Moral Intent in the Plays
And Dramatic Criticism of Richard Steele

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. ENGLISH DRAMA TO THE TIME OF STEELE</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. STEELE'S EARLY PLAYS</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the Study</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Funeral</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot synopsis</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral intent</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterization</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General effectiveness</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lying Lover</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot synopsis</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral intent</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterization</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General effectiveness</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tender Husband</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot synopsis</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral intent</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterization</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General effectiveness</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the chapter</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. STEELE'S PERIODICAL WRITINGS</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the study</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The moral effects of the theatre</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on its audience</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The moral standards of the audience</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steele's standards of a good play</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steele's judgment of others' plays</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakespeare.</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonson</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaumont and Fletcher.</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restoration dramatists</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary dramatists</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steele's reasons for being a critic</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the drama</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. A STUDY OF THE CONSCIOUS LOVERS</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to the study</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot synopsis</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral intent.</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterization</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General effectiveness</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The history of sentimental drama in England began at the end of the seventeenth century and it flourished intermittently for over one hundred years until it was absorbed in the social drama. This form of drama evolved as a reaction to the licentious Restoration drama. The drama of this earlier era mirrored its times; it was light-hearted, unthinking, and for the most part, immoral. By 1700 the more sober dramatists had revolted against the decadence of the stage and were writing a new moral drama, which had as its characters people who were fundamentally good rather than bad. Vice was held up to ridicule and scorn, not offered for imitation as it had been during the Restoration period. Richard Steele's plays are generally identified as early specimens of the sentimental drama. That he was the originator of the sentimental play is a disputed question. This argument is outside the purpose of this study, but it serves to show that Steele has been regarded as one of the first sentimental dramatists.

This study will analyze Steele's plays and his critical articles in The Tatler, The Spectator, and The Guardian in an attempt to discover his moral intent in drama. Steele wrote four plays. Three of these, The Funeral, The Lying
Lover, and The Tender Husband appeared between the years 1701 and 1705. He did not write his last play, The Conscious Lovers until 1722. However, the span of years between the appearance of his third and fourth plays was partially bridged by his periodical writings on the drama, which appeared between 1709 and 1713. An analysis of these writings will afford evidence of Steele's ideas of the purpose of drama, its ideal construction, and its moral value. An analysis of the plays themselves will show Steele's attempt to put his theory into actual practice.

A study of moral intent in the dramatic theory of Richard Steele presents an interesting problem. Since Steele was a critic of drama as well as a playwright, his works have a special value in the study of the theory of sentimental drama. In his periodical writings he performed the function of the drama critic as we know it today. In the evening he attended performances at the play-house and wrote of those performances. He wrote of the play, the author, the actors, and the audience. His writings are of value in studying the sentimental drama of his day, for we are presented with a picture in his periodical essays of the reception of this type of drama as well as its treatment in production.

Studies in the life and works of Richard Steele have emphasized his contribution to periodical literature, since
he was one of the first to adopt that form. Analyses of Steele's periodical writing have been of a general nature. The only study of dramatic criticism in the periodicals is that of Joshua H. Neumann. Mr. Neumann's article, entitled "Shakespearean Criticism in The Tatler and The Spectator" appeared in The Publications of the Modern Language Association in September, 1924. In his analysis of Shakespearean criticism in these periodicals Mr. Neumann emphasized the writing of Addison rather than Steele. The work is a general summation of the Shakespearean material in the two periodicals. Neumann found in the material a breaking away from the neo-classic standard of criticism. He was interested in the attitude expressed in this criticism, which placed its emphasis on virtue rather than rules. Neumann's article did not attempt to come to a conclusion about the critics' own theories of drama. Instead he was content to show their work as an example of the beginning of the romantic criticism which was to become popular in the late eighteenth century. Neumann's article is the only work to appear in print which makes a specific study of the dramatic criticism in Steele's periodical writing.

