“John Bull, pit, box, and gallery, said No!”: Charles Macklin and the Limits of Ethnic Resistance on the Eighteenth-Century London Stage

At its third performance, on 10 November 1767, George Colman’s farce The Oxonian in Town faced hostile opposition from a section of the audience at Covent Garden. Several London Irishmen had been offended by Colman’s character McShuffle, a “rough unpolished” Irish swindler with the “rank brogue in his mouth,” which they took to be a slanderous reflection on their countrymen. Protest had been prearranged and, following the prologue, “as soon as the curtain drew up the catcalls began” and a riot was threatened. The incident is cited as an example of the increasing cultural enfranchisement of the Irish in eighteenth-century England—as evidence that the traditionally oppressed Irish voice was beginning to be heard. In an outstanding recent article Michael Ragussis refers to the incident to support an argument that in the eighteenth century “the theater . . . began aggressively to work toward rehabilitating a variety of minority populations,” and that “minorities themselves made the theater a site of resistance by protesting plays that negatively represented them.” But could eighteenth-century theaters really function as effective sites of ethnic resistance? Did “the theater”—that abstracted sum total of heterogeneous buildings, plays, playwrights, managers, actors, audiences, publications, and so on—really work “aggressively” in the eighteenth century to habilitate minority ethnic groups?

In recent years representing and, often, championing the voices of past and present oppressed minorities has become a valuable trope of literary and cultural criticism and history of a broadly postcolonial kind. But if rearticulating these minority voices includes dislocating them from their dialogue with the hegemonic culture that they in some way critique, there is a danger that their presentation will generate slanted narratives of antiimperialist wish fulfillment. Or, to put the point differently, if the voice of resistance is to be recalled for the purpose of charting patterns of change within the politics of ethnicity, it is important to remember the
hemmed-in status of the oppressed voice and, where possible, to attend to the reception that ethnic resistance encounters.

It is certainly appropriate to recognize that eighteenth-century London theaters did function as sites in which ethnic negotiations took place. The evidence from theatrical histories and the texts of many contemporary plays shows that there were occasions when theaters were used to voice positions within the discourse of multiethnic relations. Theater workers and audiences clearly recognized that a stage role can generate meanings that resound beyond the play and into wider political debates, and this capacity was exploited and responded to by theater workers and audience members from various standpoints within contemporary ethnic politics. The thematization of ethnic interaction in eighteenth-century drama highlights the important function of the stage as a malleable mediator of the social and cultural shifts that followed urban expansion, the growth of the British empire, and, with immigration, the increasing multiculturalism of Britain and particularly London.

London theaters, then, were sometimes venues for the assertion or defense of a minority ethnic position, and alongside audience protests such as that against The Oxonian in Town can be placed the efforts of certain theater workers to promote the cause of particular minorities. For example, the Irish actor and playwright Charles Macklin (1699?–1797)—a principal focus of this article—struggled hard for much of his career to change the manner in which the Irish were represented on the London stage.

But in recalling the presence of these minority voices, what should not be ignored is that “the theater” also had an immense capacity for counterresistance. Indeed, I want to argue here that the London theaters offered only the most circumscribed opportunities for ethnic resistance and that ethnic resistance, when voiced, typically confronted an array of muffling mechanisms from the London theater’s “true-born” English Protestant majority, both in the audience and among theatrical workers. Focusing upon representations of Irishness upon the London stage, I want to examine here the dialogue between resistance and the counterresistance it inspired. I shall consider instances of ethnic protest, but rather than isolate the resistant voice—and thus run the risk of misconstruing its significance in the history of ethnic politics—I want to explore the conditions within which protest was uttered and the type of reception it provoked. And in this way I want to interrogate the degree of radicalism that can be attributed to the eighteenth-century theater as a site of ethnic negotiations.

I

Before a single catcall had disrupted the third performance of The Oxonian in Town, strategies were in place to stifle the protest. The play represents the attempted cheating of an Oxford student at the hands of McShuffle and other swin-
dlers, and it had already been suspected that “a number of sharpers . . . would attempt to damn” Colman’s play “under pretence of its casting odium on the Irish.”

Anticipating disruption, Covent Garden’s managers, a team of four that included Colman, defended their right to perform the play by attempting to disarm the criticism made against it: “bills were dispersed in the House during the play vindicating it” from anti-Irish prejudice. Their defense was supported by the bulk of the audience: those in favor of the play “were a very great majority, and at last after a contest of better than \( \frac{1}{2} \) an hour, the victory was over and the piece was performed.”

The protest was undoubtedly alarming to the management, who would have been acutely aware of the damage and cost that would ensue from a riot; it was also frightening to members of the audience, and in a public letter one Timothy Calfskin demanded a refund since his wife had fled the theater in terror at the noise of the “wild Irish.” But the protest did little to advance the cause of the London Irish. In fact, just as the Oxonian in the play is ultimately saved from the Irish swindlers, so the Oxford-educated Colman overcame his Irish critics and effectively asserted his right to represent the Irish in whatever manner the predominantly English audience would uphold. Colman continued to defend the play on the grounds that it was not prejudicial, repeating the claim on 12 November in an article in the Public Advertiser, and the controversy was sufficiently defused—or overpowered by the weight of mainstream opinion—for the play to enjoy considerable subsequent success. It ran a total of twenty-two nights in the 1767–68 season and was still being performed in the 1771–72 season. In 1770 it was published by Thomas Becket, unlike numerous eighteenth-century plays that faded from public attention unpublished, and while The Oxonian in Town has never attained anything like canonical status, it is now available in the handsome six-volume series of The Plays of George Colman the Elder (1983).

