it demonstrated that opinion via an exceptionally lengthy report of three full newspaper columns, much of which entailed a detailed plot summary of Conway’s play, stating, “We have rendered the preceding account of the fable more copious and comprehensive than usual, because, the Play having been performed at a Private Theatre, to which few of our readers can have had an opportunity of access, we conceive, a full account of it will prove more acceptable to them than a mere outline” (2 June 1788). Those who were fortunate enough to witness the event first hand seemed pleased with the result. An entry in Mrs. Philip Lybbe Powys’ diary for 23 May 1788 notes that she had gone to see the play at Richmond House with Mr. Powys and that the “whole was amazingly well acted. The house filled with all the fine people in town” (232). Horace Walpole commented in a letter to the Earl of Stratford that *False Appearances* “succeeded delightfully” (*Letters 6*: 292). From the standpoint of the London press, that the author was one of the coterie at the Duke’s theatre made the play all the more intriguing and, apparently, newsworthy. They praised Conway for not only translating the dialogue into English, but for transforming the play into an English comedy, its French origins being viewed with disdain by all concerned. Perhaps most noteworthy, are the
substantial number of comparisons to the public stage. Of Damer, acting the Countess, a powerful and well-connected woman of fashion, much like the actress herself, the *World* announced “the real stage could have given nothing more light, more fanciful, more truly comic, and with more point” (2 June 1788). The *Morning Herald* declared that the “ease and spirit” with which the ladies played their parts, “would have done honor to a Theatre Royal” (2 June 1788). And according to the *World*, “His Grace, in his present Theatrical progress, bids fair to rival the two Theatres Royal” (2 June 1788), leaving one to wonder if this escalation of publicity and adulation is exactly what Cumberland had in mind.

A year later such comparisons were put to the test, for a newly revised version\(^49\) of Conway’s play appeared at Drury Lane, the public stage openly mimicking the private one. Even the dates of the production seem to mirror Richmond House, for the show ran for five nights from April 20 through 16 May, almost identical dates to those of *The Way to Keep Him* two years earlier (Hogan 2:1146-47).\(^50\) Notably, the Duke chose not to hold any plays at his theatre in 1789, so it is as if Drury Lane decided to fill the void left by the absence of the elite amateurs. Farren provides the visible link between the two stages, playing the part of the Countess, a role that she would eventually enact in real life. In a new epilogue written by Burgoyne, the image of the stage as a mirror was made manifest, for Farren spoke it with “a looking-glass hanging from her wrist” (Conway 73).\(^51\) Holding “this wond’rous mirror,” which represents the play, found by the poet with the help of the Muses, she tells the audience that “this dear, sweet gift shall shew [sic] me what you are” (73). *False Appearances* does not merely reflect the foibles of the

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\(^49\) A new character, an Abbé, was added with the intention of infusing more humor into the play in the hopes of increasing its appeal to the Upper Galleries, where lower class patrons sat, see Conway, viii-ix.

\(^50\) The play ran 20, 22 Apr. and 1, 12, 16 May, 1789.

\(^51\) This epilogue was reprinted in the *European Magazine*, June 1789, 486-87.
audience, but the prejudices of the critics and the press, who “in tomorrow’s prints” will include “for Bard, and Actors, comments false and true” and ask, if “your private satire stand[s] the test” (74). To this end, Farren implores the crowds to “come for the proof of being what we seem,/And take my fiat for the world’s esteem” (75). In mirroring the original production at Richmond House, the actors at Drury Lane hope to achieve similar visibility, attention, and packed houses.

False Appearances was just one of many plays that were written specifically for private theatricals. In fact, Rosenfeld states that she has documented the existence of over fifty such plays (170). Some of these dramas did make their way onto the public stage, but, as in the case of Conway, their fortunate authors tended to be exceptionally well-connected and well-known. Exemplifying this point, a famous, albeit quite notorious, member of high society, the Margravine of Anspach, the former Lady Elizabeth Craven, wrote several plays, some for her private theatre at Brandenburgh House, among them The Sleep-Walker (1778), The Robbers (1798), and Nourjad (1803). One of her earliest plays, The Miniature Picture (1780) was first performed by amateur actors in Berkshire, before being produced on the stage at the Drury Lane. Her youth, beauty, and celebrity were clearly determining factors in the decision to produce her play, along with the fact that as a member of what Walpole terms “the aristocracy of noble authors” (Yale 29:43) she would be sure to fill the house with an elite crowd. Walpole describes how “she went to it herself the second night, in form; sat in the middle of the front row of the stage-box, much dressed, with a profusion of white bugles and plumes to receive the public

52 Rosenfeld lists all of these plays in a table which lists the author as well as where and when they were performed. See Temples, Appendix II, 180-185.

53 A group of student actors from the Drama Department of Royal Holloway, University of London performed this play at the first ‘What Signifies a Theatre?’ Conference at Chawton House, Alton, England on 10 Dec. 2010. For more on Craven as a playwright see Catherine Burroughs, Closet Stages (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 147.
homage due to her sex and loveliness,” (43). Among those who joined Lord and Lady Craven at the Drury Lane, 24 May 1780, were several people who would become key participants in the Richmond House theatricals, the Duchess of Richmond, Mrs. Damer, General Conway, and of course, Walpole himself. In a rather different sphere and on a different scale, that of small towns and provincial theatres, James Plumptre wrote a comedy, *The Coventry Act*, for performance at his family’s private theatre in Norwich in 1792, and much to his good fortune, but probably also due to the prominence of his family in the local community—his father was the President of Queen’s College, Cambridge and his sister Anna was active in area literary circles—it was produced at the Theatre Royal Norwich a year later and published soon after (*Rev.*). Likewise, as I discussed in chapter three, O’Hara achieved great and lasting success on public stages in both Dublin and London with his burletta *Midas* after its premier on a private stage near Belfast. In all of these cases, the patent stages saw such plays as a means to attract an elite audience of friends, family and supporters of the author and to profit from the attention and visibility of the private theatricals for which they had been originally written.

Yet the vast majority of these “new and occasional dramas for private exhibition” were never played in public. Only a month before they enacted Conway’s play, the Richmond House actors had presented another adaption, this time of Nathaniel Lee’s tragedy *Theodosius, or the Force of Love* (1680) which Edward Tighe had abridged for a private performance at Shaw’s Court in Dublin in 1786. He published it “for the use of private theatres” that same year, and there is no indication that it was ever done elsewhere. Indeed, a number of these dramas were never even published, though in some cases a manuscript copy has managed to survive through

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54 From a letter to William Mason dated 28 May 1780, see Yale, 29:43.

55 Plumptre’s play was performed at the Theatre Royal Norwich on 16 Jan. 1793, see James Plumptre, *Coventry Act* (Norwich, 1793).
the years, as in the case of *You May Like It or Let It Alone*, an original farce based on the founding of the Seaton Delaval, the Delaval family seat near Newcastle, in the days of William the Conquerer, which was performed there once in 1790.\textsuperscript{56} Others like General Burgoyne’s farce, the *Blockade of Boston*, \textsuperscript{57} or *The Siege of Scutari* by Edward Taylor\textsuperscript{58} have been completely lost to time. Though most plays which were first performed on a private stage never found a larger audience, the reality for their authors was that private theatricals provided the only opportunity to see their work produced at all. Frances Brooke explores this situation in her novel the *Excursion* (1777) through the character of Maria Villiers, an aspiring writer who tries doggedly to convince the Drury Lane’s manager to accept her play, but to no avail. In the end, she realizes that her only option is to build a private theatre and “in defiance of managers, write tragedies, and play them” with her friends (152).

\textbf{“All the World’s a Stage”: Plays about Private Theatricals}

Another indication of how the cultural valance of theatricals began to change with the Richmond House performances is indicated by plays produced on the public stage that included representations of the fashion for private theatricals. Since the passage of the Licensing Act, a few afterpieces had included comic scenes of private theatricals, among them *Britons Strike Home*, discussed in chapter three, which was only produced twice at Drury Lane, both for benefit

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\textsuperscript{56} Rosenfeld notes that the manuscript for the Delaval play is in the archive of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle, see *Temples*, 106. I have confirmed that the play manuscript is now held by the Northumberland County Archive Service.

\textsuperscript{57} I discuss this play and its performance at Faneuil Hall in Boston in chapter three. The *Maid of the Oaks*, another play by Burgoyne, was also produced at Drury Lane. But the circumstances are quite different, for the play was actually written for the public stage based on the fête champêtre given to celebrate the Earl of Derby’s marriage.

\textsuperscript{58} Written for Oldfield Bowles’ theatricals in North Aston. I analyze the prologue to this play in chapter one.
Another afterpiece about private theatricals, Joseph Dorman’s *Roger de Coverly; or, The Merry Christmas* (1740) played at Covent Garden on 18 November 1740 and then again at Drury Lane in 1746 for a benefit for the author (Scouten, 2:865, 1276). In *Plays about the Theatre in England*, Smith affirms that Dorman’s play was the first to include a country house theatrical (134). As such, its cultural implications are worth noting. The play concerns a visit by Mr. Spectator to the country house of Sir Roger de Coverly, characters Dorman appropriates from Addison and Steele’s *The Spectator*. Like Addison and Steele’s earlier fictional creation, Dorman’s Sir Roger is an exemplary country gentleman, a model of good manners and politeness, but also rather old-fashioned and traditional in his views. In *The Spectator* (No.2), Roger de Coverly is portrayed as a quintessential English country squire, a baronet of “antient Descent,” whose family name also signifies a popular English folk dance (Mackie 83). Dorman’s appropriation of this character serves to give his play a kind of legitimacy, by associating it with the cultural influence and prominence of *The Spectator*. George Justice, who includes a brief synopsis of this play in *Manufacturers of Literature* (2002), claims that “Sir Roger maintained a position with Shakespeare’s Falstaff as one of the most beloved of English characters” (63). In addition, Sir Roger provides a recognizable marker of old-fashioned virtue and English hospitality. The play, as its subtitle makes clear, takes place at Christmastime, and Dorman lards it with English Christmas traditions. Sir Roger gives monetary gifts to his servants, treats his neighbors to food and drink, plans a hunting party, and proclaims, “Thus it is we spend our

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59 Garrick’s *Peep Behind the Curtain* (1767) includes a brief scene where a husband and wife speak of their passion for enacting scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* for their own amusement, but this is not really a depiction of a private theatrical.

