

Charles Macklin's Books

‘Macklin showed [Samuel Johnson] his library, and seemed to have a sufficient knowledge of every work it contained.

John Bernard, *Retrospections of the Stage* (1830)

‘We might be the owners or purveyors of books [...] but we are not always their readers.’

Christina Lupton, *Reading and the Making of Time in the Eighteenth Century* (2018)

Macklin was undoubtedly one of the most bookish figures of the eighteenth-century theatrical world. This was noted by his contemporaries and we see traces of it in his plays and correspondence, but the fullest evidence lies in the records of his personal library. These records suggest, in fact, that Macklin was an almost compulsive bibliophile. At the time of his death he was in possession of a library of more than 3000 volumes. That figure does not place it among the truly monumental personal libraries of the period, such as Topham Beauclerk's which ran to more than 30,000 volumes and took fifty days to be auctioned off.¹ But Macklin's was still a very large collection and, given his relatively limited means, the building up of it may be taken as a sign of his priorities, his interests and, arguably, his self-image.² What might Macklin's book collection, this essay asks, tell us about its owner?

In terms of scale, Macklin's library was comparable with Garrick's, which included a general collection of over 3,000 volumes plus a corpus of early English printed plays. Garrick's collection was renowned and has been closely scrutinised – most recently in Nicholas D. Smith's *An Actor's Library: David Garrick, Book Collecting and Literary Friendships* (2017).³ By contrast, Macklin's library has yet to receive more than incidental scholarly attention, despite rich evidence provided by two catalogues. As a first step towards rectifying the neglect, the aim here is to consider the general contours of the collection as well

¹ See *Bibliotheca Beauclerkiana: A Catalogue of the Large and Valuable Library of the late Honourable Topham Beauclerk* (London: S. Paterson, 1781).

² Regarding Macklin's disposable income, it may be said that during his successful working years he was well paid, but he suffered serious financial difficulties later; see William W. Appleton, *Charles Macklin: An Actor's Life* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 230–32.

³ Nicholas D. Smith, *An Actor's Library: David Garrick, Book Collecting and Literary Friendships* (New Castle: Oak Knoll Press, 2017).

as the significance of the books as a gathered mass. What did the accumulation and possession of an extensive library mean to Macklin, and how may the collection have been used both personally and socially? What can Macklin's books tell us about his status not only as an actor and playwright but also as a figure within eighteenth-century networks of learning? Macklin has a walk-on part in Michael Brown's far-reaching recent study of *The Irish Enlightenment* (2016), and this is due to his authorship of *Love à la Mode*; can a more extensive role be afforded to Macklin when his intellectual leanings are fleshed out through consideration of his books?⁴

The posthumous auction and the catalogues of Macklin's books

Macklin's library was dispersed a few months after his death in 1797. It was sold at auction to raise funds for his widow, Elizabeth Jones, and the catalogues that were drawn up for the sale provide almost all the evidence that we have of the collection. The auction took place at the Macklins' home at 6 Tavistock Row, Covent Garden, overseen by the auctioneer Thomas King, who had premises nearby.⁵ Since King did not have the books moved from the house prior to the sale, we can be fairly sure that this was an auction purely of works that actually belonged to Macklin; in other words, the practice of adding extra stock to collections which were sold as private libraries probably did not occur. The sale lasted for five days starting at noon on Tuesday, 21 November. On the Monday before the auction, the public could go and inspect the collection and, for sixpence, could buy a printed *Catalogue of the Library of the Late Mr. Charles Macklin*.⁶

There are two known extant copies of this printed catalogue (according to the *ESTC*). One is at the New York Public Library and the other is at the Folger Shakespeare Library (the latter appearing to be the copy of the auctioneer's clerk since it is annotated with buyers'

⁴ Michael Brown, *The Irish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2016), 337–39.

⁵ King took premises in King Street in Covent Garden in 1789 – see 'King Street and Floral Street Area: King Street', in *Survey of London: Volume 36, Covent Garden*, ed. F. H. W. Sheppard (London: London County Council, 1970), 151–78. *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol36/pp151-178> [accessed 25 April 2019]. The auction catalogue, cited below, indicates that King also had premises at 369 Oxford Street – one of several addresses where the catalogue was available.

⁶ *A Catalogue of the Library of the Late Mr. Charles Macklin, Comedian, Deceased* (London: 1797).

names and purchase prices).⁷ It is a fairly standard auction catalogue. It promotes Macklin's collection as 'A General Assemblage of Books in the Various Languages', while also drawing attention, through its title-page, to some particular treasures: 'Nuict's de Straparole, 5 vol. on vellum; Harding's Shakspeare; Wood's Athenæ ... Chronicle History of King Lear and Richard II. by Shakspeare ... several excellent French Books' and others. It then presents the day-by-day schedule for the auction, with the collection divided into 1117 lots with many lots including multi-volume works, bundles of titles, and also other unnamed 'others'. The first three lots, for example, are:

- 1 Comenius Janua Linguarum, or Gate of Languages Unlocked, 1650, and 11 others
- 2 Ainsworth's Latin Dictionary, by Thomas, vol. 1st, 1758, and 18 others
- 3 Latine Primitives, wants title, Gradus. Mair's Tyra's Dictionary, *Edin.* 1760. Caninii's Gr. Grammar, *Lond.* 1624, and 1 other⁸