Steele's plays have received relatively little attention. The Conscious Lovers, Steele's last play, has been given some recognition because of its popularity during the

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1 XXXIX (September, 1924), 612:23.
eighteenth century. It is regarded by some critics as the first completely sentimental comedy. However, the earlier plays of Steele have been almost forgotten. They are listed in the standard works on eighteenth century drama as experiments in sentimental writing. Mention, though not analysis, of the plays is to be found in the biographies of Steele.

G. A. Aitken, in his two-volume *The Life of Richard Steele*, published in London in 1889, attempted no criticism of the plays themselves. He did, however, clarify their place in Steele's writing. Aitken's extensive biography corrected a misconception in the dating of Steele's plays, which had placed *The Tender Husband* as Steele's second play and *The Lying Lover* as his third. Willard Connely's *Sir Richard Steele*, published by Scribner's Sons, New York, in 1934, is the only biography of Steele to appear since that of Aitken. Connely, besides presenting the plays in relation to their appearance in print, included representative excerpts of them in his work. He summarized each play, also, and sketched its reception by the public. However, the plays are scattered through the biography, since they are included as they appeared in Steele's career. Connely treats each separately and makes no attempt to compare them. He does not picture them in their time or compare them to the plays of other dramatists. Thus, he draws no conclusions as to Steele's plays as a whole. The most complete
comparison of Steele's plays with those of other writers is made by Allardyce Nicoll. Nicoll, in his *History of Early Eighteenth Century Drama 1700-1750*, which was published at Cambridge in 1925, discusses the plays as a group and in comparison to those of other writers of Steele's time. He does not attempt a detailed analysis of each of Steele's plays but draws general conclusions about them. As yet no study has appeared which combines an analysis of the plays themselves with an analysis of the periodical dramatic criticism in an attempt to discover Steele's moral intent in drama. This combination of analyses is the subject of this study.

In the plan of this paper the next chapter is devoted to a brief account of English drama from its beginnings in the Church to the time Steele began his dramatic career. A study of these periods with emphasis on the moral drama is important in understanding Steele's own theory as to moral intent in the drama. The influences under which he worked and the nature and extent of his original contribution can be seen more clearly if the trends of dramatic writing to his time are surveyed. Emphasis will be placed upon the Restoration period. Since it was the period closest to Steele's own time, it may be considered to have had the most important influence upon the playwright.

The third chapter will present analyses of Steele's first three plays, *The Funeral*, *The Lying Lover*, and *The
Tender Husband. The plot structure, theme, moral intent, characterization, and general effect of the play from a moralistic standpoint will be analyzed in the order named. The edition of Steele's plays by G. A. Aitken has been used throughout the study. Aitken collated his text with first and later editions of each play, and modernized spelling and punctuation. His is the only complete edition of all four plays, and it also contains two fragments of plays which Steele never completed. Since these are such incomplete specimens, they will not be analyzed in this study. Few conclusions could be drawn from these dramatic bits which would be of influence in ascertaining Steele's moral intent in writing them.

The fourth chapter will be a study of Steele's dramatic criticism as found in The Tatler, The Spectator, and The Guardian. As a moralist Steele wrote of the effect of the theatre on an audience and of the moral standard of that audience. In forming his standard of a good play, Steele studied the elements which he considered important: characterization and the effects for causing emotional responses from an audience. By the standard of a good play which he set, he evaluated the works of other playwrights. Shakespeare, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Wycherly,

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Etherege, and some contemporary dramatists were studied by Steele. Lastly, Steele wrote of his own reactions to the theatre. He explained his interest in the theatre and his reasons for wishing to write about it. Chapter four discusses Steele's criticism under the headings named.

The best available edition of Steele's periodical writings is A. Chalmers' forty-five volume series of *The British Essayists*, which was published in London in 1817. The complete file of the three periodicals is to be found in this series. In the table of contents of each volume the authorship of the articles in that volume is assigned. It is upon this authority that the articles by Steele have been identified.