60 For more on the play’s use of the character of Roger de Coverly see George Justice, *The Manufacturers of Literature* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2002), 64-65.

61 Samuel Johnson attests that Sir Roger de Coverly was Addison’s favorite character from *The Spectator*, and apparently he felt very possessive of his fictional creation, see *Major Works*, ed. Donald Greene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 651.
Christmas in the Country;—cheerfully [sic], not wantonly—in honest Mirth, and Pleasure that brings no Pain” (55). The Christmas festivities center on “a little Dramatic Entertainment,” something “to make us merry these Holidays,” acted by a cast of friends, neighbors, and servants before an audience that includes Mr. Spectator and Sir Roger (23). Dorman depicts the theatrical as associated with Christmas merry-making and venerable English traditions, but his play was not a success, and the general indifference with which it was received resulted in its swift and permanent disappearance from the repertoire.

The only afterpiece about private theatricals to achieve real success on the public stage was *All the World’s a Stage* (1777) written by Isaac Jackman. With its title appropriated from Shakespeare, this three-act farce reworks the image of *theatrum mundi* into a parody that depicts the fashion for private theatricals as both ubiquitous and humorous. Jackman, an Irishman, had been born and raised in Dublin, but like fellow Irish playwrights Samuel Foote, Arthur Murphy, Richard Sheridan and Oliver Goldsmith had moved to London, where his play was first performed at Drury Lane in London in April of 1777. It proved to be a tremendously popular afterpiece, by far Jackman’s greatest success, and appeared regularly on London and provincial stages for the remainder of the century, playing 96 times on the London patent stages between 1777 and 1800.62 In the years following its debut, the tremendous popularity of *All the World’s A Stage* on the public stage parallels the rise of the fashion for private theatricals.63 A funny play, with scenes of misunderstanding, confusion, physical comedy, and broadly drawn characters, the play emphasizes the power of private theatricals to disrupt established hierarchies and

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63 Although I have only found evidence of three performances of *All the World’s a Stage* on private stages: at Shane’s Castle in Dublin in 1780, Wynnstag in 1784, and the Attic Theatre in Dublin in 1786. See Stockwell, 354n22; Banks Collection, 154; *Private Theatre of Kilkenny*, 6.
constructions of class. The desire to act for oneself, like other radical and dangerous ideas of the 1770s and 1780s, spreads from person to person, from house to house, an infection that has the potential to contaminate the established order. As Jackman’s farce opens, “the contagion has run through the house” (13) and with a playbill posted on the front door, and servants attempting to saw a stage trapdoor into the drawing room floor (30), Sir Gilbert, the master of Strawberry Hall, says, “Damme if I know my own house” (9). The house turned theatre is no longer recognizable or familiar, but something Sir Gilbert describes as madness, saying “sometimes you wou’d imagine, from the wooden scepters, straw crowns, and such trumpery that Bedlam was transported from Moorfields to the spot you now stand upon” (14). The household is in such a crazy uproar because a private theatrical performance of The Beggar’s Opera is in the works. John Gay’s plot and dialogue seep into the frame of Jackman’s play, the theatrical within the play blurring the lines between them. The fear is that as boundaries, like those that separate above and below stairs, are erased, distinctions and differences are no longer clearly apparent, and that when the household help learn to act as their betters, they will no longer want to perform their role as servants. The prologue explains: “The groom and footmen, act their parts so well./No longer Tom and Dick, they hear no bell!/The Butler mad—all’s in confusion hurl’d./He can’t obey, for he commands the world!” (vi).

As in Mansfield Park, we witness only the rehearsals, for the performance is called off once it is revealed that the actors playing Polly and MacHeath have been secretly married. Bridget Pumpkin, who is playing Mrs. Peachum, rushes into the opening scene yelling, “The wench is married” (35), which causes her brother to chastise her for beginning the play “at the wrong end” (35). The theatrical is depicted as a complete fiasco, and the bungling, unsophisticated amateur actors cannot be taken seriously. To that end it is worth noting that in
All the World’s A Stage, Jackman names his country squire Sir Gilbert “Pumpkin” and with its obvious rural and agricultural associations the surname not only sounds silly, it also rhymes with Bumpkin, and with Lumpkin, evoking allusions to Tony Lumpkin, the country bumpkin in Goldsmith’s She Stoops to Conquer (1773). Bridget Pumpkin, Sir Gilbert’s unmarried sister, the most unsophisticated and “bumpkinish” character in Jackman’s play, consistently misuses words with comedic effect, as when she inquires “You have taken a degree, I suppose Sir, at our principle adversity?” (23), and thus she invokes comparison to Richard Sheridan’s famous character Mrs. Malaprop from The Rivals (1775). Indeed, the play gleefully depicts the prevalent stereotypes concerning private theatricals as farcical performances, subject to jests and derision.

But the jokes about amateur players take on a different resonance in light of the Richmond House performances and the number of performances of the play began to decline. Though the play had been produced sixty times in the decade from April 1777-March 1787, it was only presented thirty-six times in the next ten years, and several of these were for actor benefit nights, when the actor chose the play. While there is no way to determine exactly why the play appeared less often, and there were probably a number of factors at work, it seems possible that an afterpiece that parodies amateur actors as provincial fools would prove a less attractive programming option due to the powerful and well-connected participants in the Richmond House performances. Ridiculing private theatricals that take place far from the city center, by provincial gentry and country squires, peripheral people in peripheral places, is one thing, but when the players are elite and fashionable aristocrats in London proper, calling them “bumpkins” is something else altogether.

Still the subject seems to have been low-hanging fruit, too tempting to resist, for some writers, desperate to see a play produced on the patent stage. Thus it does not seem merely
coincidental that in 1787, the same year that the Richmond House theatricals began, and ten years after *All the World’s a Stage* was first staged at Drury Lane, another two-act farce about private theatricals, called, fittingly, *Private Theatricals* was published by its author James Powell, an aspiring playwright who worked at the Custom House. The play represents the dangers that private theatricals pose to family happiness and domestic order through its depiction of the chaos that ensues in the household of Alderman Grubb during the preparations for a country house performance of *Romeo and Juliet*. According to Michael Dobson, Shakespeare’s play about “star-crossed” young lovers was “almost entirely avoided by eighteenth-century amateurs” (47). It seems that most organizers of amateur theatricals sensed that bringing the unruly power of such forbidden passion into their homes, to be performed among family and friends, might prove to have regrettable consequences. However, the young money-grubbing, social-climbing, and theatrical-loving second wife of the elderly Mr. Grubb who is the driving force behind the family’s theatrical endeavors, recklessly encourages the household to participate in *Romeo and Juliet*, creating a situation whereby three different illicit love affairs blossom, the household servants neglect their duties, and Alderman Grubb feels that he no longer has any control in his own country house. Villars, drafted into the household’s theatrical as a “ringer” to play Romeo because of his great reputation as an actor in other theatricals, ends up marrying Lucy, Grubb’s young ward who was to play Juliet, but only after denouncing his participation in theatricals. Villar’s partner in peripatetic amateur acting and theatrical seduction, Buskin, promises to “use my interest with her ladyship to persuade her to abandon her theatrical whim”

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64 David Worrall states that Powell also worked as a spy for the British government. He includes a brief biography of Powell in *Theatric Revolution*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 281-285. *Private Theatricals* was published along with another play by Powell, *The Narcotic*.

65 Rosenfeld documents two performances of *Romeo and Juliet*, in 1798 and in 1802, at Little Dalby Hall, seat of Edward Hartropp-Wigley, see *Temples*, 147, 152.
(36), and Lady Grubb is coerced into giving up the theatrical. In the end, the performance of *Romeo and Juliet* is cancelled, and the assembled audience is treated to a dance “instead of a tragedy” (37). Powell is less charitable toward those who participate in theatricals than Jackman was in his play, and *Private Theatricals* condemns them as an insidious and truly dangerous fashion, with the lines of Villars ironically summing up his own behavior as well as the play’s moral in unstintingly harsh verbiage: “I think the present rage for theatrical private performances, has grown to a ridiculous pitch, and is productive of much mischief to the morals of society, by admitting the loose and profligate (who are a scandal to the age) into the houses of virtue, whose reputation and honor they generally endanger” (35).