There are signs that it was a challenge to organise the 'General Assemblage' that Macklin had accumulated. At the start of the catalogue keen taxonomic intentions are in evidence with a heading for a section of 'Dictionaries and Grammars *Octavo et Infra.*', but the content is not entirely true to the heading and the categorisations remain loose as the catalogue progresses. The few further headings that are included – '*Octavo & 12mo. French.*', '*Histories, Miscellanies, &c. Octavo and 12mo.*', '*Mathematical and Medical. 8vo. and 12mo.*', '*Poetry and Plays. 8vo and 12mo.*' and the like – provide little true systemisation of the mass. Potential bidders were presented with a partially organised list, and because of the unspecified 'others', they would have had to have consulted the books themselves in order to see all that was on offer.⁹

In addition to the printed catalogue, there is a manuscript catalogue, held by the Houghton Library, and it is this that forms the main foundation for the discussion here. Running to over 150 pages, this document must have been produced as part of the preparatory

⁷ There is potential for further research in these annotations: they may illuminate the spectrum of buyers that the auction attracted, the monetary value of the collection and also its afterlife following its dispersal.

⁸ *Catalogue of the Library*, 3.

⁹ The difficulties of navigating the catalogue faced by those at the auction are, of course, shared by anyone attempting a scholarly investigation of the collection. To make the catalogue data more amenable to analysis – for the current essay and future research – the titles listed in the printed catalogue have been entered into a digital catalogue, using the online application *Librarything*. This catalogue is a *Librarything* 'Legacy Library' and is publicly available here: <https://www.librarything.com/profile/CharlesMacklin>. I am grateful to Rebecca Vollan who undertook the data entry and classification of the works.

work for the auction, and there is much that it illuminates that is not disclosed by the subsequent print catalogue. The manuscript provides a more complete list of titles – with none obscured as ‘others’ – and it also reveals how Macklin’s books were arranged in his home. It actually includes two inventories. There is an initial listing, of around a hundred pages, which records the titles as they were shelved. It begins by listing the volumes in the ‘Front Room’ on the ‘Shelves on left hand beginning at the bottom’. It moves through the various shelves in this room and then on to the ‘Middle Room’, where most of the books were kept, starting with the ‘Shelves on the Right hand begin^g at the bottom’, and then onwards across dozens of shelves and through many hundreds of titles.¹⁰ It then presents a second list of around fifty pages – a neater, more systematic revision of the first – which again indicates shelf positions but which reveals, when compared with the first, that some rearrangement of the library had been undertaken between the drawing up of the lists.¹¹ The rearrangement was presumably a part of the process of organising the books into auction lots, and side-by-side the two lists afford a glimpse of the work that lay behind an eighteenth-century book auction. For scholars of Macklin, though, it is the first list that is the more useful: it gives the fuller inventory, while the shelving notes offer both a vivid impression of the imposing physical presence of the collection and clues as to how Macklin may have used his library.

We must, of course, be cautious about treating these catalogues as keys to Macklin’s reading. ‘[P]ossessing books’, as Abigail Williams warns in her recent *The Social Life of Books*, ‘was not the same as reading them. [...] A catalogue on its own will never really enable us to understand the correlation between the listing of a book as a possession and its significance for its owner’.¹² We will never truly establish what Macklin read, ignored, admired, yawned over, scorned and so on, and, in fact, we cannot be sure that he controlled everything that ended up in the collection. Book gifts may have been imposed upon him and we should remember that Macklin did not live alone; to what extent was ‘the Library of the Late Mr. Charles Macklin’ also the library of his wife? She had, according to James Kirkman, ‘many polite accomplishments’ and may have been a keen reader, despite her decision to sell

¹⁰ Extra-illustrated James Thomas Kirkman, *Memoirs of the life of Charles Macklin*, 2 vols. (London, 1799), Harvard University, Houghton Library, TS 943.2 (I: pt. 2).

¹¹ The second list also omits many titles given in the first – hence its shorter length – but it may be that the manuscript is missing parts or that sections in the first list were deemed adequate for the division of the collection into bundled lots and the production of the print catalogue.

¹² Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth-Century Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 108.

the collection.¹³ It is impossible, in short, to use the catalogue as a watertight index of Macklin's interests and to conclude, for example, that since the library contained Thomas Chatterton's *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* he had any relationship with Chatterton's work. But it is reasonable to be somewhat less suspicious of trends and tendencies within the whole, and it is worth searching the catalogues for patterns from which inferences about Macklin might guardedly be drawn. Before beginning such an examination, though, it should be observed that the collection which was listed in 1797 was, remarkably, not the result of a lifetime of acquisition but was actually a type of *replacement* library – a fact which has implications for how we interpret the catalogues and which also points to the depths of Macklin's bibliophilia.

Macklin's lost library

'Crossing the Irish Sea', Craig Bailey observes in his study of eighteenth-century migration from Ireland to London, could be a 'dangerous undertaking'.¹⁴ Macklin was fortunate to sail those treacherous waters unscathed numerous times – unlike several theatre colleagues, such as Theophilus Cibber, who died alongside many others when the *Dublin Trader* went down in 1758. Macklin did, though, lose much his personal property in a 1772 accident and this included an extensive book collection. Little is known about this earlier library, except that Macklin valued it very highly and that it was shipped after him when he moved from London to start an engagement at Dublin's Crow Street Theatre.¹⁵ Kirkman describes the loss:

When Mr. Macklin left London, in 1771, he shipped all his furniture, plate, pictures, and a very choice and valuable library of books, worth upwards of five thousand pounds, on board a Dublin trader, then lying in the River Thames, but, unfortunately, this ship was stranded on the Coast of Ireland, off Arklow, and almost the whole of Mr. Macklin's property was lost. What he had to regret most was the destruction of his books and manuscripts, the labour of many years close study and application.¹⁶

¹³ James Thomas Kirkman, *Memoirs of the life of Charles Macklin*, 2 vols. (London, 1799), I, 405.