In this context it is worth comparing the events that took place just three weeks after the troubled performance of The Oxonian in Town in the same theater at Covent Garden. The performance of Charles Macklin’s two-act farce The Irish Fine Lady on 28 November 1767 presents a compelling counterpart to the earlier performance—it is a counterpart in which almost every key detail is reversed. Where Colman depicted the Irish duper duped, Macklin’s play valorizes Irishness through the Irish patriot hero Murrogh O’Dogherty, the part played by Macklin himself. The Irish Fine Lady concludes with O’Dogherty overcoming an English “coxcomb,” Count Mushroom, who ends the play trapped in a box, upside down, in women’s clothes, and sneezing because snuff has been thrown into his face. I shall consider the play in more detail later, but for now would observe that it takes no great interpretative ingenuity to find in this ending a slight against the English. As will be seen, the play’s satire is politically complex and often has a Swiftian multidirectionality, but since highly charged issues of national identity are thematized throughout, the demise of Mushroom can be readily construed, in the eighteenth-century phraseology, as a “national reflection.” A version of the play, with the title The True-
born Irishman, had first been staged in Dublin at the Crow Street theater on 14 May 1761. Macklin had written the comedy, which is set in Dublin, specifically for the Dublin stage—or, more accurately, for the Dublin audience—and it received an enthusiastic reception there, being played six times in its first season. Attempting to make the play palatable to London audiences, Macklin made significant alterations to the script (of which more later), but even in its revised form it could not gain the approval of the crowd at Covent Garden. The memoirist and playwright John O’Keeffe (1747–1833) recalled how the play “was highly complimentary to the Irish national character,” which leaning was not tolerated in London: “With its powerful strokes of satire, Macklin was yet indiscreet enough to bring it on the London stage . . . but John Bull, pit, box, and gallery, said No!” The exact manner in which the audience’s dissatisfaction was expressed is not recorded, but it was certainly sufficiently eloquent to prompt a response from the stage. This time there was no organized defense of the play; rather, Macklin went before the audience and apologized. An early biographer of Macklin describes how the play was “so universally condemned” that Macklin—no stranger to audience riots nor to humbling himself before the public—“thought it necessary” to go before the curtain and deferentially declare, “Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very sensible, that there are several passages in this Piece which deserve to be reprobated, and I assure you that they shall never offend your ears again.”

Macklin’s assurance held true—The Irish Fine Lady’s first London performance was also its last. And when, in 1801, The True-born Irishman was staged at the Theatre Royal in Bath, the attempt at an English revival lasted no longer than one night. In Ireland The True-born Irishman continued to be popular; J. O. Bartley states that “Macklin often revived it, both in the capital and the major country towns.” It was also printed in Ireland: there was a Dublin edition in 1783, and in 1795 it appeared in the Dublin-published Jones’s British Theatre, a series modeled on the London-based Bell’s British Theatre that, unsurprisingly, did not include Macklin’s play. An edition of the play was also printed in 1784 in Philadelphia, where, at the conclusion of the War of Independence, there was presumably sufficient ill feeling toward the English to give the play considerable resonance. Only recently has the play found any sort of footing in England in the form of an adaptation by the Irish playwright Brian Friel (1929–). In the 1990s performances of Friel’s one-act version, retitled The London Vertigo, were given successfully in both Ireland and England as altered conditions of reception afforded Friel a degree of cross-cultural currency that was simply not available to Macklin. Quite why in 1767 the Covent Garden management allowed Macklin’s play to be staged is not clear—possibly they were attempting to demonstrate Irish sympathies after the controversy surrounding Colman’s play (The Irish Fine Lady could have been rehearsed and staged in the three weeks between the two performances). But if that was the case, the plan failed and, taken together, the events at Covent Garden merely reasserted
the authority of the eighteenth-century London public to arbitrate on matters of ethnic representation.

Teasing out the details of these two performances and their reception shows that ethnic resistance—whether expressed on the stage or from the auditorium—encountered counterresistant forces that recent scholarship has tended to overlook. Such opposition is certainly underrepresented in the article I quoted earlier, Michael Ragussis’s “Jews and Other ‘Outlandish Englishmen’: Ethnic Performance and the Invention of British Identity under the Georges” in *Critical Inquiry*. Ragussis’s analysis of what he dubs “multi-ethnic spectacle” is of a quality that renders its Achilles’ heels well worth interrogating; opening up new directions of inquiry in political history and theater studies, it is what academics like to call an *important article*, and one of my aims here is to offer corrective points to the debate that Ragussis has energized. So what does Ragussis argue? Underlying his analysis is the suggestion that “the most noteworthy feature of the Georgian stage, particularly during the last half of the eighteenth century,” is “the development and multiplication of ethnic, colonial, and provincial character types: Jews, Scots, Irish, Welsh, blacks, West Indians, nabobs, and Yorkshiremen paraded on the London stage.”

And following such studies as Linda Colley’s celebrated analysis of the development of notions of Britishness, he convincingly argues that the “domestic and colonial others” presented on the stage “showcased London and, more generally, England as the center of an increasingly complex and culturally mixed nation and empire, and in this way functioned to explore the emerging and shifting identity of the recently invented Great Britain.” A strength of Ragussis’s argument lies in his refusal to reduce contestation surrounding ethnic, English, and British identities to a series of straightforward binary oppositions. He presents a complex picture of performative national identity that is understood “through a variety of contradictory discourses about ethnicity—counterdiscourses, residual and emergent discourses, in conflict and in process.” Ragussis rightly represents the London theater as a site in which a host of ethnic characters (stereotypes, representations attempting to break through stereotypes, newly emergent stereotypes) were staged jostling against one another in intricate struggles for cultural authority.

Ragussis presents individual acts of ethnic resistance, including the objections to *The Oxonian in Town* and Macklin’s writing of *The True-born Irishman*, as constitutive of “a much larger movement toward... the legitimization of the ethnic voice,” and he portrays the latter half of the eighteenth century as a period of emancipation for the Irish in particular. For Ragussis, Macklin’s *The True-born Irishman* is a triumph of representation for the Irish. Overturning the usual stage stereotype of the Irish—the stupid, blundering, fortune hunter—*The True-born Irishman* concludes with a scene in which the Irishman claims the power to represent the English: “it is the triumph of the true-born Irishman (played by Macklin) to have produced at last this spectacle of Englishness.” But the play can be seen only as a triumph (in
a broader sense than the resolution of its plot) if the performance history of the play is ignored—as it is by Ragussis. When a play is so poorly received that the author is obliged to go on stage and apologize to the audience, it is difficult to see it as a triumph in either theatrical or political terms. *The True-born Irishman* was, of course, something of a triumph in Dublin, where it was hardly an *ethnic* triumph. Ragussis may have in mind the Dublin performances of the play; after all, he uses the Dublin title of the play rather than *The Irish Fine Lady*, and he quotes from a text based on the Dublin version of the play.24 But Ragussis’s main concern is clearly (and elsewhere explicitly) London, the hub of British multiethnicity. It might be said that Ragussis’s silence with regard to the conditions of *The True-born Irishman*’s performance is symptomatic of a general failure to attend to, in Homi Bhabha’s phrase, the *location of culture* and that Dublin and London are misleadingly conflated in his account of Macklin.