While it is unclear why, or if, Powell himself felt so strongly about private theatricals, it is clear that the managers of the public stages decided that his play was not suitable for public performance, for there is no record of any eighteenth-century performances of it, anywhere. Perhaps it was felt that one successful play about private theatricals—Jackman’s—was quite enough, or that Powell’s play was deemed to be too derivative of other plays, rehashing as it does key elements of *All the World’s a Stage*, Murray’s *Apprentice*, and Garrick’s *Peep Behind the Curtain* (1767), to warrant staging at the public playhouse. In its completely dismissive review of his play, the *European Magazine* quotes Powell himself as attesting, “To be entirely original in plot and character is a difficulty that bears hard upon an author of the present day: for almost every combination and variety of incident has been seized on by the fertile genius of those who have preceded me in the dramatic path” (23:43). The magazine derides him for this statement, holds up the originality and creativity of Foote as an example to the contrary, and pronounces that “*Private Theatricals* will afford but small entertainment to those who recollect

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66 Michael Dobson discusses this play and states in a footnote that it was performed once in 2000 by a group of amateur actors in Lymington, England. See *Shakespeare*, 48, 225n77.
Mr. Garrick’s *Peep Behind the Curtain*” (43). This kind of critical response could explain why it was never staged, or it may be that the play was simply too acerbic, in depicting in quite a harsh and unforgiving light an activity that enjoyed favor with a large number of the patent theatres’ most loyal customers. And if the harsh review in the *European Magazine* is any indication, the play’s reception, by whatever readers it may have had, could well have been less than enthusiastic. Although we’ll never know how many copies of this play were sold, it’s doubtful that a self-published play from an unknown and inexperienced writer really had much, if any, cultural impact. So it actually seems quite likely that the play, with its vehement attack on private theatricals, may, in fact, generate more interest among current-day researchers of private theatricals than it ever did from contemporary readers.67

Another play depicting a private theatrical, which, like Powell’s play seems to have never been staged, was also published in 1787: *One and All* by aspiring playwright Richard Paul Jodrell.68 The play was included in an anonymously published volume titled *Select Dramatic Pieces; Some of which Have Been Acted on Provincial Theatres, Others Written for Private Performance, and Country Amusement*. Despite the assertion of the title that some of the plays had been acted in the provinces or at private theatres, there is no evidence that any of the plays were actually performed anywhere. That these plays did not find any success on the stage would appear to be supported both by the fact that Jodrell does not choose to affix his name to them and by the deeply disconcerted tone that pervades the preface, wherein he defends his decision to publish them by referring to Addison’s belief that “no work can possibly be so bad, but that something may be obtained from it” (v). Though *One and All* was also published separately that

67 Rosenfeld also mentions this play, see *Temples*, 13. It may be that the title alone seems to render it necessary for researchers on private theatricals to include it.

68 Smith includes a brief discussion of this play in *Plays*, 137-38.
same year, that volume did not bear the author’s name either; it did, however, contain a faint attribution by stating that the play was the work of the author of *Widow and No Widow*, a mostly forgettable three act drama by Jodrell that had played at the Haymarket in 1779.69

The structure of *One and All* is quite curious, for it begins with a brief skit, which the author labels a “prologue,” and this short opening scene then sets up the two act farce which follows as a private theatrical being presented in Sir Peter’s country house by his wife, children and servants, before a full house of neighbors and friends. The prologue reveals that Sir Peter’s wife is the organizer of this Christmas holiday performance in conjunction with the play’s author, Spatter-wit. Sir Peter protests against the disruption and expense of the theatrical, in a tirade similar to *All the World’s a Stage*:

And so you call it reason to keep my children at home a month after the holidays, to stuff their brains full of a nonsensical Farce, without wit, humour, or moral in it (as far as I can see) for the entertainment of a parcel of country bumkins . . . . It is reason, too, I suppose, to have my best dining parlour stript of all my pictures, and converted into a playhouse . . . my carpets and damask curtains sewed into scenes; and all my own and your wardrobe cut up into dresses. (8)

His wife replies that it is money well spent, for it provides an invaluable way of entertaining and rewarding his constituents, thus ensuring his reelection to Parliament: “you don’t spend so much among your constituents here in the country, that you should scruple giving them an innocent amusement. Indeed, my dear, you begin to be very unpopular. Unless you live a little more, and spend a little more, in the country, I question whether you will be returned at the next election” (8). However, this framing of the farce as a theatrical within a play seems like a contrivance, as if the opening scene, with no other discernible connection to the play that follows, was added merely to allude to the fashion for private theatricals, and in a blatantly derivate way at that. If

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69 Jodrell had a greater success with his “dramatic proverb,” *Seeing is Believing*, which opened on 22 Aug 1783 and ran for a decade as an afterpiece at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, see Hogan, 1: 629, 2:lxxi.
so, it obviously did not succeed in increasing the play’s marketability, and, in the end, like *Private Theatricals, One and All* may prove more useful for the historical perspective that it provides on the role of private theatricals in the late 1780s, than for its imperceptible impact on the eighteenth-century stage. That both of these playwrights attempted to “cash in” on the profound impact that the Richmond House theatricals had made in 1787 and failed to do so, seems to be the real story here.

The same can be said of Richard Graves’ *Coalition; or, the Opera Rehearsed* (1794), which also frames a performance as if it were being produced as a private theatrical. In this case, the theatrical is of an opera based on Echo and Narcissus. In the “Advertisement” to the published version, Graves, a clergyman and writer, explains that this opera had been performed once at the Upper Rooms in Bath, “to considerable applause but at a considerable expense” (v). In an attempt to recoup these financial losses by getting it staged at a London playhouse, Graves added “the comic part,” which frames both the beginning and end of the play with a plot portraying the opera as a private theatrical being performed at a country house, in what was basically the same conceit that had failed to work for Jodrell. After two years passed, and the play was still refused, Graves, like Powell and Jodrell before him, decided to publish it instead, writing, in language that seems more off-putting than promising, that he “gives it to the public, as a beggar, when he has no further use for them, leaves his tatter’d exuviae on the public road, if haply they may be of service to some poorer devil than himself” (vi). He avoids putting his name directly on this literary “exuviae,” and instead, as did Jodrell, alludes to a previous work, in this case his satirical novel, *The Spiritual Quixote*.

Averring that the play’s depiction of a private theatrical remains timely, for “the rage for private theatrical exhibitions . . . does not seem much diminished” (vii), he then makes a
strikingly blatant attempt to utilize the public interest in theatricals in order to sell his opera, reprinting three of Bunbury’s tickets from the Wynnstan theatricals (the same set of three which had originally appeared in the *European Magazine*). The prologue is worth examining in its entirety, for it peevishly encapsulates almost all of the criticism leveled against private theatricals over the years:

What Shakespere utter’d with a *moral* view,
In our blest days is *literally* true:
‘Tis now a fact, that ALL THE WORLD’S A STAGE,  
For all the world are Actors in *this* age. 
Not only Men and Women *now* are Players: 
Even *Children* spout before they’ve learnt their prayers. 
Whether in private or in public schools, 
Boys learn to act—and slight their grammar rules; 
Nay, Lords and Ladies, Knights and Country Squires; 
The Cit himself at GARRICK’S fame aspires, 
In some Great Families, ‘tis sorely fear’d, 
(As whisper’d by their Chaplains, I have hear’d) 
The *moral* Works of our Dramatic Bards 
Engross more time than Sermons—nay, than *Cards* 
In provinces, where scarce a Church is found, 
These well-frequented Theatres abound: 
And, should we go to Blenheim or Winstay, [sic] 
It would not be to *act*, but see a play: 
And sit like fools, surpass’d in our own art; 
Admiring! How the Ladies *top* their part. 
These act for fame—there are who act for gain; 
And patentees their patents plead in vain. (9)

Though Graves ostensibly utilizes Shakespeare’s oft-quoted lines from Jacques speech in *As You Like It* to bolster his line of reasoning, doing so also allows him to appropriate the title for Jackman’s well-known play, in effect coupling that success to his own rather feeble dramatic attempt. In addition, it is more than slightly ironic that after appropriating the Wynnstan tickets to his own purposes, Graves proceeds to castigate the plays, actors, and spectators at Wynnstan and Blenheim. Yet in doing so, he affirms the importance and lasting impact of those theatricals.

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70 See figure 2, chapter two of this dissertation.
Though neither of these private theatres had hosted any performances for over five years—plays ceased at Wynnstay in 1787 and at Blenheim in 1789—Graves assumes that readers will still recognize and comprehend his allusion to them.

These plays about private theatricals were probably rejected by the patent theatres for many of the same reasons that caused many other plays to be refused: poor quality, bad timing, and the terrible odds of getting the managers to accept a new play. Ultimately though, plays which disparaged and burlesqued elite amateur actors may have been declined because they proved bad for business. Even though the plays themselves did not meet with success, the fact that a number of aspiring playwrights during this particular period of time chose to focus on amateur acting reflects the central and significant position of private theatricals within British culture during the late 1780s.

At the height of the Richmond House theatre’s fame it seemed that the fashion would continue indefinitely, and the World broadcast those sentiments: “His Grace of Richmond, Mrs. Damer; and other Richmond House Performers, have set the Dramatic Whirligig a-going—stop it who can?” (12 May 1788). Walpole, too, predicted that the Richmond House theatricals “will take root” (33:564). However, they did not, in fact, continue after 1788. At Richmond House, the Duke was said to have grown tired of all the time and effort required by the theatricals (Gross 126), and so dismantled the theatre in order to turn it into a home for his nephew and heir, Charles Lennox and his new bride, Charlotte Gordon (Baird 137). In December 1791, Richmond House burned to the ground and was never rebuilt (142).

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71 From a letter written by Anne Damer to Charles Hotham dated 5 Oct. 1788.