¹⁴ Craig Bailey, *Irish London: Middle-class Migration in the Global Eighteenth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 43.

¹⁵ For a fuller discussion of the shipwreck and Macklin's loss, see Paul Goring, 'The Sinking of Charles Macklin's Scholarship', *Notes & Queries*, 66.4 (2019), 577–81.

¹⁶ Kirkman, *Life of Charles Macklin*, 46.

Sources suggest that Macklin visited the wreck himself to salvage what he could, for it was reported that, as the *Leinster Journal* put it, ‘the greatest part of the cargo will be saved’, but there was little of his property that survived.¹⁷ He fell ill that spring – perhaps because of his foray into the sea – and when news reached his daughter Maria in London, she wrote with concern: ‘I sincerely lament the loss of your most valuable Library, it was indeed a dreadful Stroke. Yet I had rather all the Books in the World had been lost sooner than you shou’d have suffer’d such an Illness or have ventur’d down to the Wreck in such Weather’.¹⁸ Her singling out of the library – with no mention of the other possessions – is suggestive of her awareness that Macklin valued his books above all other chattels. She wrote a further letter that day and offered her ailing father the type of medicine a bibliophile would most appreciate: ‘pray let me know if there are any Books of any kind that you want that I can send you’.¹⁹

It was a loss which could partly be translated into monetary terms, and Macklin became involved in a drawn-out insurance claim involving a London broker. In December 1772, Maria wrote to him to report a lack of progress: ‘The affair remains just as it did, & will do so till you send over more Proofs to satisfy the Insurers that you had Goods on board to the Value of the sum insured’.²⁰ As Kirkman’s report suggests, though, not all that was gone could have a price put upon it. Macklin’s library was a truly personal collection in that he had not only assembled it but had used it as a basis for his studies – perhaps annotating the books as he read – and his own writings, in manuscript form, had grown out of his intellectual engagement with the collection and, without having reached a printing press, were gathered with the books. Macklin lived a further quarter of a century after the shipwreck, but he never managed to publish a work of theatrical scholarship. In Kirkman’s account, the shipwreck was the main reason for this gap in his output and legacy:

It was not Mr. Macklin alone that had to lament this loss; the Stage, and the whole of the dramatic world, suffered very materially by the shipwreck; the merciless waves destroyed his Treatises on the *Science of Acting*, on the *Works of Shakespeare*, on

¹⁷ *Leinster Journal*, 22–25 January 1772.

¹⁸ 6 May 1772, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Extra-illustrated Kirkman, TS 943.2 (II: pt. 1), 54.

¹⁹ 6 May 1772. This letter was auctioned by International Autograph Auctions Ltd on 5 July 2018, with an image that was consulted on 10 April 2019. The site is no longer live. The other letter of 6 May cited above states that she will write him a further letter.

²⁰ 9 December 1772, Folger Shakespeare Library, Y.c.5381 (2).

Comedy, Tragedy, and many other subjects, together with several manuscripts of infinite value and importance to the British Theatre.²¹

Much of Kirkman's biography was based on late conversations with Macklin, and so what we probably have here is a rendering of Macklin's own version of the significance of the 1772 disaster. The state of completion and quality of the lost treatises is not known, but what is clear – if Macklin was indeed the source – is that Macklin saw himself as having been cheated by the waves of the intellectual status he deserved as a scholarly author. And this may partly explain why, after the shipwreck, he zealously embarked upon a process of re-establishing a rich and imposing library – a personal resource, but also an outward sign of his learning which he never came to prove through scholarly publications bearing his name.

Exactly how much of the new library Macklin acquired after 1772 is unclear because we do not know what survived the shipwreck – and also what might have been stored in London and never been put on board. In line with Kirkman's account of some materials having survived, the printed auction catalogue lists a number of items that are suggestive of Macklin having not lost everything. For example, it concludes with 11 lots of manuscripts and among the named items are 'Mr. Macklin's Case' and 'a Will and no Will, or a Bone for the Lawyers'.²² There is no good reason for manuscript versions of either of these works to have been produced after 1772 – *The Case of Charles Macklin* had been published in 1743; *A Will and No Will* was not played after the 1750s – and so we can probably deem them survivors or non-travellers. The catalogue also includes a sequence of lots (817–823) presenting works published before 1772 described as 'stained'; were these volumes perhaps salvaged from the Arklow waters yet left with marks of their misadventure? Whatever survived, Macklin was clearly deeply bereft and despite his age – more than three score years and ten by that time – his response was to set about gathering the new library that would come to pack the home he made in London following his return from Dublin in 1773.

A tour across Macklin's shelves using the manuscript catalogue

While Macklin valued books he was relatively casual when it came to their arrangement. Examining his library via the manuscript catalogue, it soon becomes apparent that a large proportion of the collection was shelved in a largely unsystematic way. The list begins with a

²¹ Kirkman, *Life of Charles Macklin*, 46–47.

