

<p><i>The Rivals</i></p> <p>(first performed in 1775)</p> <p>By</p> <p>Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751 – 1816)</p>	<p>Book Discussion</p> <p>Irish Cultural Center / McClelland Library</p> <p>Norton Room</p> <p>October 29</p> <p>10:30 AM – 12:30 PM</p> <p>Unless otherwise announced, this meeting will be live.</p>
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Discussion Guide:

Prologue: Most of us assume that Irish drama began in 1897 with conversations among William Butler Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Edward Martyn. These first discussions led to the development of a national drama performed in the Abbey Theatre. In reality, theatre in Ireland began much earlier than that as Ireland became a place to try out new plays as well as a place where old actors and tired plays came for final acts. As in other countries, the first plays were performed as part of Corpus Christi and St. George’s Day. As early as 1589 licensed companies of wandering actors were entertaining.

In fact, the first theatre outside of London was established in 1637 in Dublin. One of the early 18th C. theatres in Dublin was the Smock Alley Theatre, where Thomas Sheridan (father of Richard B. Sheridan) was manager. Ireland was also home to a series of Irishmen—William Congreve, George Farquhar, Richard Steele, Oliver Goldsmith, Richard B. Sheridan and others-- who found fame and fortune in London as part of a lively theatre scene (our reading of Shadowplay introduced some of these characters.)

Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the author of our play for this occasion, became the noted manager of the famous Drury Theatre in London (recently the home of The Lion King). The point of this discussion is that Dublin was an active center for theatre and, with London, contributed to the genre during this period.

At this point, we should caution that a play might receive a different reception in Dublin, from the Irish, than it received in London from an English audience. For one thing, the Irish were beginning their nationalist movement (Remember that 1791 is the founding of the United Irishmen by Wolfe Tone.)

Ideas to consider:

- > Consider the play (The Rivals) as a night at the theatre. What would any audience enjoy? What do you enjoy today?
- > As you read The Rivals, what reactions would you expect from an Irish audience? From an English one?
- > What aspects of class consciousness do you detect?
- > Select one character for close analysis. What motivates this character? Why would he/she be popular with the audience?
- > Does R.B. Sheridan stand up for the Irish in his play? Is he a good playwright?
- > How should we characterize this period of literature? Is it Irish? (Defending it as such is the challenge.)

Performance note: There is an excellent production of the play on YouTube.

Looking Ahead→→→The selection for December3 is a challenge for all of us: The Wild Irish Girl by Sydney Owenson, Lady Morgan. It is one of many products by the Anglo-Irish portion of Ireland. You may find it slow going at the beginning, but once you have insight into the plot, the reading will become easier. The discussion guide will be available before Thanksgiving.