72 From a newspaper clipping with the heading “Theatrical of Ton” in the Banks Collection, 133. It has a hand written date of 8 Dec 1789 added but no there is indication of which newspaper it was taken from. The report states “The Richmond-House Theatrical, in spite of all that such uncommon skill and fashion could do for it, is no more! The Theatre is dismantling and turning into a dwelling house for Col. Lenox [sic] and Lady Charlotte.” Charles Lennox, who became the fourth Duke of Richmond in 1806, married Lady Charlotte Gordon in Sept 1789.
Many private theatres were shuttered in a show of respect for the monarchy when King George suffered a bout of serious mental illness, perhaps due to porphyria, beginning in the late summer of 1788 (Baird 137). Some of them never resumed performing plays after that. By 1790 a number of the great houses, which had played a crucial role in making theatricals so culturally central, had stopped all theatrical activity. The French Revolution created a different kind of political theatre, and in light of the drama of the guillotine during the Reign of Terror in France, private theatricals may have begun to seem to be a more dangerous enterprise than they did before. British aristocrats may well have determined that it was in their best interest to avoid drawing attention to themselves, especially over lavish and opulent theatrical productions. Private theatricals had, as a result of the aristocratic actors at Richmond House, received a tremendous amount of attention, taking a very visible and central place in the cultural life of London, and spinning off numerous imitators. Nevertheless, though the dramatic whirligig continued to spin, and private theatricals played on throughout the British Empire, aristocratic theatricals would not continue into the next decade under the same intense glare of publicity, and theatricals in general no longer held quite the lofty and elevated position, commanding center stage, the way that they had during the 1780s.
CONCLUSION

“MIMIC TALE”: THE CONTINUING SAGA OF PRIVATE THEATRICALS

And to some merit, sure, we have pretence [sic],
Who turn to such account our scanty sense;
Who cunningly combine our mimic tale,
Throw o’er our faults a charitable veil,
Turn private vanity to public good
And work our follies into solid food.

—Robert Langrishe, “Epilogue”

Private Theatricals after 1789

Though private theatricals continued to provide entertainment and amusement for many participants and spectators during the last decade of the eighteenth century and on into the nineteenth century, the public image of aristocratic theatricals began to change, tarnished by a spate of increasingly negative publicity during the 1790s. In large part, this can be attributed to the profound changes taking place in the political and cultural milieu due to the French Revolution, the Reign of Terror, and its aftermath. In such a climate of fear and hostility, extravagant private theatres with lavish displays of opulence became easy targets. While, to a great extent, the press continued to follow the developments at such theatres with avid interest and publish flattering—often to the point of being sycophantic—reviews, the circulation of several pernicious polemical publications and a series of exceptionally scathing caricatures by James Gillray started to have a detrimental effect on public perception. If, as I argue in the previous chapter, theatricals played a significant part in a project of aristocratic image-making,

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1 From an epilogue written and spoken by Robert Langrishe at the closing performance of the Kilkenny theatre for the 1804 season, 4 Oct. 1804, see Private, 17.
portraying them as a credit to the nation by enhancing public visibility and celebrity while affirming national allegiance and patriotism, then these caustic depictions of a few high profile theatricals created a decidedly less favorable image of British aristocrats, alarming in light of recent developments in France, as excessive, dissolute, and decadent.

Richard Barry, the 7th Earl of Barrymore, was particularly notorious, a very rich, very young man, known as a rake, gambler, and spendthrift, who excelled in excessive display of all his vices and was also singularly passionate about acting and the theatre. In 1790, for his twenty-first birthday, he enlarged his already quite opulent theatre at Wargrave, his estate in Berkshire, turning it into an exact replica of the King’s Theatre in the Haymarket, and thereby creating the largest, with seating for seven hundred people, and most expensive private theatre in the kingdom, spending an astonishing sixty thousand pounds on the project (Reid 125-26) (fig 23). Barrymore’s irresponsibility was on full display when he flouted royal decree and refused to cancel the premier performances on this new stage upon the death of the King’s brother, Prince Henry, Duke of Cumberland, flippantly blaming the moon for his decision, and leading the Times to castigate his insulting behavior and exhort the public “to judge how far this conduct is decent or becoming, that while the Public Theatres are shut on account of the decease of one of the Royal Family, Private Theatricals should take place under the immediate auspices of a Peer of the realm” (24 Sept. 1790; italics in orig.).

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2 In her diary for the 21 Sept. 1790, Mrs. Philip Lybbe Powys says it could hold 400 spectators, but a footnote states that this is incorrect. See Powys, 249, 249n2. Rosenfeld quotes Powys and the Morning Post 16 Jan.1792 to argue that 400 was the correct number, Temples, 18. The original figure of 700 came from the General Magazine, Mar.1792, 108.

3 Built by Vanbrugh in 1705, the King’s Theatre in the Haymarket was known as the Royal Opera House and it had a patent for performing only opera. It burned down in June 1789, four months after the opening of Barrymore’s theatre on 26 Jan 1789.
The theatre was only in use for less than two years, for in June 1792, the building and its contents were seized for nonpayment of debts and sold at auction (Gazetteer 25 June 1792). At the trial, the presiding judge, Lord Kenyon, issued a scathing condemnation of Barrymore’s theatrical proclivities, deploiring how “this young nobleman” had “depraved his taste and perverted his disposition” and adding that “with respect to the tendency of private theatricals, he doubted extremely whether they ever inculcated one virtuous sentiment; he had known instances when they had had a contrary effect, as they usually vitiated and debauched the morals of both sexes” (200). Less than a year later, Barrymore was dead at age twenty-three, having accidentally shot himself while on duty with his regiment, the Berkshire Militia (Robinson 223).

Within short order a number of scurrilous, and anonymous, accounts of the Earl’s theatricals were published, blatant attempts to cash in on all the attention generated by Barrymore’s death. One of these, Truth Opposed to Fiction, denigrates Barrymore as lacking in any “respect for decency, morality, or religion” (37), and claims that though “the most distinguished families in the county” had “honored the earliest performances with their presence,” eventually they realized that the theatricals were contributing to the “precipitation of another’s ruin” and refused to attend (38-39). His longtime sidekick John Williams, writing under the pseudonym Anthony Pasquin, countered with his own profit-minded version of events, but his attempt to rehabilitate Barrymore’s character is less than successful, for he acknowledges that Barrymore had “aimed to reach happiness by the shortest possible road” (36) breaking rules in the process and concedes that he “carried his passion for the drama to the very threshold of indiscretion” by expending “several hundred thousand pounds” on his theatre, “that temple of enchantment”(23).

He died on 6 March 1793.

John Robinson states that “the sum the Earl of Barrymore had squandered during his brief career was estimated at about £300,000.” See The Last Earls of Barrymore, (London: Sampson, 1894), 228.
Barrymore certainly pursued both publicity and celebrity with a kind of relentlessness during his lifetime, it was after his untimely death that his profligate behavior, reckless extravagance, and tremendous debts, came to be symbolized by his theatre and theatricals.

In 1793, the year that Barrymore died, the Margravine of Anspach, the former Elizabeth Craven (née Berkeley), another aristocrat with a scandalous reputation, opened a new private theatre at Brandenburgh House in Hammersmith (fig 24). While married to William Craven, 6\textsuperscript{th} Baron of Craven, she had acted in and written plays for private theatricals\textsuperscript{6} but was eventually exiled to Europe on allegations of infidelity, where she became the paramour of the Margrave of Anspach. Upon her husband’s death, she married the Margrave and persuaded him to return to London, where she began to use her theatricals as a means of reinstating herself into London society. For the most part, upstanding members of the “quality” continued to shun her, so the audience at her theatre was comprised of others who, for various reasons, found themselves on the margins of high society along with French émigrés, fleeing the Revolution (Rosenfeld 59).\textsuperscript{7}

The press reports about her performances, which ran until 1805, were generally decorous (Banks 25-27), but as a woman accused of sexual immorality and an aristocrat with numerous French friends who had lived for years on the European continent, she was vulnerable to ridicule and derision, as when the \textit{Times} snidely commented that the “outward appearance” of her newly built theatre “has nothing to recommend it, for one should rather suppose it to be a Bastille, than a temple dedicated to the Muses” (7 Nov. 1792) The Margravine was joined on the stage by Albinia Hobart, recently elevated to the rank of Countess of Buckinghamshire.\textsuperscript{8} Her performance

\textsuperscript{6} In chapter four I discuss the performance of her play \textit{The Miniature Picture} at Drury Lane.

\textsuperscript{7} For more about the Brandenburgh House theatricals see Rosenfeld, 53-75; Dobson, \textit{Shakespeare}, 71-72; and Ledger, 92-93.

\textsuperscript{8} Her husband, George Hobart, inherited the title of third Earl of Buckinghamshire on the death of his half-brother in 1793.
as Cowslip in John O’Keeffe’s comic opera *The Agreeable Surprise* (1781) proved especially memorable thanks to James Gillray’s unforgettable caricature, *Enter Cowslip with a Bowl of Cream* (1795), which depicts a very rotund Countess costumed as a dairy maid and looking completely ridiculous (fig. 25). A ubiquitous presence at many aristocratic theatricals over the course of three decades, the Countess had performed to acclaim at her house in Ham Common as well as at the Richmond House theatricals, and can be seen, in many respects, to represent the public embodiment of private theatricals.