²² *Catalogue of the Library*, 41.

heading 'Folio Quarto' (suggesting that the cataloguer may have been learning about book sizes on the job) and what follows is a long and largely miscellaneous collection of titles running to some 40 pages – getting on for half the library. The shelf locations are noted but within this sequence there is no heading indicative of subject area, and, in fact, despite the promise of 'Folio Quarto', format turns out not to be an organising principle as folio and octavo volumes are found rubbing shoulders with the quartos.²³ The listing shows some thematic groupings – seven works of grammar are gathered together, for example – but much is randomly ordered with sequences such as 'Rusden on Bees' (1679), 'The Civil Wars of England' (1680), 'The High German Doctor' (1720), 'Montagu's Letters' (1777) and 'The Historian's Guide' (1688).²⁴ Macklin may have been able to navigate this assortment of volumes – and it should be noted that there are many multi-volume works in this section which probably stood out visually – but the lack of order (plus further evidence later in the catalogue) suggests that this part of the collection, filling the 'Front Room' and reaching into the 'Middle Room', was the less regularly used part of the library. Thereafter, the catalogue shows the care of organisation at work and thematic groupings begin to appear in the list, but the whole library was not trawled to gather the volumes which 'should' have been placed within particular sections. The miscellaneous section and another such section at the end of the catalogue both contain many works which would have been appropriate within the generically defined gatherings.

The first generically headed section is 'Divinity', filling six pages of the list. It is, of course, quite normal to find a substantial gathering of religious and theological works in an eighteenth-century book collection, but it is noteworthy that this should appear as an organised section in Macklin's library, given that he was not known for great devotion. Brought up with a Catholic mother and a Presbyterian father, Macklin, according to his early biographer William Cooke, 'inclined to her religion' but only 'as much as a man may be said to belong to any religion, who was so careless as he was about its ceremonies and injunctions'. Aged around forty, Macklin converted to Protestantism – and notable here is a story that it was a book that brought about his change. Cooke writes that Macklin picked up 'a

²³ Some headings in the manuscript may have been lost through cropping, since the leaves have been mounted and bound. The titles in this section, though, suggest no thematic or generic arrangement.

²⁴ Titles are presented here as given in the manuscript, which uses many shortened forms. To retain a sense of the catalogue's register, many other titles are presented in this way. In some cases, where clarity is lost by retaining the manuscript form, italics are used and the titles are given as generally recognised.

little book upon a stall called “The Funeral of the Mass” while strolling through Lincoln’s Inn Fields. Struck by the title, Macklin bought it and ‘read it two or three times over very attentively, the consequence of which was, that he deserted his mother church, and became a convert to the Protestant religion’.²⁵ The paucity of references to his religion in early accounts, though, suggest that he gave little attention to matters of faith, and it is significant that the Divinity section contains mostly older publications. There are many seventeenth-century titles and just four dated later than 1772, the year of the shipwreck, from which the most concrete conclusion to be drawn is that post-1772 Macklin was not, at least through book purchases, keeping up with the very latest sermons and currents of thought within divinity. Indeed two of the four more recent publications – ‘Keach’s Scripture Metaphors’ (1779), ‘Bunyan’s Holy War’ (1775) – were not new as such but reprints of seventeenth-century works. However, one cannot definitively equate a scarcity of new titles in a library with a lack of interest in a subject on the part of the owner – something which the next section of the catalogue eloquently demonstrates.

That section is headed ‘Law’, a topic which preoccupied Macklin more than most matters, aside from the theatre. Through his trial for the killing of Thomas Hallam in 1735, Macklin developed a keen interest in the law and he may be said almost to have had a legal career as he pursued later cases, fighting in the courts for the rights of performers (in the 1740s and 1770s) and fiercely defending his authorial rights to *Love à la Mode*. It is almost inevitable that his library should have had a designated ‘Law’ section, and yet it is more modest than might be expected, running to only two and a half pages in the catalogue, and containing just seventy-one titles. As in the ‘Divinity’ section, many of the books were timeworn – there are 21 seventeenth-century titles and one work, ‘Commonwealth of England’, from 1583 (presumably *De Republica Anglorum* by Sir Thomas Smith). All but a handful of publications pre-date the shipwreck, but among the later works are titles that do point to Macklin’s engagement with contemporary legal matters. From 1772, Macklin had two copies of Henry Dagge’s *Considerations of Criminal Law*, a substantial and important critique of English penal law.²⁶ He also had three volumes of George Wilson’s *Reports of the*

²⁵ William Cooke, *Memoirs of Charles Macklin, Comedian* (London, 1804), 75.