Macklin’s career, as both an actor and a playwright, is certainly fertile ground upon which to cultivate narratives of ethnic politics. But that career is also a powerful testimony to the *different* demands that were made upon Irish theater workers according to whether they were seeking success in Dublin or in London. Christopher J. Wheatley is right, I believe, to challenge the standard view of the eighteenth-century Dublin theater as merely a provincial mirror of what was happening in London or as a training ground for London-bound theater workers.25 Sharing Wheatley’s conviction that the theatrical cultures of the two cities require separate treatment, I want here to reexamine Macklin’s career and to reconsider his engagement with the project of representing the Irish. The London theater afforded Macklin only limited opportunities for progressive “national reflection”; thus the cultural work performed there by his plays needs to be seen not as part of the emancipatory trajectory proposed by Ragussis but, more bleakly, as part of an ongoing struggle that, at the end of the century, had done little to advance the position of the Irish in London. In terms of the stage, this is witnessed firstly in the resilience of stereotypes of the Irish; contrary to Ragussis’s claims, conventional approaches to the representation of Irishness were hardly overturned in late eighteenth-century London. In fact, in a wide-ranging survey of Irish, Welsh, and Scottish characters in English drama, J. O. Bartley asserts that “the nineteenth century stage Irishman enlarges upon the absurdities of his eighteenth century progenitor.”26 In what follows, I examine processes that allowed such representations to endure and prosper.

II

Macklin’s struggles to succeed within the English theater world and the self-transformations by which he veiled his alien status have long been part of the Macklin story. From the earliest biographies by James Kirkman and William Cooke, Macklin’s attainment of his position as one of the century’s finest and most
innovative actors, typically ranked second only to David Garrick (1717–79), has been shown to have depended upon his moderating or changing those attributes that marked him out as Irish.27 He who became “Charles Macklin,” the Protestant, English-speaking resident of Covent Garden, was born “Cathal McLaughlin” and grew up an Irish-speaking Catholic in the rural County Donegal in the north of Ireland. Wheatley and others have shown that from the earliest years of his immensely long career, Macklin was obliged to “accommodate” his identity to the demands of a predominantly Protestant, London-accented theater community.28 Born toward the end of the seventeenth century, McLaughlin/Macklin began acting professionally, probably around 1716, with a strolling company in the west of England.29 Ambitious, resilient, and dedicated to his craft, he learnt early on that more secure and illustrious positions in England would be contingent upon personal metamorphosis. Kirkman records, for example, Macklin’s determination “to get rid of the natural brogue. . . . so gross to an English audience,” and he describes how he “made the English language the object of his pursuit.”30 Numerous other accounts and anecdotes of varying reliability reveal Macklin’s many struggles as an immigrant confronting prejudice, but they show that by the 1730s he had assimilated himself sufficiently to be finding adequate, if irregular, paid acting work in London.

With a change of tongue, name, and religion, Macklin made himself acceptable to Londoners and to London theater audiences, but he did not entirely efface his Irish identity. His acculturation within England is sometimes portrayed as a process through which he learnt to ape Englishness.31 But the public persona projected by Macklin was not a simulated image of Englishness; rather it was an image of acceptable Irishness. In this context “acceptable” involved not only a comprehensible accent, a pronounceable name, a tolerable religion, but also a willingness to show complicity with popular stereotypes of the Irish. Macklin the Irishman was not entirely masked in London, but he was publicly humble and open to self-mockery. Kirkman describes how a public image of Macklin emerged in his early years at Drury Lane—those years prior to 1741 when Macklin made his name (having made up his name) with his celebrated portrayal of Shylock. Macklin would sometimes fall “by accident into comic parts, which served to afford an opening for public opinion, and to give him the character of a funny fellow; as, in general, he went by the name of ‘the Wild Irishman.’ ”32 In this slightly opaque account, Macklin’s Irishness is not disguised; it is conspicuous, but it becomes unthreatening when its association with wildness is tamed. The wild Irishman can be seen as an agreeable “funny fellow” when he takes on parts—including explicitly Irish parts—which render him the object of comedy.

An endorsement of the comical stage Irishman is one of the strategies of Macklin’s early “accommodation” that is rarely noted; it is perhaps an embarrassment for critics interested in Macklin’s later, more resistant position. But it was a strategy without which Macklin might not have gained a public London voice at
all. One of his principal early successes was playing the obtuse but loyal Teague in Robert Howard’s *The Committee* (1665), an anti-Puritan comedy that, while little known today, was among the most frequently performed plays of the eighteenth century. At its early, post-Interregnum performances, Howard’s royalist satire had an immediate political relevance, but *The Committee* also offered less localized attractions in the character of Teague. Walter Scott, writing early in the nineteenth century, confidently attributed the play’s endurance to Teague: among Howard’s plays, he wrote, *The Committee* “alone, kept possession of the stage till our time; and that solely supported by the humours of Teague, an honest blundering Irish footman, such as we usually see in a modern farce.” And that it was Teague who maintained the play’s popularity in the eighteenth century is further suggested by the growing use of “*The Faithful Irishman*” as a subtitular addition. With his frequent “Irish bulls” and his fidelity to service, Teague offered London audiences an image of Irishness that was amiably unprovocative and risible; indeed his unquestioning servitude must have been reassuring to those who feared in the Irish the threat of rebellion (a recurring threat that would be realized with the Irish Rebellion in 1798). And it was partly by exploiting this representation that Macklin, who played Teague regularly from the late 1730s, built his reputation among London theatergoers. The “funny fellow” was in part a complicit stage Irishman.