The Margravine’s plays at Brandenburgh House seem to have been the catalyst for an anti-theatrical polemic titled “Theatrico-Mania: An Essay on the Rage for Private Theatrical Exhibitions” (1801), penned by Richard Graves, whose play, the *Coalition*, I discussed in chapter four, and who clearly continued to carry his animus against private theatricals on into the turn of the nineteenth century. In it he bemoans the fact that “not only Brandeburgh-house [sic] but many a noble house of less notoriety is frequently opened for these dramatic exhibitions” (58). His invective warns of the risk to members of the lower classes in imitating aristocratic theatricals (59), and, in true patriarchal fashion, he also focuses on the inherent dangers that acting poses for women and children. Paraphrasing from Pope’s *Epistles*, he laments that “in our times, not only our daughters, but our wives, our mothers and our grandmothers, I do not say *read*, but *act* in plays” (57). He concedes the value of using plays in schools to teach oratorical skills but concludes, “I do not see any good end it can answer, to make a boy a mimic or a buffoon. Every man should be a good speaker, but why must every man be a good actor” (61) and finds the need for boys to play the female roles to be the most deplorable aspect of school theatricals (62). Given his obvious anxiety over sex and gender roles both on and off the stage, it

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9 The line from Pope is “Our wives read Milton, and our daughters Plays” See the *First Epistle of the Second Book of Horace: To Augustus*, 14.
is no surprise that he focuses on the possibilities for sexual licentiousness that theatricals create, exposing young Britons to “the voluptuous morals of the French nation” (64). This unambiguously anti-French rhetoric can also be seen as an allusion to the Margravine’s moral character in light of her past behavior and the prevalent French influence at the Brandenburgh House theatre. His pointed underscoring of the ubiquitous nature of theatricals in contemporary society, “there is hardly a family in high or low life, that has not its theatre of some kind or other, and its occasional performers” (58), seems to indicate that amateur acting remained a popular and widespread British pastime, but given the nature of his argument, he is probably also employing some significant hyperbole to make his point.

This same sort of overblown rhetoric reaches a fever pitch in regards to a group of amateur acting enthusiasts who took the moniker the Pic Nic Society and began holding plays in 1802 at a private theatre on Tottenham Street in London. One of the principal organizers was none other than the indefatigable Countess of Buckinghamshire. Her newest theatrical endeavor combined multiple amusements—acting, dancing, singing, and card playing—into an entire evening’s entertainment, including a supper to which they all contributed, and it is from this practice that the name of the group was chosen. In addition to her renown as an actress, the Countess had also achieved public notoriety as an inveterate faro player and compulsive gambler, making her the poster child, quite literally considering Gillray’s many caricatures of her, for aristocratic excess (Perry, Spectacular 181). Accusations of decadence and debauchery swirled around the Pic Nic society, and Gillray produced yet another derogatory gem, Dilettanti Theatricals;--or—A Peep at the Green Room (1803) (fig 26), featuring the Countess

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10 According to the Oxford English Dictionary, by mid-eighteenth century the French term “pique-nique” often anglicized to “pic-nic” was used to describe a meal at which each guest provided part of the food.

11 For an illuminating gloss on the Pic Nic controversy see Dobson, Shakespeare, 72-78.
front and center and reiterating Graves’ concern over the green room, where the actors “retire to change their dresses and the like,” as a space of “voluptuous” immorality which has “been productive of more than one intrigue, and elopements, and improper marriages, to the distress of families” (64). However, because they were held in a regular theatre building, rather than a private home, these “dilettanti” performances also came under attack from the managers of the patent stages, who alleged that they were in violation of the Licensing Act for performing spoken drama without a patent, a situation that Gillray, of course, commemorates in Blowing up the Pic Nics (1802) (fig 27), and within months the Pic Nic Society had folded under the barrage of criticism and public approbation.

Faced with this level of derision and mockery, it is not too surprising that many aristocratic amateurs began to shun publicity and adopt a decidedly lower profile, producing plays but in less ostentatious ways, more akin to the simpler theatricals enjoyed in middle class households. Though aristocratic theatricals continued apace at places like Woburn Abbey and Bentley Priory, they presented a more ostensibly private tenor, as if to deflect any accusations of impropriety. When at Wynnstay theatricals were revived in 1803 after a sixteen-year hiatus, performances were given in the great room rather than in the purpose-built theatre, and according to Rosenfeld, “they were not on any big scale for the entertainment of the neighborhood at large, but simply organized by a party of family and friends for their own amusement during the Christmas holidays” (94).

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12 Gill Perry develops an inspired reading of these Gillray caricatures as satirical attacks against female excess in Spectacular Fictions, 175-185.

13 For more on these see Rosenfeld, Temples, 154-166.

14 The theatricals took place from 1803-1810 under the supervision of Watkin Williams Wynn, fifth Baronet. See chapter 2, note 64. For a description of the plays produced during this period see Rosenfeld, Temples, 92-94.
Of course the press had been recommending improvements and trying to reform private theatricals for years. In a report on the theatricals at Richmond House, *The London Packet* included the following observation:

> We have thought to record this new species of town amusement, merely to preserve the chain of events which a newspaper is expected link together in one general annal—We do not profess to approve or disapprove of it—but only think that since ‘such things are,’ they are capable of an improvement which would reconcile all the world to them. Suppose that a few of the acting nobility were to hire one of the play-houses (as was done some years ago when Othello was played) and print as many tickets as the house could contain in box, pit, and gallery. Let them appoint a Committee to distribute the tickets, by which means improper persons would be precluded, and fix a price on each ticket, suppose five guineas—By this means, they would enjoy their favourite amusement in their own way, and a sum of money would be raised, sufficient, after paying all expenses, to establish a considerable fund for some charitable purpose, or it might be distributed among those public or private charities which need it most. If the House, at the usual prices contains 300l. or 350l. the sum raised by the above plan would be very great, as there can be very little doubt of its being full in every part.—Such a scheme will do away all prejudices against grown ladies and gentlemen ‘playing the fool’ for their own amusement only; and many hundreds would have reason to be thankful for an institution, that tended to alleviate distress, and banish poverty. (20 April-23 April 1787; italics in orig.)

This unsolicited advice was mostly ignored by the “acting nobility” who preferred to act in the comfort of their elegant private theatres before a select of group of friends. However the notion that raising funds for charity would help to justify their actions, and their acting, was, eventually, adopted by the group of Irish amateur actors who established a private theatre in Kilkenny and who, during the years from 1802-1819, donated the proceeds from tickets sales to charity. Dobson, in his quite detailed examination of these performances, writes that “this venture represented private theatricals at their nearest point of convergence with the public stage” (*Shakespeare* 53) and he reads them as a response to “a mounting level of hostile public comment about domestic theatrical performances” (46).  

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15 See Dobson, *Shakespeare*, 46-64.
donations to local charities proved to be an effective strategy, one that was to be used not only for the Kilkenny theatricals, but by a number of other nineteenth-century private theatres.

“Acting amongst Ourselves:” Novels and Retrospective Representation

The troupe at Kilkenny also hired professional actresses to play the female roles in response to the growing animosity towards female amateurs. This viewpoint had been articulated as follows by Thomas Gisborne, an Anglican curate, in An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex (1797): “For some years past the custom of acting plays in private theatres, fitted up by individuals of fortune, has occasionally prevailed. It is a custom liable to this objection among others; that it is almost certain to prove, in its effects, injurious to the female performers” (173-74). This gendered anti-theatrical prejudice took firm hold in the nineteenth century, and in 1812, while the Kilkenny theatricals were still in full swing, Maria Edgeworth, published Vivian, in which a production of The Fair Penitent with the young Lady Julia playing the part of Calista is proposed. However, the idea is quickly rejected due to her mother’s objection, with other characters concurring that “it would be unfit and injurious to a young lady to exhibit herself” on stage in such a way, leading to a lecture on the dangers to young women inherent in acting on private stages, that could have come directly from Gisborne’s treatise (206-09).

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16 The quote is taken from Francis Burney, The Wanderer, eds. Margaret Doody, Robert Mack, and Peter Sabor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 60. We first hear about the plan for the theatrical from Elinor’s younger sister Selina, who says “I could not sleep…all last night, for the thought of a play that I am to have a very pretty dress for; and that we have fixed upon acting amongst ourselves.”

17 It was originally published as volume four in the six volume Tales of Fashionable Life.

18 Unlike Lovers’ Vows, the Fair Penitent was a perpetual favorite for private productions. Edgeworth’s father had taken part in the Delaval’s production of the Fair Penitent in 1767. See Richard Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth (London: Bentley, 1844), 76-77. I discuss this production by the Delavals in chapter one of this dissertation. See also Marilyn Butler and Claire Connolly, Introductory Note, Novels and Selected Works of Maria Edgeworth (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), 4:xxii.
Two years after *Vivian*, Edgeworth wrote another novel, *Patronage* (1814), which does contain a detailed representation of a theatrical, this time of a performance of another she-tragedy, Hill’s *Zara*, a play that was often done at private theatres. Not much has been written on the novel, and even less has been written about the scene with the private theatrical. It probably has not helped matters that some influential critics who have discussed *Patronage* over the years have not been particularly enthusiastic, for instance, Marilyn Butler, dismisses it as “the least readable of the Edgeworth novels” (*Maria* 337). In fact, the novel’s reception in Edgeworth’s own time was mixed, for though the book’s first edition was eagerly anticipated and sold quickly, reviewers derided the many errors in her portrayal of legal procedure and the medical profession, and, as a result, she was forced to make major revisions to later editions (Mullan x-xi).