²⁶ Dagge’s work was expanded for a 1774 edition in three volumes; Macklin’s library appears to have two copies of the one-volume 1772 version. For a brief account of Dagge’s position within the philosophy of the law, see Lindsay Farmer, ‘Of Treatises and Textbooks: The Literature of Criminal Law in Nineteenth-Century Britain’ in *Law Books in Action: Essays on the Anglo-American Legal Treatise*, ed. Angela Fernandez and Markus D. Dubber (Oxford and Portland: Hart Publishing, 2012), 145–164 (149).

cases argued and adjudged in the King's Courts at Westminster (1784) and five volumes of Sir James Burrow's *Reports of Cases Adjudged in the Court of King's Bench* (1785). Macklin knew the legal institutions of London well – it was in the Court of King's Bench that his own case in the long controversy surrounding his 1773 production of *Macbeth* had been heard and judged by William Murray, the Lord Chief Justice and Earl of Mansfield.²⁷ These volumes in his library suggest that, well into his eighties, Macklin liked to remain in touch with the proceedings of the courts. He also had a modern edition of a fifteenth-century legal work, 'Fortescue on the Laws of England', published in 1775, the year of his own victory in the Court of King's Bench; perhaps this work by Sir John Fortescue, an early Chief Justice of that same court, was acquired in 1775 in recognition of his triumph at the end of a drawn-out and taxing dispute. Alternatively, it may be a sign of Macklin's interest in the history of the law alongside his personal engagement with contemporary legal matters. If Macklin did lose all or most of his legal library in 1772, he built up its replacement primarily through the acquisition of older volumes, and the catalogue suggests that antiquarian or historical interest dictated many of the choices rather than an ambition to build up a comprehensive modern collection. The library includes, for example, 'Blount's Law Dictionary' from 1670, but, perhaps remarkably, there is no volume of William Blackstone's celebrated *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–69).

Following 'Law', there is a small collection of medical books,²⁸ and then follows the largest headed section in the library, running to twenty pages of the manuscript list: 'French Books'. With language being the ordering principle, this section has a wide generic reach and includes dictionaries, grammars, histories, sermons, prose fiction, and more. There are also many volumes of French drama and works on the theatre and acting, such as two editions of 'Observations sur l'art du Comedien' (1774 and 1775) by Jean Nicolas Servandoni D'Hannetaire. Here the catalogue confirms what is clear from other sources: that Macklin was very attentive to what was happening in the world of the theatre across the Channel. Gaining access to the developments that were occurring within his profession on the continent was doubtless one of the greatest benefits of developing his French proficiency, which he apparently did late in life: 'at sixty', according to John Bernard's *Retrospections of the Stage*,

²⁷ For more on Macklin and Mansfield, see David Worrall's chapter in this volume.

²⁸ A title in the manuscript here has been cropped but it can be deciphered as 'Physick'; the section is headed thus in the second list.

‘he was versed in [the grammar] of the Latin, Greek, French, and Italian languages’.²⁹ But French was also crucial to participation in European intellectual life and the library suggests that Macklin was also interested in following the currents of French Enlightenment thought: the catalogue presents many philosophical and scientific works by such luminaries as Rousseau, Voltaire, Diderot, Fontenelle, and Montesquieu. French appears to have been Macklin’s preferred language for prose fiction too. The library contains relatively little prose fiction: a tally of titles in the print catalogue presents around seventy titles that may be categorised as such, but it is notable that over half of those are French-language works. Overall, the section of French books constitutes around a fifth of the library, and many of the titles are more recent publications, including many published after the year of the shipwreck; there are also older volumes but the bulk of the French works have publication dates from the middle decades of the eighteenth century. This part of the library points conclusively to French thought and culture having become a very particular interest for Macklin in his later years.

Thereafter six headed sections of the catalogue present what is entirely expected in the library of a busy actor and playwright whose career had spanned many dozens of roles. They present Macklin’s drama collection, subdivided according to genre and print format: ‘Quarto Plays Comedies’; ‘Tragedies. Quarto’; ‘Quarto. Operas, Pastorals’; ‘Comedies. Octavo’; ‘Tragedies Octavo’; and ‘Operas, Farces, Pastorals etc. Octavo’. Together these sections fill nine pages of the catalogue (five of them half pages) and they present altogether around 180 titles. Reflecting a significant shift in the printing of dramatic works during Macklin’s lifetime, the quartos are, with just a few exceptions, earlier publications, dating from the late seventeenth century and first few years of George I’s reign. Then the collection reflects the later preference for the octavo format, and most of these smaller volumes date from the period of Macklin’s career as an actor.³⁰ Many of the titles, though, were published long before the shipwreck, so if Macklin was gathering them post-1772 then he was acquiring them largely as used books. This part of the library was clearly a professional resource, but the catalogue shows that Macklin continued to add dramatic works to his library as he neared his final

²⁹ John Bernard, *Retrospections of the Stage*, 2 vols. (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830), II, 120.

³⁰ On changes in the typical book format for the publication of plays, see Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *The Publication of Plays in London, 1660–1800: Playwrights, Publishers, and the Market* (London: The British Library, 2015). Milhous and Hume divide the period into ‘The Age of the Quarto, 1660–1715’ and ‘The Era of Octavo and Duodecimo, 1715–1800’.

performance in 1789 and during his retirement, and that he maintained an interest in what the very latest authors for the stage were writing in the 1780s and 1790s. He had two works by the soldier-turned-dramatist John Burgoyne: *The Heiress* (1786) and *The Maid of the Oaks* (1794). He had *Julia, Or, The Italian Lover* (1787) by his fellow countryman, Robert Jephson, and *Zorinski* (1795) by the up-and coming Thomas Morton. By the largely unknown John Macaulay he had *The Genius of Ireland: A Masque* (1785), a title which probably appealed to him. The drama section provides confirmation of what was obviously a true passion, and it shows that that passion never left him. It should be noted also that his collection of plays was considerably larger than that shown in these six designated sections in the catalogue. The less organised part of the library (listed in the catalogue's first 40 pages) includes numerous dramatic works: 'Beaumont and Fletcher's Plays in 10 Vols' (1750), 'Johnson's Shakespeare 8 Vols' (1765), 'Johnson's Shakespeare 12 Vols' (1771), 'Massinger's Works 4 Vols' (1759), six volumes of 'Anonymous Comedies' (1760), and many others. If there was a policy determining the arrangement, multi-volume runs of drama were shelved in the front room, while individually published plays were gathered in the drama section in the middle room, but it was not strictly applied.