Not only did Macklin perform stage Irishmen, but he also bred more of them through his early comic writing for the London stage. The most blatant such figure appears in a dramatic prologue to his two-act farce *A Will and No Will; or, A Bone for the Lawyers*, an afterpiece first performed at Drury Lane on 23 April 1746. The prologue is conceived as a metatheatrical conversation between spectators in the pit, which device Macklin wittily exploited to assert humility as both an Irishman and a playwright. It functions in part as an apology for Macklin’s first dramatic effort, *King Henry VII; or, The Popish Imposter* (1745), a tragedy that, hastily thrown together in response to the Jacobite uprising, was apparently laughed off the stage. Macklin mocks his failed ambitions as a writer of tragedy and offers himself as a comically self-effacing author of less lofty material. He stages a conversation about himself between English wits—Rattle, Snarle, and Smart—who have heard that Macklin is the author of the coming farce:

*Rattle*. Why, can he write?
*Snarle*. Write? Ay, and damnably too, I assure you, ha! ha! He writ a Tragedy this Winter, but so merry a Tragedy was never seen since the first night of Tom Thumb the Great.
*Smart*. I was at it and a merry Tragedy it was and a merry Audience!
*Snarle*. I never laughed so heartily at a Play in my Life; if his Farce has half so much Fun in it as his Tragedy had, I’ll engage it succeeds.

Essentially Macklin asks to be given a second chance by declaring his deference to the earlier judgment of the public; it is a dramatized version of the apology he would later issue following the failure of *The Irish Fine Lady*. And as Macklin strives to accommodate his output to dominant public tastes, he offers the audience his own
version of Teague in a “poor ridiculous Fellow” whose hyperbolic name, Laughlin-burruderrymackshoughlinbulldowyn, both plays on Macklin’s own name(s) and invokes that prime attribute of the stage Irishman—the bull. It might be said that by extending his character’s name to this ridiculous extreme, Macklin is actually ironizing the institution of the stage Irishman, and clearly there is a self-conscious artificiality about the representation. But Macklin does not deconstruct the stereotype further than by shrouding it in metatheatrical knowingness. Macklin’s Irishman is in the tradition of the blundering fool with a mouthful of bulls; he speaks of things “as false as the Gospel” and relates how “at School . . . we acted one of Terence’s Tragedies there, so when the Play was over I spoke the Prologue to it.”37 Smart judges his pit companion to be “only a Teague,” and the prologue offers little that challenges this belittling assessment.38 Macklin may have been quietly ironizing the institution, but he nonetheless made available a character that could invite laughter of the most traditional kind.39

However, in subsequent works—notably The New Play Criticiz’d (1747) and Love à la Mode (1759)—Macklin did increasingly open up a public interrogation of the framework within which Irishness was represented on the stage. Macklin’s early work in London shows his line-toeing complicity with London stage Irishness, and is thus revealing of the accommodations that a midcentury Irish actor/playwright was obliged to make in order to survive in the profession. His later career reveals an attempt to assert a more critical ethnic position, but it equally highlights the resilience of Teague and the tenacity with which London audiences held on to this stock theatricalized version of Irish identity.

III

The New Play Criticiz’d, an afterpiece written for Drury Lane, concludes with a metatheatrical exchange that encapsulates those constraints of stock representation against which Macklin’s later works tend to react. In this play about plays, the English hero, Heartly, observes that the circumstances he and his fellow characters are enmeshed in would be good material for a short drama. Heartly is imaginatively engineering a resolution when Sir Patrick Bashful, an Irishman, asks him: “And what part shall I have in your Play, Mr. Heartly?” “Really, Sir Patrick,” replies Heartly, “I know of no Business you can have in it, unless it be to make the Audience laugh.”40 This is a typical move for Macklin as a playwright. Almost all of his later plays include some such moment of formal self-consciousness; he shatters any accretion of illusionism, reminds his audience that they are in the presence of convention, and exposes the limits of convention. The Irishman can have no place on the London stage, Heartly avers, except as an object of comedy. And yet this exchange comes at the end of a play in which Macklin has begun to propose a more flexible approach to the representation of Irishness.

“John Bull, pit, box, and gallery, said No!”
Like Laughlinbullruderrymackshoughlinbulldowny, Sir Patrick Bashful can certainly perform the traditional functions of the stage Irishman. In a long scene Sir Patrick—embarrassed by his Irishness and attempting to pass as French—is bated, mocked, and exposed by Heartly and the heroine, Harriet. As Sir Patrick’s absurd pose collapses, the play offers the London public a comic victim whom many spectators might well have found to be, in Heartly’s words, “more diverting and more blundering than his Countryman in the Committee [that is, Robert Howard’s Teague].” But this scene of mockery also allows for “contrapunctal” interpretation, for entwined among Sir Patrick’s bulls and blunders are energies that ruffle the straightforward thrust of the satire. Sir Patrick’s attitude toward his native country is a compound of shame and pride. He tries desperately and disastrously to appear French (generating Gallic bulls along the way), but when pushed on the subject of the Irish he is unrestrained in his praise and appears critical only of those who, like himself (and indeed like Macklin), have alienated themselves from its traditions. The character is in part a study of Irish self-hatred, a disposition that would be more fully explored in The True-born Irishman. Asked why the Irish “don’t speak their own Language,” Sir Patrick replies, “Because . . . they are ashamed of it; . . . Now when I was upon my Travels I liked the Language so well that I learned it,” and he entertains the company with an Irish song. Macklin stages a defense of Ireland—even an advertisement of its traditional culture—but here he does so demurely through a character who feels he must deny his national inheritance and who becomes risible in the process.