The final chapter of this study will contain an analysis of Steele's last play, *The Conscious Lovers*. For the analysis of this play as well as Steele's earlier ones the same five categories of study will be used: plot structure, theme, moral intent, characterization, and general effect. G. A. Atken's edition of the plays will be used as the text for the study in this chapter, also. *The Conscious Lovers*, as Steele's last piece of dramatic writing, should embody his principles of morality in drama, as seen in his earlier plays and his dramatic criticism, at their culminating point.
CHAPTER II

ENGLISH DRAMA TO THE TIME OF STEELE

The dramatic theory of Richard Steele must be related to the influences under which he was placed as a playwright at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The purpose of this chapter is to sketch a brief history of the drama in England to the time Steele began to write. Since the most salient factor in Steele's play-writing is his insistence upon the moral uplifting of his audience, emphasis in this chapter will be placed upon the drama as a moral instrument.

English drama had its beginnings in the church. In the middle ages all social life emanated in its different forms from the church; so drama, as a form of expression of a people, naturally sprang from the greatest single influence on that people—the Roman Catholic Church. The first native drama developed from the mass. As the mass, through its accompanying ritual, is a symbolic portrayal of episodes from the life of Christ, it is easily noted that a development into a distinct, dramatic activity might take place. Since the mass was in Latin, and few could understand that language, considerable mimetic action was added to illustrate the spoken word. The feast-days of Christmas and Easter were important for the instruction of the people in the outstanding incidents of Christ's life. Consequently
the religious ritual on these days was strongly symbolic. By the ninth century tropes were written to supplement the ecclesiastical music of these feast-day masses. The most important of these was the *Quem Quaeritis*, a dramatization of the New Testament episode which took place around the tomb of Christ. This trope, though in Latin, was understood by the people because of its accompanying mimetic action. Traces of dramatic construction can be identified in the trope by the use of antiphony, or dialogue. Questions asked by members of the choir personating the three Marys were answered by another member of the choir personating the angel guarding the tomb.

Tropes such as the *Quem Quaeritis* drew crowds to the Church on feast-days. Here was pictorial instruction in religious principles for the laymen. Certainly in its very beginnings English drama served as a moral instrument. So popular a form of instruction was the trope that it was extracted from the body of the mass and became a little playlet, containing dialogue and action. The vernacular was soon interpolated in the Latin text. Gradually playlets written entirely in the vernacular were produced in the church. The churches of England could not hold the crowds who poured in to witness the feast-day tropes. So the drama moved out-of-doors. The tropes were presented on the steps of the churches and in the squares in front of them.
Once the drama was outside the doors of the Church the religious fathers could no longer control it. The Church perceived danger in the secularization of drama and forbade priests to participate in plays within the church. Thus drama which moved out of doors because of popularity with the clergy and the people remained there because of Church censure. By the fourteenth century drama was secularized and the miracle and mystery plays had grown out of the earlier liturgical drama. Technically there was a difference between miracle and mystery plays. In France miracle plays were those dealing with episodes from the lives of saints. Mystery plays were those dealing with episodes from the Bible. The two terms "miracle" and "mystery" were used interchangeably in England, however, to denote plays which dealt with Biblical scenes.

These plays were written and played by the common people, since Church censure did not permit participation in them by the clergy. But the themes of the plays and the occasion of their presentation were still religious. Corpus Christi Day, the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, was the occasion for binding together the disconnected liturgical plays which depicted scenes from the Bible. These plays formed cycles which were acted out in celebration of the holiday. The plays of the cycle were apportioned to different guilds. For instance, the Shipwrights' Guild
presented the Noah's Ark episode. The acting in these plays was done by the members of the guilds, who took time from their everyday work to portray the Biblical characters. Scenery used in the plays, such as the hell-mouth in the Harrowing of Hell episode, or the ark in the Noah's Ark episode, was built by the guild which presented that particular play. At first the plays were performed on stationary platforms. However, as the cycles became more elaborate, movable platforms called "pageants" were employed. The pageant usually consisted of a two-story platform, the upper one being used for a stage and the lower one being used as a tiring-room for the actors. These stages were on six wheels and were moved wagon-like from place to place. A scene from the Bible was acted upon each wagon. A cycle of these plays, each of which was performed by a different guild, was played on Corpus Christi Day, as well as on other religious holidays.