In the final twelve pages of the manuscript catalogue (that is, of the first of the two manuscript inventories) there is a return to a mixing of genres, but when compared with the earlier miscellaneous section there is a much higher proportion of newer publications, with many works published in the 1770s and 1780s. It seems that this was the place for 'latest acquisitions' and contemporary material; alongside the dated titles, a small number of summary entries, such as 'Magazines & Reviews 39 numbers', are indicative of such a profile. Again we cannot point to a strict policy since the first miscellaneous section includes some later publications, but the catalogue is suggestive of such a leaning. Most importantly, we may presume that this later section, with the large number of post-1772 titles, lists considered purchases and that the titles found on these final twelve pages are reflective of Macklin's actual interests; the same cannot be said of the earlier miscellaneous section which, with its many older titles, could well include some job-lot purchases.

There are further plays here and works of dramatic criticism and theatre history – for example, three volumes of 'Dramatic Miscellanies' (1784), 'The Faithful Shepherd' (1782), 'Remarks on Shakespeare' (1783) and a life of the actor John Henderson (1777). There are also French works (more Voltaire, for example), and some works, such as 'Divinity Lectures' (1775), which might have found a place in the 'Divinity' section, although these are very few, suggesting again that Macklin did not devote great energies to religious matters in his later

years. He did, though, take a keen interest in the politico-theological controversies surrounding the Dissenter and scientist Joseph Priestley in 1787: ‘Letters to Priestley by the rev^d Mr Madan’ (1787), ‘Remarks on David Levi’s Letters to Dr Priestly’ (1787), and ‘A Letter to D^r Priestley’ (1787) all appear in his library. There are also further medical works and a good many additions to the collection of law books. Macklin followed closely the legal work of Lord Mansfield, to whose rulings he was personally indebted. He owned, for example, ‘Judgment of the Earl of Mansfield on a Cause’ (1784) and ‘A Letter to the Jurors of Great Britain occasioned by an Opinion of the Court of King’s Bench, read by Lord Chief Justice Mansfield in the Case of the King v Woodfall’ (1785). Unsurprisingly we also find matter relating to his own past legal actions: ‘Arguments of the Council in the Cause of the conspiracy against Macklin’ (1774).

These final pages also list a substantial poetry collection – around three dozen volumes, largely from the 1770s, which appear as a grouping within the other miscellaneous arranged material. But what is most striking here are the catalogue’s indications of Macklin’s interest in contemporary politics and of his following of ongoing events and debates, both local and international. He appears to have kept a close eye on the American Revolution, through reports of the most important developments – for example, ‘Votes & proceedings of the American Congress’ (1774) – and works of opinion such as ‘Reflections upon the present state of England, and the Independence of America’ (1782) by Thomas Day, a supporter of the American colonists. Military matters were of ongoing interest to him, as suggested by copies of ‘Advice to the Officers of the British Army’ (1782) and ‘History of the Campaigne of 1794’ (1794). He had works examining the British political system, such as ‘Thoughts on equal representation’ (1783) by Francis Basset, and also works conveying what was going on at the heart of that system, including a 1780 ‘Speech of Edmund Burke’ and ‘Fox & Pit’s Speeches in the House of Commons on June 8th ’84’ (1784). His library contained both conservative and liberal opinion; Burke is there but so too is Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* (listed with an erroneous ‘The’ in the title and dated 1791, so presumably the first part). Macklin supported the Whigs; he exercised his franchise, and we know that in a Westminster election in 1796 he gave his vote to Charles James Fox.³¹ But his library was no echo chamber of his own views, and the catalogue suggests that he informed himself of the various sides of the debates in the heated political climate of his last years.

³¹ See the database within ‘London Electoral History 1700–1850’: <http://leh.ncl.ac.uk/LEH-Database.html>

He particularly followed Irish news and the politics of Anglo-Irish relations. He retained a passionate interest in his native country and it is known that he remained involved in London's Irish social and intellectual networks until his final years. His library reflects this strand of his sociability with many works concerning Ireland, and notably a clutch of titles published in the wake of the establishment of the Irish Parliament in 1782. The catalogue lists 'Tucker on England and Ireland', 'Reflections on the Trade between England & Ireland' and 'Plan for settling the Government of Ireland', all from 1785. He had two copies of John Magee's 'An Irishman's reception in London' (1787) which was doubtless of personal interest to him, and he also followed Irish theatrical news, notably the passage of the Irish Stage Bill in the 1780s. He had, for example, 'Candid remarks on the Stage Bill now defending' (1785) and two copies of 'Case of the Stage in Ireland' (1786). These titles were doubtless of great personal interest but they would also have rendered him a knowledgeable participant in the intellectual circles in which he moved. They were published while Macklin, for example, was a governor and select committee member of the Benevolent Society of St. Patrick, founded in 1783. He was a loyal attender of this charitable society's anniversary dinners, and his library suggests that at such events he would have been a well-informed conversationalist and disputant on a wide range of contemporary Irish topics.³²

Overall, the titles in this final section show Macklin to be a serious reader who, in his later years, was deeply engaged in what was happening in the world and in the ongoing debates which surrounded a whole spectrum of issues. Collectively the titles also, of course, display Macklin's fundamental bibliophilia, and it is worth noting that his own library included two copies of the vast 'Catalogue of the Library of Topham Beauclerk' (1781). Had Macklin been one of the buyers at the 50-day auction of Beauclerk's books? Perhaps Beauclerk's 30,000 volume library was something to aspire to – even for an octogenarian.