An altogether more confident attempt to challenge stock Irish representation is found in Love à la Mode, one of Macklin’s most popular, long-running, and lucrative plays and arguably one of the most significant theatrical interventions into ethnic political debate of the eighteenth century. First staged at Drury Lane on 12 December 1759, Love à la Mode is a courtship farce in which four suitors—“a beau Jew,” “a downright English, Newmarket, stable-bred jockey,” “a proud, haughty, Caledonian knight,” and “a wild Irish . . . hard-headed soldier”—compete for the hand and fortune of Charlotte, a spirited English heiress. This play, as Ragussis states, puts on display “the new world of mid eighteenth-century Britain, socially mobile and ethnically diverse and fractious,” and it plays the suitors off one another in an intricate struggle not only for Charlotte but also for ethnic significance and supremacy. Ragussis provides an exceptional reading of Love à la Mode, showing both how Macklin endeavours to deconstruct stage Irishness through the unconventional Sir Callaghan O’Brallaghan, and how this strategy runs hand in hand with the construction of new ethnic caricatures, such as the stage Jew: “we see the Irishman detheatricalized and the Jew supertheatricalized.” Macklin’s detheatricalization of the stage Irishman is, to my mind, very powerful (although, as will be seen, it was not necessarily so for all of Macklin’s contemporaries). Before Sir Callaghan’s entrance, the play builds up expectations for the arrival of a typical stage Irishman: the Scot, Sir Archy McSarcasm, for example, warns Charlotte that
“the fallow is week enough till laugh at, but I would hai ye leuk aboot ye there . . . there is a deseegn upon yeer fortune in that quarter, depend upon it.”

But such expectations are overturned through the behavior of the character himself. Sir Callaghan is no fortune hunter—indeed this trope is transposed onto Sir Callaghan’s rivals: when it is pretended that Charlotte’s fortune is lost, all but Sir Callaghan abandon their courtship. And Sir Callaghan is no stereotypical comic butt; as Raguissis puts it, he “fails to make a fool of himself . . . The discrepancy between his actual behaviour and the expected blunders of the stereotypical wild Irishman exposes the stage Irishman as a theatrical construct and invites the audience to reflect on the very conditions of spectatorship and the spectacle that engross it.”

The degree to which Love à la Mode did prompt London audiences to reflect self-consciously upon the institutions and conditions upholding constructs of Irishness—or indeed of any other national or ethnic identity—is difficult to establish. As with all matters of reception, sources here are incomplete, fragmentary, and only partially revealing. What is certain is that the play inspired a multifaceted public debate involving respondents from different ethnic positions, operating on a number of ideological and aesthetic fronts. And the available evidence furthermore suggests that the play succeeded despite Sir Callaghan’s unconventionality rather than because of it; when the elderly George II had the play read to him, he was reported to be “much pleased with the Irishman’s getting the better of his rivals,” but the direction and directness of this royal approval are strikingly absent from other recorded responses and accounts of the contemporary reception.

Prominent among responses were reactions from several Scots objecting to the character of Sir Archy. The unconventional Irish representation was by no means uncontroversial, but with a conspicuous comical Scot—played by the star performer Macklin—much of the debate revolved around this new satirical creation rather than the “deetheatricalized” Irish figure. “The farce was no sooner produced,” Francis Congreve writes, “than several Caledonians, imagining Sir Archy to have been meant as an unhandsome reflection on their nation, were very loud and turbulent during the representation, and did all in their power to cut short the run of the piece.”

Like the later Irish protest against Colman’s The Oxonian in Town, this Scottish resistance was rapidly subdued; indeed, accounts suggest that the play gained favor in London precisely because it proved offensive to Scots, whose growing political and administrative prominence was creating increasing anti-Scottish prejudice. Congreve states that “the petulance of these North Britons . . . served only to increase its popularity, and they had the mortification to witness its success triumph over all party opposition and censure.” In such accounts of Love à la Mode’s reception, the play’s main effect has not been to charge the spectatorial act with self-consciousness, but to (re)focus the gaze upon a non-Irish comic “Other.”

Outside the theater the outcry against the play took printed form, and for the anonymous author of A Scotsman’s Remarks on the Farce of Love a la Mode (1760),
Macklin was guilty not only of blatant anti-Scottishness but of poetic impropriety. *Love à la Mode*, for this author, was no challenge to theatrical convention but was simply incoherent and flawed in artistic terms. “Propriety of characters,” this damning pamphlet asserts, “may be divided into two sorts—The one to make them act and speak in every thing suitably to the intended purpose, untainted by any peculiarly vicious manner of country or education.—The other is, when the character is made to result entirely from a provincial dialect, and local manners.” Such a view of drama precludes the possibility for a character to be of a nation but not a national stereotype: a proper character must either transcend nation, or be engulfed entirely by what are thought to be a nation’s markings. Approving nothing between “universal man” and “local man,” the Scotsman finds “the mongrel characters of this farce” to be a “monstrous compound.” Macklin becomes a “jumbling author,” and the detheatricalization of Teague through Sir Callaghan becomes just part of the play’s dire inconsistency. Locked in his theory of character, the Scotsman is unable to fathom how Sir Callaghan can, for example, have honor—such morality as Sir Callaghan displays “belongs to the ingenuous and noble-minded of every climate, and is here strangely appropriated to *Irish Teaguisim*.” And this intractable spectator’s criticism was by no means unique. Cooke writes that the general “critical objection” to *Love à la Mode* arose from Macklin having given “to his hero, who is an Irishman, a degree of affection for his mistress, of a purer and more disinterested nature than the Englishman, the Scotchman, and the Jew, who were his rivals; contrary to the received opinion, ‘that the Irish are generally fortune-hunters.’” When conventional “Irish Teaguisim” is seen as nature’s mirror, the unconventional Sir Callaghan becomes an objectionably poor representation of reality.

The enduring success of *Love à la Mode* shows that its negative criticism was ultimately outweighed, but approving the play did not necessarily entail recognizing or acquiescing with its challenge to conventional Irish representation. Indeed, it is striking that even within favorable accounts of the play can be witnessed a preservation of Teaguisim as a theatrical and political formation. When Cooke responds to the critical objection noted above, his defensive strategy is to “explain away” Sir Callaghan:

> Macklin did not draw his character from the common herd of needy adventuring Irish, who are ready to snap at any thing in the way of fortune, but from a purer source. His hero had been educated in the simple manners of the interior part of Ireland, where an unsuspicious temper, courage, generosity, and fidelity, are qualities that seem peculiarly congenial to that soil. From thence he is transplanted into the military line, which is no bad soil for the further culture of those qualities: so that, on the whole of such an education, it is no wonder he should carry away the prize from a *foolish Jockey*, an *unfeeling Jew*, and an *avaricious Scotchman*.