Yet it seems particularly notable that in the inverse of the way the theatrical is rendered in *Mansfield Park*, this novel does not describe the rehearsals but rather concentrates on the performance itself. As in Austen’s novel, though, the theatrical functions as a vehicle for revealing underlying truths about characters, but here Edgeworth is less concerned with the contiguity between actor and role, focusing instead on what a talent for acting might indicate about sincerity and integrity, especially if the amateur player is female. Written as a study in contrasts, *Patronage* tells the story of two starkly different English families, the Percy family, intellectual, moral, and virtuous almost to a fault, and the Falconers, an ambitious, political, and conniving lot. The theatrical displays those disparities on stage for all, or at least those in the audience, to see. To begin with, Edgeworth makes much of the good character and “modest

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dignity” (366) demonstrated when Caroline Percy, a young woman of marriageable age, refuses to take part in the country house theatrical hosted by the Falconers. Georgiana Falconer, a talented actress and Caroline’s rival for the attention of Count Altenberg, takes on the role of Zara, the tragic heroine. Her performance is riveting, “nothing spoiled the illusion, the attention of the audience was fixed, their interest was sustained, their feelings touched” (386), and her ability is all the more notable when compared to the faults of her fellow amateurs, speaking with their backs to the audience, tripping over robes, forgetting lines (385). Because “the theatre at Falconer-Court was not very spacious,” despite being “elegantly fitted up,” there is a shortage of seating, and Caroline, who arrives just before the play begins, is seated “with the Lady Arlingtons on a bench upon the stage” (383), a situation that mimics the way aristocrats were seated on the stage of the public theatres during the first half of the eighteenth century.20 Caroline, thus, becomes part of the play, and “the gaze of public admiration” fixes on her rather than on the amateur actors (383). Count Altenberg watches her attentively and is rewarded by seeing her “good natured sympathy” and kindness displayed (386), for it is thanks to Caroline that a cruel practical joke instigated by the Lady Arlingtons, jealous rivals of Georgiana, is quickly averted, and the play goes on without incident (387-88). Being on stage ultimately exhibits the true character of both young women, for Georgiana’s acting prowess reveals her to be essentially vain and insincere, someone for whom all of life is a performance.

It seems rather amazing that yet another novel published in 1814 included a pivotal scene centered on a private theatrical, but Frances Burney’s The Wanderer joins those by Austen and Edgeworth in depicting the ways that private theatricals serve as an effective test of character. Though all three of these novels happened to be published in the same year, Elaine Bander in

20 I discuss Garrick’s success in finally ending this customary practice in chapter one.
“Mansfield Park and the 1814 Novels” points out that they were not all written at the same time: Edgeworth began *Patronage* in 1793, Burney started working on *The Wanderer* in the late 1790s, after the publication of Camilla (1796) and wrote a more complete draft of it in 1806 while living in France, and Austen did not begin writing *Mansfield Park* until 1811 (115). The various dates of conception for these novels may have impacted their portrayal of the theatricals, reflecting changing attitudes during those years towards amateur acting, especially in regards to women. Theatricals had made only brief and peripheral appearances in novels up until that point, as in Brooke’s *The Excursion*, where they provide the only hope for the main character to see her plays produced on stage (152), or as in Tobias Smollett’s *Expedition of Humphry Clinker* (1771) in which members of Matthew Bramble’s family, gathered together before a wedding ceremony, “got up several farces” in order to “pass the time as agreeably as we can,” with a particularly memorable performance of the pantomime *Harlequin Skelton* receiving special mention for providing “unspeakable entertainment” due to the reaction it created “among the country people, who are admitted to all our exhibitions” (346). Theatricals in these novels are portrayed in a positive light, reflecting the generally felicitous press reports that appeared during the same decade. Perhaps due to the derisive commentary on amateur acting that had appeared in popular culture for the past two decades, the novels by Austen, Edgeworth and Burney portray theatricals as more complex, conducive to dangerous entanglements, with the potential to unleash unacceptable desires and unveil unwelcome truths. Yet these novels also contain much more detailed representations of theatricals, reflecting the continuing presence and influence of private theatricals on cultural norms and experiences on into the nineteenth century. While it may have just been coincidence that these three novels by successful women writers all included

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21 See Margaret Doody’s introduction to *The Wanderer*, viii.
theatricals, that they do suggests that these writers could assume a certain familiarity with amateur acting on the part of their readers, indicating that theatricals had become a common aspect of social and cultural experience for many people.

Despite the invective against them in *Vivian*, Maria Edgeworth, like Austen, had participated in family theatricals, writing plays that were produced with her siblings in the dining room in 1786, and in “a charming theatre in the room over [her father’s] study” in 1798 (Edgeworth *Memoir* 1:93). In 1810 Edgeworth had attended the plays at the private theatre of Kilkenny, a season that included *Othello, Richard III, Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night* (*Private* 63, Oliver 253). Frances Burney had personal experience with private theatricals as well. In 1777, when she was twenty-five years old, Burney, along with other family members, took part in a private theatrical at Barebones Lodge in Worcester, home of her uncle Richard Burney (*Early* 164-166). Like the aristocrats at Richmond House, they chose to perform *The Way to Keep Him,* and Burney took the part of Mrs. Lovemore, later noting in her journal the miserable stage fright that she experienced (*Journals* 75-80). As an afterpiece they attempted Fielding’s burlesque comedy, *Tom Thumb,* with Burney playing the wildly silly role of Huncamunca opposite her young cousin Nancy as Tom Thumb (Anderson 49-50). Burney relates the way preparations for the play disordered the household: “At dinner we did not sit down above three at a time; one was with the hair-dresser, another finishing some dress, another, some scenery; and so on. I was quite amazed to see how my uncle submitted to all this confusion” (*Early* 165). She

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22 Emily Hodgson Anderson also discusses Edgeworth’s involvement with her family’s theatricals in *Eighteenth Century Authorship and the Play of Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 107, 111, 117.

23 For Burney’s account of her experience in this play see the *Early Diary of Frances Burney,* ed. Annie Raine Ellis (London: Bell, 1913), 2:164-181.

24 According to Dunbar, 86 and 86n30, the Burney family used the original three act farce, rather than the five act comedy as the Richmond House actors did.
seems to be recalling aspects of this experience in the fictional representation that she creates many years later.

In *The Wanderer*, Burney constructs the most completely realized portrait of private theatricals in the 1814 novels, for, in contrast to Austen and Edgeworth, she shows the entire process of putting together a play, from the initial idea, to the rehearsals, to the performance itself, all of which she describes in detail. The private theatrical that Elinor Joddrel produces at her Aunt Maple’s house in Lewes is not wildly extravagant like those of the Earl of Barrymore nor as exclusive as those at Richmond House, but it seems similar to the family theatricals that Burney herself participated in at her uncle’s house, and as such it is probably representative of countless Georgian era private theatricals, done on a small scale in country houses. Mrs. Maple’s drawing room is “given up for the theatre” and “another apartment . . . appropriated for a green-room” (Burney, *Wanderer* 88), parts are copied, scenes rehearsed, playbills written, and scenery painted by the well-intentioned but inexperienced acting troupe. Burney informs us that the invited audience, which consisted of “some of the principal families of Sussex” (*Wanderer* 93), watches the play with “the politeness excited by a private representation” (95) and then is pleased to be entertained with a supper, “two country dances and two cotillions” (99).

Though, as we have seen, many private theatricals, like the one Burney herself acted in at her uncle’s house, included an afterpiece as part of the evening’s program, *The Provok’d Husband* is the only play performed by Elinor’s acting company, and since there is no mention of a prologue or epilogue being spoken, Colley Cibber’s play thus becomes the sole focus of Burney’s depiction. The play, begun by John Vanbrugh under the title *A Journey to London*, was finished after his death by Cibber. First produced in 1728, it had been revived with great success at Drury Lane and Covent Garden during the 1780’s, and a search of the *London Stage* reveals
that from 1783-1793 *The Provok’d Husband* was performed 143 times on the London patent stages (Hogan 5:2, xxxiv). The play, “adapted for theatrical representation,” was included in the 1776, 1780, and 1791 editions of *Bell’s British Theatre*. So it really comes as no surprise that during the same time period there are also a number of recorded instances of the play being produced for private theatricals at places like Adlestrop House, Bolney Court, and Blenheim Palace.25

Margaret Doody claims that the play “was evidently a favorite of Burney’s,” for it is mentioned in both *Cecilia* and *Camilla* (Frances 422n38). An early manuscript of *Camilla* in the British Library contains a sketch, eventually discarded, for a private theatrical of *The Provok’d Husband*, and vestiges of this scene can be found in *The Wanderer* (Wanderer Appendix 901). In the play, which contrasts the seductive appeal of London’s public entertainments with a married woman’s responsibility to husband and home, Lady Townly’s passion for gambling and Lady Wronghead’s for shopping bring them to the edge of disaster, and a vertigo inducing scene at the top of the Monument underscores that public spaces can be dangerous, causing one to lose perspective and balance (Cibber 96-7). The play thus attempts to demarcate public and private as distinct and separate, establishing boundaries based on class and gender. While Lawrence Klein argues that such a clear binary between private and public did not actually exist in eighteenth-century life, and that “the distinction between the private and the public did not correspond to the distinction between home and not-home” (104-5), the play construes their separation as a powerful form of social control. Ultimately the aristocratic men, Sir Francis and the tellingly named Mr. Manly, put Lady Wronghead in her place, coercing her to go back home where she belongs. According to Cibber, “the conduct of his imaginary fine lady,” Lady Townly, “had so

25 See Rosenfeld, *Temples*, 128; Banks Collection, 12; Powys, 182-83.
provoked” Vanbrugh that he intended for Lord Townly to “turn her out of his doors” at the end of the play (vi), but Cibber, judging “such violent measures” to be “too severe for comedy” (vi), adds a happy ending in which a reformed Lady Townly renounces public entertainments to take her proper place at home, saying “So visible the bliss, so plain the way/How was it possible my sense could stray?/But now, a convert to this truth I come,/That married happiness is never found from home” (157).