The attitude of the people toward these plays was sincere and devout. Though the plays were held outside the church, their themes held those who saw them in the faith which had been emphasized in liturgical dramas. Perhaps more than the liturgical dramas the mysteries had their lesson for the people. The playlets acted by the guild members held many anachronisms. The Biblical characters with their English speech and homely traits were
recognizable to those who saw them. Noah's wife was a village shrew. The shepherds who saw the star over Bethlehem were shepherds of an English countryside. The realistic treatment of these Biblical characters had its humorous effects, also. Herod, a ranting, bellowing fellow, became the laughing stock of all who saw him. This common, realistic treatment of the acted characters brought the stories of the Bible close to the people. At the same time the English flavor of the plays gave the people a taste for theatrical shows and started an interest in the drama which was never to flag.

About one hundred fifty years after the mystery play became popular the morality play came into the fore in England. This form of drama was longer than any single play of the mystery cycles. Instead of a Biblical theme, the morality play used allegorical characters in a situation which was designed to show the triumph of good over evil. The morality differed from the mystery play in the occasion of its presentation, also. Often moralities were written for the aristocratic classes rather than the common people. These moralities were designed for entertainment in the halls of the nobility rather than for the instruction of the townspeople on holidays. Professional actors rather than guild members performed many of the moralities.

The morality plays dealt with such personifications as the Seven Deadly Sins and the Everlasting Wisdoms. The
plots of most of the moralities showed the pursuit of mankind by the deadly sins and his rescue by wisdom or conscience. Everyman is the best-known of fifteenth century morality plays. This play shows the descent of man to his grave. When he dies he is forsaken by all his worldly goods. Kindred, fellowship, knowledge—all leave him except his good deeds. Other moralities help prove the precepts of the time. The theme was always the struggle of the soul between vice and virtue, with salvation coming only when virtue triumphed over vice. Mankind, The World and the Child, and The Castle of Perseverance were only a few of these plays which dealt with the fight for the soul.

From these morality plays sprang a character which was to continue in various forms to the present day. The "Vice" had appeared in the mystery plays, but in the morality plays he was at hand always to torture mankind and send him on the wrong path. The Vice, as he was usually called, was sometimes a servant of the devil, sometimes a jester. His main characteristics were his rascality, his amorality, and his sense of fun. He developed into the "Diccon" of Gammer Gurton's Needle as well as the clown in many of Shakespeare's plays. The morality plays, though they dealt in abstract, allegorical personifications, created contemporary types which were to develop in one
century into the "comedy of humours" characters. By the
time of Ben Jonson these allegorical creatures were humans
with "humours" which dominated their characters and formed
their personalities. By presenting Mankind pursued by
evil and rescued by good, the moralities also succeeded in
showing man with his conflicting passions and thus develop­
ed characters which experienced human emotions. Consequently,
the allegorical characters of the morality plays come closer
to realism than well-known Biblical characters of the
mystery plays.

The interlude developed from the morality play. This
form of drama, which appeared early in the sixteenth
century, was closely related to the morality. However, it
had more purely comic elements than the earlier form. In
the interlude we find English drama written for entertain­
ment rather than for moral instruction. In dramatic con­
struction it resembled the morality play but was more real­
istic in tone. The characters were no longer personifica­
tions of abstract virtues and vices; consequently, they
presented recognizable portraits of real people to those
who saw them. Here was native drama. A secular type,
localized in idea and characterization, it helped form
the background for the drama which followed it—tragi­
comedy.