Cooke justifies the representation by positing Sir Callaghan as an exception to the norm. With his genealogy embellished, Sir Callaghan can stand aside from the
“common herd” whose fortune-hunting tendencies are maintained as a predominant mark of national identity. Cooke accepts stage Irishness as mimetic but exempts Sir Callaghan from the swath of reality he maintains the convention reflects.

In other ways the deconstructive energies of Love à la Mode were quietened. When the play was reconstituted as Love a la Mode, A New Whimsical Cantata (1764) by “Young D’Urfey,” Sir Callaghan was in fact reinscribed with the familiar signs of stage Irishness. In this short ballad-version of the play, Macklin’s virtuous soldier becomes “a Teague from Cork red hot,” and he appears positively bog Irish in his wooing. He concludes a seductive air, promising “we’ll cuddle like Pigs in a hogstye together,” and D’Urfey similarly crucifies Macklin’s Charlotte so as to create a fitting couple. She becomes a “buxom Widow . . . [with] Chink in Hand,” who determines at the cantata’s conclusion that “Sir Calloghan’s the Man shall plough up my Land.” As a response to Macklin’s play, this adaptation represents either an incapacity to see beyond Teaguism when an Irish character appears on stage (a response akin to that of the anonymous Scot), or a desire, conscious or otherwise, to reassert convention and stereotype when they appear to have been challenged. Either way, its appearance in 1764 suggests that, despite Love a’ la Mode having been performed popularly for some four years, stage Irishness remained a buoyant and powerful convention. And Macklin was clearly aware of its continued vitality when he tried to bring The Irish Fine Lady to the London stage in 1767.

IV

Macklin composed the original version of The Irish Fine Lady after having moved to Dublin in 1760 to act and write for the Crow Street theater alongside the Irish actor-manager Spranger Barry (1717–77). The True-born Irishman, performed in 1761, placed Macklin in the role of Murrogh O’Dogherty, a proud, patriotic Irishman whose wife, after visiting London and attending George III’s coronation, has returned to Dublin with manic anglophilia: “the Irish Fine Lady’s delirium, or the London vertigo.” With a “phrenzy of admiration for every thing in England,” O’Dogherty’s wife snobbishly embraces London fashions and attempts to erase the signs of her Irishness, changing her name to “Diggerty” and adopting a “new kind of London English.” The device of the nationally embarrassed social aspirant has here a double-edged satirical function; it opens up a broad critique of faddish English culture and of the English administration of Ireland (the latter embodied in Count Mushroom, Diggerty’s vain would-be lover), but it also allows for a dramatic interrogation of Irish self-hatred and its destructive consequences for the nation. O’Dogherty—often seen as a mouthpiece for Macklin’s own views—regards the growing anglophilia of his wife and her associates as a further ruination of a country already in desperate need of practical reform. Resisting his wife’s entreaties that he should sell himself for a title, O’Dogherty echoes

“John Bull, pit, box, and gallery, said No!” 73
Swift in advancing practical solutions, unshaped by party interest, for the alleviation of Ireland’s problems. Paraphrasing *Gulliver’s Travels*, for example, he argues that “an honest quiet country gentleman who out of policy and humanity establishes manufactories, or that contrives employment for the idle and the industrious, or that makes but a blade of corn grow where there was none before, is of more use to this poor country than all the courtiers, and patriots, and politicians, and prodigals that are unhanged.”65 The play is thus in part a manifesto for political and economic reform, and O’Dogherty becomes vehement in his criticisms of the English, whose trivial, luxurious indulgences he, as the tenant of an absentee landlord, is funding while his own country suffers. “I tell you again and again,” he insists, “the English can never be precedent to us,” and he denounces the capacity of the English to “run mad about something or other, either about burlettas, pantomimes, a man in a bottle, a Cock-lane ghost, or something of equal importance.”66

With the humiliation of Count Mushroom and the reform of Mrs. Diggerty—she overcomes her “London vertigo” and regains pride in her Irishness—the play ends well for the true-born Irishman. But could such a play end well for Macklin if it were to be staged in London? Clearly Macklin believed that it might so long as it were suitably revised. The revisions made by Macklin prior to the London production are recoverable from MS No. 274 in the Larpent Collection at the Huntington Library—this is the script that was sent to the Examiner of Plays in order that a performance license be granted (no license was needed for Dublin performances). The revisions reveal two fundamental strategies by which to mollify the play’s anti-English tendencies and to justify the untypical Irish representations to a London public. One is the redirection of the satire of English fashion onto the French. As earlier Macklin had used a Scotsman as a “foreign” scapegoat through which to cement complicity with a London audience, here he invokes the French to bear a satirical burden and to show English and Irish together as victims of trivial, continental vorges. On stage in London, O’Dogherty, “whose hall is filled with milliners, mantua-makers, mercers, the Mounseers,” complains that

[t]he Devil’s in the People of this Country! they are going to be as French mad, I think, as our wise Neighbours of England are, nothing will go down with us here, now a days, but french milliners, french Taylors, french Hair dressers, french Valets de Chambre—French Cooks for our Palates, French Tutors for our Sons, French dancing Masters for our Daughters and French Perriwig Makers for our wives—Ogho! if we don’t take special care, this rage of imitating french fashions will one day or other insensibly lead us into the Stocks of narrow french wooden Shoes, and that would but very ill agree with an English, or an Irish Foot—which always loves to step at large, in the soft flippant easy Slipper of Liberty.67

Macklin’s revisions are not so thoroughgoing as to expunge the satire of the English, but such uneasily integrated passages as this nonetheless aspire to adjust the ethnic negotiations operating through the play—to exhibit the French as a cultural opponent against which the Irish and the “wise” English can join as freedom-loving, sensibly shod Britons.
The other principal strategy of revision is the addition of a prologue that vigorously argues against conventional stage representations of the Irish. I am not aware of this prologue having been printed before, so I shall quote it here in full:

Hibernias Sons from earliest days have been,  
The Jest and Scandal of the Comic Scene;  
For Dullness gave her Bards this modest Rule,  
“To Irish Tones associate Knave and Fool;  
Let these, and Nonsense deck’d with Bull and Brogue,  
Be native marks and means to Comic Vogue.”  
Peculiar Case, that they alone should stand  
Proscrib’d for Tones that mark a Native Land.  
As if wise Nature, at her own Expence,  
Had drop’d them here, devoid of Truth, and Sense.  
A lonely Bard this partial Law reviews,  
When social Justice fires his Feeble Muse.  
A homebred Character he vows to draw,  
In fair defiance of this Gothic Law.  
Milesian sprung,\textsuperscript{69} confess’d in every part,  
Hibernia’s Seal impress’d on Tongue and Heart.  
Nay more, our Bard still rises in O\textsuperscript{V}ence,  
And dares give Irish Tones a sterling Sense.  
But what is stranger still, indeed a wonder,  
He hopes to make him please, without a Blunder;  
A Prodigy, you’ll own, on Britain’s Stage,  
And may excite the Hypercritic’s Rage.  
To him he weds a Belle with follies fraught,  
By Nature good—by Fashion almost naught.  
Some months refin’d in London’s polish’d School,  
Return’d—just ripe for wholesome ridicule.  
A thoughtless, Mungril[?], wild, fantastic Dame,  
Serv’d up for Public Mirth, and private Shame.  
In her he shews, what Taste and Fashion make us,  
When common Sense and Decency forsake us.  
This is his Plan, on this you must decide,  
He’s on his Country fairly to be tried.  
Sage Pope to Critics gives this sound Advice,  
“In little matters be not over nice.  
In every work, regard the Writer’s end,  
Since none can compass more than they intend.”  
Our work’s a Farce,—Our end to mend the Heart,  
Then try us not by any nicer Art;  
Nor let the whole be blamed for one weak Part.  
Whate’er the Event, we are sure of Self applause,  
For if we are damn’d—it is in Virtue’s Cause.

“John Bull, pit, box, and gallery, said No!”
In many ways we might see the first twenty-two lines of this prologue as encapsulating the aspect of Macklin’s later career I have been exploring here: his frustration with stage Irishness, his attempt to forge alternative modes of representation, his sense—as a “lonely Bard”—of working against the grain, his acute awareness that all his efforts may ultimately fall victim to “the Hypercritic’s Rage.” It is the most explicit revelation of a desire to rescue the Irish from Teaguish theatrics in the Macklin oeuvre.

The prologue was spoken only once: despite the revisions, *The Irish Fine Lady*, as we have seen, *was* damned in London on its first night. The play’s failure should not be attributed entirely to its unconventional approach to ethnic representation. *The True-born Irishman* is in part a topical, local comedy, and its transplantation to London would have rendered elements of its Dublin humor unfunny or meaningless. Macklin recognized as much, remarking after the London failure that “[t]here’s a geography in humour as well as in morals, which I had not previously considered.”

But the failure can also be seen as an eloquent sign of the London public’s intolerance of unashamed, “true-born” Irish pride on the stage and the unwillingness of the majority to engage in “outlandish” comedy which, to succeed in London, would require the English to share in laughter directed generally at themselves. When Macklin did succeed in London with another new play he was on safer satirical ground; in *The Man of the World* (1781), he gave the audience Sir Pertinax Macsycophant, another comic Scot.

V

I have aimed in this discussion to emplot Macklin’s ethnic negotiations within a new narrative—one in which the ethnic voice gains only limited legitimacy within eighteenth-century London and in which traditional modes for representing Irishness on the London stage are not radically overturned. But I also hope that by revisiting plays explored by Ragussis, the analysis may serve as a case study allowing more general reflection on historiographical practice and on the role of reception within analyses of cultural texts’ political mediations. Often—perhaps usually—the production and reception history of a dramatic text is impossible to construct except in the most skeletal and speculative manner (the evidence for eighteenth-century British dramatic reception is certainly patchy, but it is actually copious compared with that from earlier periods). And when there are extant texts of various kinds that provide some way into a study of reception, *en masse* they are typically as open to interpretation as the imaginative works to which they relate. For example, Ragussis *is* attentive to the reception of *Love à la Mode*, and reading basically the same body of responses he arrives at conclusions at variance with those of my own partial account. I have endeavored to be sensitive to such problems and frailties as are endemic to reception studies, but I hope to have shown nonetheless
that if a text such as *The Irish Fine Lady* is to be deployed so as to support a narrative of change within attitudes to ethnic minorities, a meticulous—perhaps tedious—attention to matters of production and reception is demanded if that text’s significance is not to be seen purely in terms of its interventionist aspirations.

While I have been arguing that eighteenth-century London theaters afforded only limited scope for ethnic resistance, what I have not had space to explore more broadly here is the resilience of conventional Irish representations in later eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century London drama. Bartley’s expansive study of Welsh, Irish, and Scottish stage representations, as I have suggested, supports an argument that stage Irishness became a yet more entrenched formation during that period (so too does G. C. Duggan’s not altogether scholarly account of *The Stage Irishman*). But it would be well worth reexploring these aspects of drama in the light of theoretical advances in ethnic studies and with scholarly tools that were unavailable when Bartley was writing (such as *The London Stage, 1660–1800*, *A Biographical Dictionary of . . . Stage Personnel in London, 1660–1800*, and Chadwyck-Healey’s online database of *English Drama, 1280–1915*). “Teague” and other malleable ethnic representations were clearly recognized by many as potential vehicles for intervention in interethnic debate, and eighteenth-century drama contains numerous characters that are, to some degree, attempts to commandeer and control the public image of an ethnic group. Such representations need to be reexamined with a broader focus upon not only their status within the text of the play but also their position within the complex structure of “the theater.” Analyzing nationally marked characters—and examining, on an individual basis, the contexts of their production, performance history, and reception—may well afford further insights into the underpinnings of national and ethnic identities, into the complex interrelationships between alternative identities, and into the degree of a minority’s cultural enfranchisement within a nation at a given time. It would be fruitful, for example, to examine further the manner in which the Teague of Robert Howard’s *The Committee* was manipulated through performance and through adaptation, such as in *The Honest Thieves* (1797), a reworking of Howard’s play by Thomas Knight (d.1820). Knight, it so happens, had been trained for the theater by Macklin, and anecdotes suggest that he felt hugely indebted to his instructor. Considering Macklin’s efforts to open up new possibilities for Irish stage representation, Knight did not repay Macklin well with *The Honest Thieves*. Knight’s Teague is as blundering and bull-ridden as Howard’s; despite Macklin’s protests, the Irishman in London remained, in this representation at least, “The Jest and Scandal of the Comic Scene.”
Notes