That Burney stages this play in the drawing room of a home, rather than having the characters attend a performance at a public theatre as she does in *Evelina*, seems notable. For such a performance subverts the play’s attempts to delineate boundaries; private theatricals blur the distinction between home and stage, private and public, and, therefore, by their very nature call these categories into question. Harleigh, we are told, is not altogether comfortable with the blending of “their private society” (87) with “so public an amusement” (88) that bringing the theatre into the home entails. The private theatrical, thus, provides a liminal space within the novel which Burney uses to question and disrupt established hierarchies of class and gender. As preparation for the play takes over the household, disrupting daily life, Mrs. Maple laments that “there was not any chance that the house could be restored to order, nor the maids to their usual occupations, till this business were finally over” (88). Affecting more than just household routines, the private theatrical disrupts the social structure of the household, changing established hierarchies in a dramatic way. Elinor casts the play in part for the “pleasure of giving a lesson of democracy to Aunt Maple” (70), and succeeds in infuriating her when the household steward, maid, footman, and a neighboring farmer’s son appear on stage. As actors, the servants are on more equal footing with family members than usual, upending the household order. The socially mixed cast leads Miss Arbe, who was to play Lady Townly, to bow out of the performance, for
though she would always be ready to act with the Miss Joddrels, who were nieces to a
baronet, and Mr. Harleigh, who was nephew to a peer, and Mr. Ireton, who was heir to
a large entailed estate; she was yet apprehensive that it might let her down in the
opinion of the noble theatrical society to which she belonged, if she were seen
exhibiting with such common persons as farmers and domestics (85).

When Elinor declares that the show will go on, and insists that the young stranger referred to
merely as the Incognita must “fill the chasm” (85) and take a role in the play, the enraged Aunt
Maple cries “that she would never agree to such a disgrace, as suffering a poor straggling pauper
to mix herself publicly with their society” (86). But Elinor prevails, and the novel’s characters,
and its readers, find themselves questioning identities and categories that previously had
appeared to be fixed and determined. Drawing room or stage? Home or theatre? Private or
public? Servant or equal? Self or other? It all becomes terra incognita: unheimlich, both familiar
and strange, and unrecognizable as clearly one or the other.

The Incognita, like the private theatrical, disrupts the order of the household and
established hierarchies of class and gender, for lacking a name, identity, money, family or social
connections, a free-floating, or wandering, signifier, she is dis-placed. The family finds it
impossible to determine whether she is a “poor straggling pauper” (86) or a “gentlewoman,” a
“foundling girl” (86) or a “young lady of family” (89), an “illegitimate stroller” (86) or an
“elegant and well bred young woman” (76). Harleigh says to this “accomplished creature” who
knows how to draw, dance, sing, and play the harp, but who has been put to work hemming
handkerchiefs, “who . . . and what are you?” (88).

As a result of the private theatrical, she is no longer the “Incognita.” From the initials
L.S on a letter she receives, her fellow actors bestow on her the name “Ellis,” and under the
name of “Miss Ellis” she plays an increasingly crucial role in the play, initially serving as
prompter, then writing, reading, and eventually acting the part of Lady Townly. Next she
receives an identity, for Mrs. Maple decides that “the only way to avoid disgrace to themselves, amongst their acquaintance for admitting her, would be to say that she was a young lady of family, who came over with them from France” (89) and “the stranger calmly answered that she could offer no objection, in a manner which, to the attentive Harleigh, clearly indicated that it was true” (89). The truth of her constructed identity is confirmed when Ellis appears in the green room dressed as Lady Townly and they recognize that she is a “young lady of consequence” (91)

from the ease with which she wore her ornaments, the grace with which she set them off, the elegance of her deportment, and an air of dignified modesty, that spoke her not only accustomed to such attire, but also to the good breeding and refined manners, which announce the habits of life to have been formed in the superior classes of society(92).

At the end of the performance, Ellis meets her half-siblings, Lady Granville and Lord Melbury, and though their relationship is not revealed until much later in the novel, through the private theatrical she ultimately gains a name, an identity and family connections.

Though the private theatrical in many ways comes to define Ellis, she ends up defining the private theatrical. While studying the part of Lady Townly, Ellis recognizes its centrality to the play, realizing that the role “was too prominent to be placed in the back ground; and the whole performance must be flat, if not ridiculous, unless Lady Townly were a principal person” (92). Determining to try her best to “enliven the representation” (92), she comes, in fact, to embody it. For during the private theatrical performance, we are told, the “young, beautiful and wholly new” Ellis “create[s] a surprise so powerful, and a delight so unexpected” that she becomes the sole object of the audience’s gaze: “the play seemed soon to have no other object than Lady Townly, and the audience to think that no other were worth hearing or beholding . . . all seemed vapid and without merit in which she was not concerned; while all wore an air of interest in which she bore the smallest part” (94). Even Harleigh, on stage as Lord Townly, is so
caught up in watching Ellis that he cannot pay attention to his own acting; he “could look at, could listen to her alone . . . wrapt up in the contemplation of an object thus singular, thus excelling, thus mysterious, all ambition of personally shining was forgotten” (95). Only Elinor, in the role of Lady Wronghead, does not, fittingly, understand that the private theatrical has become all about Ellis (99). In addition, since Burney’s description of what transpires on stage focuses only on Ellis’ feelings and perceptions and on the mesmerizing effect that Ellis’ performance has on the audience, the reader’s attention, necessarily, is focused solely on her too. Thus Ellis, the unknown, the stranger, the other, comes to represent the private theatrical.

And so in Burney’s novel the private theatrical becomes a place where identities are uncertain, categories questioned, and order disrupted. Margaret Doody, writing about The Provok’d Husband, states that Burney “seems to have been perpetually attracted to this play perhaps because it clearly sets out the orthodoxies of proper behaviour while allowing a place for libidinous questioning of them” (Wanderer 901; app. 6). Burney, it would seem, uses the private theatrical in The Wanderer to attain much the same end. Though at the end of the novel those “orthodoxies of proper behaviour” have been reestablished, by providing a liminal space for disorder and uncertainty, the private theatrical allows for the questioning of class structures, gender norms, and cultural values.

Amateur acting, as Burney acknowledges and portrays so brilliantly, allowed for the interrogation of the established order, a carnivalesque and temporary inversion of the status quo. Acting, by its very nature, involves putting on different gestures, behaviors, manners, and emotions, fashioning and re-fashioning characters and identities in a process that, to the spectator, appears almost as quick and easy as changing costumes. But when this role playing takes place on a private stage, the mutability of the boundaries that defined and identified
categories of everyday life in the eighteenth century—gender, class, social status, rank, race, national allegiance—is laid bare, for the distinction between actor and role is blurred in such a setting where the close connections of family and friendship between actors and audience delimit any objectivity or distance. The protean possibilities inherent in private theatricals make them unsettling and even, at times, dangerous, as Fanny Price was quick to recognize, but this was also a large part of their appeal, and it would certainly appear that this is why the young actors at Mansfield Park enjoyed them so much. Tom describes the process of putting on the play as “rais[ing] a little theatre” (148), making it seem akin to raising a little hell, engendering the freedom to say and do things that would normally be off limits. As a result, razing the little theatre, attempting to efface every trace of it, appears absolutely necessary to Sir Thomas, insuring that his authority, and the patriarchal order that he embodies, can be reinstated.

The threat that theatricals posed to the established social order, then, seems to be one reason that society suffered from a case of collective memory loss in regards to them. As evidence discussed earlier in the chapter demonstrates, the polemical attacks against amateur acting contained exhortations to protect children, and especially daughters, from its insidious and pernicious effects. All three of the 1814 novels invoke these widely disseminated reactions to theatricals as threats to female virtue, albeit in slightly different guises. From a historical perspective, Bratton contends that such a response is actually a fairly predictable and typical one, for “contested spaces” in the cultural and social discourse, those activities or areas perceived as marginal and peripheral (and certainly private theatricals can be, and were, categorized in just this way), are often characterized as “the dangerous edges of experience from which the young and vulnerable need protection” (138). Given the cultural anxiety over theatricals, the fact that, over time, they were forgotten begins to resemble repression.
This chapter posits another reason theatricals may have been forgotten. After the French Revolution, as increasingly horrific events unfolded in France during the Reign of Terror, aristocrats in Britain began to fear for their own safety. All of the negative publicity that coalesced around the performances at Wargrave, Brandenburgh House, and the Tottenham Street Theatre amplified the perception that the elite were being vilified, resulting in a muting of such performances, in an effort to reduce unwanted public visibility and attention. In the 1790s theatricals, understandably, were no longer as fashionable among the upper classes as they once had been, and although amateur acting never really lost its appeal, and families continued to enjoy putting on plays in the parlor, the aristocratic private theatricals that held sway in the 1770s and 1780s had lost their luster: theatres were razed and memories of extravagant, over-the-top performances were erased.

This collective forgetting extended to the writing of history, for private theatricals were also left out of historical accounts. Aristocratic private theatricals have been discounted by theatre historians who privileged professional productions done for commercial gain, but they have been ignored by cultural historians as well, who were more interested, in many cases, in plebian popular culture. So despite the fact that they were a hugely important part of the cultural milieu of the eighteenth century, private theatricals have, for the most part, been relegated to the attic of cultural history. (In this respect the Countess of Ely’s decision to call her private stage the Attic Theatre was more apropos than she could ever have known).