Macklin and Enlightenment learning

One basic effect of conducting an overview of Macklin's library is the solidification of the idea of him as a serious, engaged thinker. It allows us to recognise better the intellectual leanings of a figure who published plays and pamphlets concerning controversies he was involved in but was frustrated – perhaps because of a shipwreck, perhaps for other reasons – in his ambitions to produce scholarly works on the art of acting, drama, the history of the

³² Craig Bailey, 'From Innovation to Emulation: London's Benevolent Society of St. Patrick', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 27 (2012), 162-84 (176).

stage and more, and so has rarely been remembered as a figure within the eighteenth-century world of learning. David O'Shaughnessy has described how 'Macklin's Enlightenment credentials have been lost in plain sight to modern critics', despite being recognised in his time, and O'Shaughnessy has worked to rehabilitate Macklin 'as a writer with a coherent intellectual and political vision'.³³ By considering the traces of Macklin's library – the toolbox of the intellectual – we are able, in a very general sense, to advance that rehabilitation, whilst the pursuit of particular threads within the library's wide-ranging content may afford a refinement of our knowledge of Macklin as a participant in the intellectual culture of his time.

The long story of Macklin's life offers more than a few opportunities to dwell upon non-achievement as an intellectual: the ridicule that his 'British Inquisition' prompted in the 1750s, the rioting that followed his historically researched production of *Macbeth* in the 1770s, as well as the treatises that never appeared. The library may act as a counterweight here, providing an indication of Macklin's role as a node within contemporary networks of learned life. In this respect, it is important to recall the place the library had in Macklin's home and that it had a social function as well as serving as a personal resource. At Tavistock Row, in the heart of London's theatre district, Macklin not only read and studied but also entertained numerous guests: friends and acquaintances, established colleagues from the theatre world, aspiring actors seeking the advice of the 'Nestor of the stage', students of elocution and more. The manuscript catalogue, with its shelving notes, shows that Macklin surrounded himself with a mass of books and that visitors to his 'Front Room' and 'Middle Room' would have encountered him against a powerful and eloquent backdrop – walls of spines, asserting with heavy presence the scholarly inclinations of the host and creating an environment which would foster erudite exchange. The actor John Bernard was one of those who experienced Macklin as a conversational partner. In his *Retrospections of the Stage*, he described how Macklin spent his last decades 'laying up his knowledge'; he was not uncritical of how Macklin handled this knowledge, suggesting that 'prejudice spoiled it, as heat mostly does grain', but importantly he recalled Macklin as someone keen to engage in learned discussion: 'he had two of the qualities of an instructive companion, – his information was extensive, and his ideas were specific and practical'.³⁴ In an age which revered the art of conversation, such contributions to intellectual culture, whilst they left little residue when

³³ "'Bit, by some mad whig": Charles Macklin and the Theater of Irish Enlightenment', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, (2017) 80:4, 559–84, (560, 567).

³⁴ Bernard, *Retrospections of the Stage*, II, 76.

compared with the work of Enlightenment authors, should not be discounted. We know also that Macklin was prepared to lend his books to those around him. In a note to Charles Grignion we find him sending compliments and politely asking for the return of a volume: ‘if he has done with the French book he sent him with Lord Bacon’s Tracts he should be obliged to him if he would send it by the bearer’.³⁵ Macklin, in short, both absorbed knowledge and played an active part in its circulation.

As we consider Macklin’s ‘Enlightenment credentials’, though, we should not overlook his well-known pugnaciousness and his apparent desire not only to *be* a man of learning but also to assert that identity and gain recognition for it. Edward Abbott Parry, a nineteenth-century biographer, described Macklin as ‘a self-willed and self-educated man, who [...] full of knowledge and conceit, burned to impart to the universe some crumbs of the information he had acquired with such difficulty, and to receive in return the homage due to a philosopher and a man of learning’.³⁶ This is harshly put, but accounts of Macklin suggest there to be truth in the depiction of him as a man with much to prove, and there is strong evidence to suggest that Macklin’s library played a part in his self-representation. Bernard’s memoir includes a vivid depiction of Macklin’s asserting his scholarly prowess in a scene which sees him receiving Samuel Johnson into his book-lined home. A line from the passage has already been quoted as an epigraph to this chapter; it gains resonance when it is placed in the broader context of Bernard’s account of the two famously combative personalities engaging in a tense battle of brains:

When Macklin grew into notice as a man of letters [...] the Ursa Major of literature paid the Ursa Major of theatricals a visit, to ascertain the extent of his pretensions. Macklin showed him his library, and seemed to have a sufficient knowledge of every work it contained. Then they sat down to converse, and rambled over a variety of subjects, upon all of which Macklin kept his legs, to the Doctor’s satisfaction. [...] their strength seemed to be equal. The Doctor, nevertheless, was desirous of overthrowing him before they parted, and touched on the score of his classic attainments. Greek and Latin the actor knew as intimately as French and Italian, and defended himself grammatically and colloquially, from every thrust of the lexicographer. Johnson, growing more determined from the failure of his attempts, at length addressed him with a string of sounds perfectly unintelligible. ‘What’s that, Sir?’ inquired Macklin. ‘Hebrew!’ answered Johnson. ‘And what do I know of Hebrew?’ – ‘But a man of your understanding, Mr. Macklin, ought to be acquainted with every language!’ The Doctor’s face glowed with a smile of triumph. – ‘Och neil

³⁵ Private Collection, PC1/6/31 NAD540, by permission of the owner and Julian Pooley, The Nichols Archive Project.

³⁶ Edward Abbott Parry, *Charles Macklin* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1891), 127.

end eigen vonsht hom boge vaureen!’ exclaimed Macklin. Johnson was now dumb-founded, and inquired the name of the lingua? ‘Irish, Sir!’ – ‘Irish!’ exclaimed the Doctor. ‘Do you think I ever studied that?’ – ‘But a man of your understanding, Doctor Johnson, ought to be acquainted with every language!’³⁷

In this telling, Johnson’s visit is a deliberate testing of Macklin – of his ‘pretensions’: there is an underlying idea that his intellectualism may be a pose and that he is an imposter in the world of letters. The library performs a key function in Macklin’s passing of the test: it is something initially to be *shown*, but possession alone is not enough, and Macklin must also demonstrate his intimacy with his own collection. And as the scene develops we come to see Macklin triumphant: the autodidact from rural Donegal standing up to and ultimately overthrowing ‘the greatest Genius of the present age’, as Charlotte Lennox had dubbed Johnson.³⁸ Heightening Macklin’s victory, of course, is the fact that he uses the language of his native Ireland to trounce his supercilious English guest: this is a colonial encounter as well as an intellectual one – a strike not only for Macklin but also for Ireland, with Johnson’s baffled response to hearing Irish providing a reminder of the ongoing oppression, in terms of both attitudes and power, of Ireland and its people. It is, of course, a preposterously pro-Macklin account and, in fact, it is likely that it was Macklin himself who provided the story.³⁹ This may explain the narrative bias yet, while some veracity may slip away when we consider Macklin as the source, the episode loses none of its suggestiveness regarding Macklin’s character. Indeed, the idea that he told this tale about himself brings into even sharper focus the sense of him as profoundly driven both by scholarly passion and by a desire for respect and recognition as a man of letters.

Macklin’s books, then, can be said to have performed a declarative function. That should not be taken to imply that Macklin – the brilliant actor – was ever a man of masks and that offstage he was merely playing the part of the scholar, with his books providing the setting and props for his performances within the theatre of his home. Acknowledging the force of the library as a domestic spectacle does not undermine the idea of Macklin as a sincerely scholarly figure, but it opens up for an understanding of Macklin’s intellectual ‘project’, if we may call it that, as one involving a thread of assertive image building of which his imposing library may be treated as both a part and a sign.

³⁷ Bernard, *Retrospections of the Stage*, II, 125–26.

³⁸ Charlotte Lennox, *The Female Quixote*, 2 vols. (London, 1752), II, 314

³⁹ Appleton, *An Actor’s Life*, 198.

There are some entries in the manuscript catalogue that might actually be used to support an argument that Macklin's acquisition of books was sometimes driven by vanity. At the start of the listing of French books there is a series of titles of French intellectual works, and included in the cataloguer's description of them is a notable detail: the pages are uncut. The list includes, for example, '1775 Encyclopedie 42 Vols in boards uncut 4^{to}', '1770 Questions sur l'encyclopedie 9 Vols 8^o boards uncut', and also from 1770 'L'Esprit de l'encyclopedie 5 Vols 8^o boards uncut'. Macklin, we discover here, had acquired numerous volumes – among them key works of French Enlightenment thought – and had never actually used them. How we interpret that information is, though, open to question. We might well want to use it to cast doubt upon, to use O'Shaughnessy's phrase again, the 'Enlightenment credentials' that Macklin seemed to be so keen to establish, and thus see Macklin as, in part, a poseur in the world of letters. Is there indeed a better emblem of eighteenth-century intellectual posturing than a copy of *L'Encyclopédie* standing in full view on a shelf and yet untouched?

We do not, though, have to treat these pointers to unread material with such cynicism. An owner of an unread book is not necessarily without intentions to read it or refer to it, plus a large collection is not necessarily assembled purely for the individual collector's use. As Christina Lupton makes clear in her *Reading and the Making of Time in the Eighteenth Century* (quoted earlier in a second epigraph) the activity of reading cannot be separated from questions of time, and eighteenth-century reading, like modern reading, was often conducted in fits and starts in the time snatched between other activities.⁴⁰ Many books lie dormant awaiting their moment of activation, and however tempting it is to find performance in the off-stage activities of a great actor, Macklin's uncut *L'Encyclopédie* may be seen as an untapped resource with future potential – either for Macklin, when he could find the time, or for his acquaintances. When we consider Macklin's library as a whole, we certainly find enough evidence of genuine bookishness to allow for such a reading.

⁴⁰ Christina Lupton, *Reading and the Making of Time in the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018).