Tragi-comedy bridged the change from the earlier mys­
teries, moralities, and interludes to the true comedy and
tragedy which entered England as part of the humanistic movement. Tragi-comedy was a type of play which combined tragic and comic elements within itself. It owed its form to two influences. One was the humanistic movement, which brought the knowledge of the ancients to the sixteenth century Englishman. Plots from Greek and Roman plays formed sources for the tragi-comedy. At the same time there was a second influence. This was the native element which pervaded the form. From the moralities and interludes came the character of the Vice. Other native influences, such as a lack of obedience to the classical rules of drama, were present. The tragi-comedies also contained the morality tradition in the exhortations to virtue which usually appeared at the end of the plays. Apius and Virginius, one of the most primitive of the tragi-comedies, contained abstract forms of Justice, Reward, and Memories, who appeared at the end of the play.

Although tragi-comedy was popular, it was looked upon with derision by the classicists of the time, who felt drama should follow the rules of Aristotle. English definitions of tragedy during the Renaissance were much the same as those of the French and the Italians. There was a mixture of Aristotelian theory and Senecan models in the philosophy of tragedy of the English. The distinctions between tragedy and comedy were based upon two ideas: the behavior of
kings and princes in tragedy, as opposed to the behavior of a lower sort of men in comedy; and an unhappy ending in tragedy, as opposed to a happy ending in comedy. The theory of comedy among the English was based upon the doctrines of Aristotle as perverted by the Italians. English comedies of the Renaissance were modeled upon those of Plautus and Terence.

Sir Philip Sidney is considered the first man to formulate the general principles of dramatic art in England. These he gleaned mostly from the Italians. As a matter of fact, during the age of Elizabethan drama, little was said in defense of it, but rather, the English critics were content to follow the doctrines of other countries. Sidney criticized the contemporary drama for being a hybrid form, tragedy mixed with comedy. He considered the mingling an outrage on the form of tragedy, wondering, how all their plays can be neither right tragedies, nor right comedies: mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it: but thrust in clowns by head and shoulders to play a part in majestical matters, with neither decency nor discretion. So as neither the admiration and commiseration, nor the right sportfulness, is by their mongrel Tragi-comedy obtained.

Tragi-comedy, in spite of the classicists' remonstrances, continued to be a popular form of drama. It was the foundation for the romantic comedies of Shakespeare as well as the

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later tragi-comedies of Beaumont and Fletcher.

True comedy developed in the sixteenth century with a further combination of classical and native elements. Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister-Doister* was published in 1566. Its plot was Terentian, but its fast-paced style was English. *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, another early English comedy, showed less classical influence. It was almost entirely native in setting, characters, and situation. This true comedy continued in popularity in more complex forms later in the century.

True tragedy, as the classicists called it, came to the fore about the same time as the true comedy. *Gorboduc*, by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville, remains extant as the first complete Senecan, or classical, tragedy. The Senecan tragedy demanded rhetoric, narration, and other static qualities. The neo-classic rules of tragedy were strictly followed. Where tragi-comedy, with its lyricism, action, and freedom appealed to the popular audiences of the day, Senecan tragedy entertained a more humanistic audience. While the early true comedy developed into the comedy of humours by the end of the sixteenth century, Senecan tragedy did not flourish in England. Many poets tried to follow the neo-classic rules rigidly, but their works did not breathe the life the English audiences wanted to see. The neo-classic tradition did influence later drama,
though, by its form and dignity of expression. When these were combined with romantic material, it became great tragedy.

During the last twenty-five years of the sixteenth century English drama passed through its transitional period and emerged into its greatest era. The University Wits: Marlowe, Kyd, Peele, Lyly, Nashe, and Greene, were all writing dramas in one or the other, or more often a combination, of the forms mentioned above. Their plays combined humanistic with native, romantic elements. This was a happy mixture. Fanciful comedies were written by Lyly, romantic comedies by Greene. Farces with the interlude tradition as well as imitations of the Roman comedy writers were still popular. In tragedy Marlowe was creating great characters, helpless against the gods. Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy was representative of the "revenge play", bloody tragedy which was very popular with the audience of the day.