The goal of this dissertation has been to recover, reconstruct, and reevaluate the stories of private theatricals, writing them back in to the narrative of theatre history. While there is more to be done in order to rescue them from historical obscurity and reinscribe them into our collective cultural history, I have, in the preceding chapters, presented new information, utilized new
methodologies, and posited new arguments about them. One of the ostensible reasons for embarking on such a project is that learning more about theatricals can help to illuminate our understanding of public theatres of the time. Certainly, these mimic stages illustrate the cultural influence and social importance of the theatre in eighteenth-century life, providing a different and useful perspective on issues that were significant to their professional, patent-holding counterparts. But to argue that the sole reason to study private theatricals lies in what they can teach us about the public stage is to be complicit in the belief that commercial and professional performances are the only ones with inherent value. Over the course of the dissertation, I have made the case that private theatricals are worth studying in their own right. The amateur actors mimicked the public playhouses, but they also used their private stages to reflect their own images. Thus their theatricals reveal how they viewed themselves and others, as well as how they wanted to be seen. During a time of political revolution and social upheaval, they turned these private performances into a powerful tool for crafting and projecting an image of the British aristocracy as patriotic, loyal, and essential to the nation. Mirroring and, at times, magnifying national anxieties about class status, gender roles, race, legitimacy, and empire, private theatricals reflected and refracted the profound changes occurring in British society during the Georgian era.
GOODMAN’S FIELDS.

October 19th, 1741.

At the late Theatre in Goodman’s Fields, this Day will be performed,

A Concert of Vocal and Instrumental Music,
DIVIDED INTO TWO PARTS.

Tickets at Three, Two, and One Shilling.

Places for the Boxes to be taken at the Place Towne, near the Theatre.

N.B. Between the Two Parts of the Concert will be presented an Historical Play, called the
LIFE AND DEATH OF

King Richard the Third.

CONTAINING THE DISTRESSES OF K. HENRY VI.
The awful secession of the Crown by King Richard,
The Murder of Young King Edward V, and his Brother in the Tower,
The Landing of the Earl of Richmond,
And the Death of King Richard in the memorable Battle of Bosworth Field, being the last that was fought between the Houses of York and Lancaster; with many other true Historical Passages.

The Part of King Richard by A GENTLEMAN,
(Who never appeared on any Stage).

King Henry, by Mr. GIFFARD, Richmond, Mr. MARSHALL,
Prince Edward, by Miss HIPPSLEY, Duke of York, Miss NAYLOR,
Duke of Buckingham, Mr. PATTERSON, Duke of North, Mr. BLAKES,
Duke of Gloucester, Mr. PAGEETT, Lord Deputy, Mr. PAGEETT,
Custard, Mr. VAUGHAN, Temple, Mr. W. GIFFARD, Captains, Mr. MARL, Rentiff, Mr. CROFTS,
Bess, Mr. NAYLOR, Tyrell, Mr. PUTTENHAM, Lord Mayor, Mr. DUNSTALL,
The Queen, Miss STEEL, Duchess of York, Mrs. YATES,
And the Part of Lady Anne, by Mrs. GIFFARD.

with

Entertainments of Dancing,

By Mr. FROMET Madame DUVALT, and the Two Masters and Miss GRANIER.

The Virgin Unmask’d.

The Part of Lucy, by Miss HIPPSLEY,
Both of which will be performed Grain, by Persons for their Diversion.

The Concert will begin exactly at Six o’Clock.

Figure 2. Playbill from Goodman’s Fields, 19 Oct 1741. Public Domain. Wikimedia Commons.
Figure 4. Three Theatre Tickets from the Wynnstay Theatre, 1786.
© Trustees of the British Museum.
Figure 5. Playbill from the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, 1767.
© Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
At the THEATRE at WYNNSTAY.

On TUESDAY, January 5th, 1779, will be presented, The

JEALOUS WIFE.

Oakley, Mr. ALDERSEY.
Charles Oakley, Mr. W. COTES.
Lord Trinkel, Mr. GRIFFITH.
Sir Harry Beagle, Mr. CLOUGH.
Major Oakley, CARTER.
Captain O'Cutler, SALISBURY.
Paris, Mr. G. COLMAN.
Tom, BOWEN.

Russel, Mr. COLMAN.

Mrs. Oakley, Mrs. COTES.
Lady Freeslove, Mrs. PULESTON.
Harriot, Mrs. APPERLEY.
Toilet, Mrs. GRIFFITH.
Chambermaid, Mr. T. GRIFFITH.

WITH NEW SCENES AND DECORATIONS.

To which will be added,

THE COZENERS.

Air Castle, Mr. COLMAN.
Toby, Mr. ALDERSEY.
Colonel Corset, Mr. CLOUGH.
Prig, Mr. GRIFFITH.
Moles Manass, Mr. SMITH.
Flaw, Mr. W. COTES.

Hellebore, CARTER, O'Flanagan, SALISBURY.
Tom, C. SIDEBOTHAM, Roger, WILKINSON.

Mrs. Fleece'em, Mrs. COTES.
Mrs. Simony, Mrs. GRIFFITH.
Mrs. Air Castle, Mrs. APPERLEY.
Betsey Blossom, Mrs. PULESTON.
Marianne, BOWEN.

To begin precisely at Six o'Clock.

V.B. No Person to be admitted without a Ticket, which may be had of S. SIDEBOTHAM at WYNNSTAY.

On Wednesday, The BEGGARS BUSH, with CATHERINE & PETRUCHIO.

Figure 6. Playbill from the Wynnstaw Theatre, 1779. Sarah Sophia Banks Collection. © The British Library Board, 937.g.96.
Figure 7. Playbill from the Wynnystay Theatre, 1780. Sarah Sophia Banks Collection. © The British Library Board, 937.g.96.
Figure 8. Theatre Ticket from the Hall Place Theatre, 1782.
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Figure 9. Theatre Ticket from the Theatre Royal Covent Garden, 1753.
© Trustees of the British Museum.
Figure 10. Theatre Ticket for Drury Lane Theatre, 1788. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 11. Benefit Theatre Ticket for the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, 1747. © Trustees of the British Museum.
Figure 12. Two Theatre Tickets for the Wynnstay Theatre, 1786. © Trustees of the British Museum.
Figure 13. Henry Bunbury, Admission Ticket for the Wynnstey Theatre, 1786. © Trustees of the British Museum.
Figure 14. Thomas Gainsborough, *David Garrick, Esq.*, 1769. Engraved by Valentine Green. © Trustees of the British Museum.
Figure 15. Robert Adam, Design for a Monument to David Garrick at the Park at Wynnstay House, Wrexham, 1779. © Trustees of the British Museum.
Figure 16. Henry Bunbury, Admission Ticket for the Wynnstwy Theatre, 1785. Engraved by Francesco Bartolozzi. © Trustees of the British Museum.
Figure 17. John Downman, *Georgina, Duchess of Devonshire*, 1787. © Trustees of the British Museum.
Figure 20. *The Way to Keep Him as Performed at the Richmond Theatre*, 1787. Published by Hannah Humphrey. © Trustees of the British Museum.
Figure 22. William Hogarth, *Scene from A Beggar’s Opera*, 1729. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

Figure 24. Henry Wigstead, *Interior of the Brandenburg House Theatre, Hammersmith*, 1792. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.
Figure 25. James Gillray, *Enter Cowslip with a Bowl of Cream*, 1795. © Trustees of the British Museum.
Figure 26. James Gillray, *Dilettanti Theatricals, or a Peep at the Green Room*, 1803. © Trustees of the British Museum.
Figure 27. James Gillray, Blowing up the Pic Nics, 1802.
© Trustees of the British Museum.
Table 1. Shakespeare at Wynnstay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Performed</th>
<th>Play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1773</td>
<td>Merry Wives of Windsor</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Much Ado About Nothing</td>
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<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>Othello</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td>Merchant of Venice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1779</td>
<td>Catharine and Petruchio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1780</td>
<td>Cymbeline</td>
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<tr>
<td>1781</td>
<td>Richard III, Merchant of Venice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1782</td>
<td>1 Henry IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1783</td>
<td>2 Henry IV, 1 Henry IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1784</td>
<td>Twelfth Night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Macbeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1785</td>
<td>As You Like It</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1785</td>
<td>A Winter's Tale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1787</td>
<td>Cymbeline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Tempest</td>
</tr>
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Table 2. Garrick's Plays and Adaptations Performed at Wynnstay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Performed</th>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Author of Original</th>
<th>Author of Adaptation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1779</td>
<td>Jealous Wife</td>
<td>Fielding</td>
<td>Garrick and Colman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1779</td>
<td>Catherine and Petruchio</td>
<td>Shakespeare (Taming of the Shrew)</td>
<td>Garrick</td>
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<tr>
<td>1780,1787</td>
<td>Cymbeline</td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td>Garrick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1781</td>
<td>Rule a Wife and Have a wife</td>
<td>Fletcher</td>
<td>Garrick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1781</td>
<td>Clandestine Marriage</td>
<td>Garrick and Colman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1776</td>
<td>Bon Ton</td>
<td>Garrick</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1785</td>
<td>Neck or Nothing</td>
<td>Garrick</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1785</td>
<td>Harlequin's Invasion</td>
<td>Garrick</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Roles Made Famous by Garrick which Were Performed at Wynnstay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Performed</th>
<th>Play</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1773</td>
<td><em>Much Ado About Nothing</em></td>
<td>Benedick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1773,1775,1777</td>
<td><em>Upholsterer</em></td>
<td>Pamphlet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td><em>Beaux Stratagem</em></td>
<td>Archer</td>
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<tr>
<td>1776</td>
<td><em>Provok'd Wife</em></td>
<td>Sir John Bute</td>
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<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td><em>The Wonder</em></td>
<td>Don Felix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1780,1787</td>
<td><em>Cymbeline</em></td>
<td>Posthumous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1782</td>
<td><em>Every Man in His Humor</em></td>
<td>Kiteley</td>
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<tr>
<td>1781</td>
<td><em>Richard III</em></td>
<td>Richard III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1785</td>
<td><em>Venice Preserved</em></td>
<td>Jaffier</td>
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