5. Ibid. 6. Ibid., 3:1291.
7. Burnim states the play ran a total of twenty-two nights, ignoring the performances after its first season; see *Plays of George Colman the Elder*, 1:xx.
10. Benjamin Victor’s account of the play’s failure does little to explain the grounds of the audience’s disapproval: “This fine Lady was so ill used by the Audience the first Night, that she never appeared afterwards,” as stated in *The History of the Theatres of London, From the Year 1760 to the present Time* (London, 1771), 117.
13. Charles Macklin, *Four Comedies by Charles Macklin*, ed. J. O. Bartley (London, 1968), 81. It has also been successfully revived in Ireland subsequently; Bartley quotes enthusiastic reviews of a 1910 Dublin production by the Theatre of Ireland Company (81).
14. See William J. Cameron, *A Bibliography in Short-Title Catalog Form of Jones’s British Theatre, 1795*, Western Hemisphere Short-Title Catalog Bibliography, no. 23, 1984, 1–2. Another omission from *Bell’s British Theatre* which perhaps is surprising—as well as suggestive with regard to the status of Irish-authored drama in England—is Macklin’s *Love à la Mode*, a play which was very successful in London theaters. William Jones included *Love à la Mode* in his Dublin series.
21. Ibid., 794. 22. Ibid., 789. 23. Ibid., 788.
24. Ragussis’s reference to Bartley’s edition of Four Comedies by Charles Macklin is understandable since the London version exists only in manuscript form: Larpent Collection, No. 274, at the Huntington Library.
28. See Chapter 5 in Wheatley: “‘Our own good, plain, old Irish English’... where, he argues, ‘the problem for immigrants was Irishness irrespective of religious belief’” (89).
31. Ragussis presents Macklin’s acculturation in such terms: “the birth of the Englishman meant the silencing, even the mutilation, of the Irishman”; see “Jews and Other ‘Outlandish Englishmen,’” 787. He argues that Macklin learned to pass as an Englishman but his example does not show a true test of the skill: the deluded party is Irish not English (787).
32. Kirkman, Memoirs, 1:137. The idea of the “wild Irishman” dates back to at least the Elizabethan period; the association with savagery declined in the eighteenth century but clearly retained some currency; see Bartley, Teague, Shenkin, and Sawney, 28 and 193.
33. The Committee’s first printing was in 1665; it had been performed before that date—see Carryl Nelson Thurber, “Sir Robert Howard’s Comedy The Committee, edited with introduction and notes,” University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature 7, no. 1 (1921): 39. Thurber shows the many eighteenth-century reprints of the play and notes the frequency with which it was performed; fuller details of the performance history can be found throughout The London Stage.
37. Ibid., 3. 38. Ibid., 5.
39. There are conflicting views on the popularity of A Will and No Will; Kern stresses the success of the play, claiming it was “revived many times up to 29 March 1756” (i); Matthew J. Kinservik argues that before Macklin’s Love à la Mode (1759), “all of his plays were failures”; see “Love à la Mode and Macklin’s Return to the London Stage in...
1759,” *Theatre Survey* 37, no. 2 (November 1996): 18. With a total of eight performances (according to *The London Stage*), it can be said to have been a moderate success.


41. Ibid., 67.

42. I allude to Edward Said’s deployment of “contrapunctal reading” (developed particularly in *Culture and Imperialism* [New York, 1993]), denoting an interpretative strategy that aims to uncover a simultaneous awareness of a text’s “official” discourse and a concealed counternarrative of the oppressed.

43. Wheatley argues that the depiction dramatizes Macklin’s embarrassment concerning his own heritage; *Beneath Ærinne’s Banners*, 88–89.


47. Ibid., 780.

48. *Four Comedies by Charles Macklin*, 52.


51. Cooke writes that “there were some prejudices against the Author in the beginning, heightened, perhaps, by the partiality he has shewn his country,” in *Memoirs of Charles Macklin*, 231.


53. Some of this prejudice was expressed within the theaters; see, for example, James Boswell’s account of a 1762 visit to Covent Garden: “two Highland officers came in. The mob in the upper gallery roared out, ‘No Scots! No Scots! Out with them!’ hissed and pelted them with apples”; see *Boswell’s London Journal, 1762–1763*, ed. Frederick A. Pottle, The Yale Editions of The Private Papers of James Boswell (London, 1950; reprint, 1951), 71.


55. Kirkman hints that Macklin may have intended to prosper from controversy: the Scottish protest “turned out exactly as the Author imagined it would; the resentment of the Caledonians provoked the mirth of others, and spread the fame of *Love-a-la-Mode* all over the town” (*Memoirs*, 1:402).


57. Ibid., 4. 58. Ibid., 6. 59. Ibid., 30.


61. Ibid.

62. Young D’Urfey, *Love a la Mode, A New Whimsical Cantata* (London, 1764). The adaptation appears on a single sheet together with an engraving of a scene from the play; the English Short-Title Catalogue states that “Young D’Urfey” was a pseudonym for Frederick Forrest.

63. *Four Comedies by Charles Macklin*, 85.


67. Charles Macklin, *The Irish Fine Lady*, Larpent MS No. 274, Huntington Library. Here and below, this item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

68. In editing the MS text, I have eliminated running quotation marks, regularized one dash, and incorporated two corrections pencilled into the margin.

69. That is, Irish, after “Milesius,” a fabulous Spanish king whose sons were reputed to have conquered Ireland.
81. John Bull, pit, box, and gallery, said No!

70. Cooke, Memoirs of Charles Macklin, 270.