Against this setting Shakespeare entered the field of drama. His plays ranged from romantic comedies with rude, farcical elements to sombre tragedy. Shakespeare's scenes could be as easily realistic middle-class, as in The Taming of the Shrew, or romantic and idyllic as in The Tempest or A Midsummer-Night's Dream. From the character studies in Hamlet to the vituperative revenge scenes in Timon of Athens Shakespeare was master of form. He was influenced undoubtedly
by the earlier playwrights. However, this influence would seem to be more native than humanistic. Shakespeare did not follow the neo-classic unities. What he probably owed to the neo-classic tradition was his majesty of verse. Though his tragedies were more flamboyant and also realistic than the Senecan tragedy, the great dignity of feeling he maintained showed acquaintance with the earlier, restrained tragedians. In satire, too, Shakespeare took his place. *Troilus* and *Cressida* had its allusions to his own times as did some of his history plays, such as *Julius Caesar*. In satire, though, Jonson was more adroit—at least more prolific—than Shakespeare.

Ben Jonson made popular the satirical "comedy of humours". He poked fun at all strata of society. He wrote realistically from wide observation. His intent was to poke fun at the vices and follies of the time. A stern classicist, he followed the Aristotelian rules closely in his tragedy; he was a little more lax in his comedy writing. His ideas on the purpose of drama were humanistic. In defining the parts of comedy and tragedy, he said: "The parts of comedy are the same with a tragedy, and the end is partly the same, for they both delight and teach." Jonson, however, was against the moving of laughter as the function of comedy. For his attack on it he quoted Aristotle: "For

\[\text{Ibid., p. 108.}\]
as Aristotle says rightly, the moving of laughter is a fault in comedy, a kind of turpitude that deafens some part of a man's nature without a disease." Jonson himself used human frailties and follies as the derisive notes in his comedies. He summed up his purpose in comedy in these words: "In depicting these human follies, it is the office of the comic poet to imitate justice, to improve the moral life and purify language, and to stir up gentle affections." 

The moral standard which Jonson was trying to raise was that of the Jacobean era. After the death of Queen Elizabeth the lustiness of that age became decadent and superficial. Audiences enjoyed the Spanish intrigue plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, with their illicit love situations. They crowded to see horror tragedies of Ford, Tourneur and Webster; abduction, incest, and murder were themes the audiences enjoyed. Episodic suspense and theatrical devices for arousing excitement were the stock in trade of the Jacobean dramatists. Running counter to this horror tragedy was a movement which is of extreme interest to this study. Almost as though to counteract the unbelievable tragedy of the time, drama appeared which was realistic to the point of being factual in many cases.

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5 Ibid., p. 108.
Domestic tragedy, as it was called in its eighteenth century revival, came upon the stage. The usual domestic tragedy concerned ordinary, middle-class people, not kings and princes as the neo-classic rules decreed it must. Their misfortunes, brought about through their earthly sins, were blamed on no one but themselves. The writers of domestic tragedy were moralists; they believed that they could persuade people to mend their ways by showing them examples of sinners.

One of the first domestic tragedies was Arden of Feversham. This story of a woman's many attempts to murder her husband is attributed to Kyd or one of his followers, though for many years it was thought that Shakespeare was the author. This play, besides having middle-class characters, contained a good deal of dialogue in prose. This element added to the realism of the play and was used in many of the later domestic tragedies. The Yorkshire Tragedy, 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, and A Woman Killed With Kindness were other plays which, as Henry Hitch Adams says, "contain too much moralizing, too much religious didacticism, for the phenomenon to be dismissed as accidental." Certainly the events which followed on the heels of the domestic tragedies helped prove they were no accidents as far as motive was concerned. The Puritan revolts, which

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7 Henry Hitch Adams, English Domestic or Homiletic Tragedy 1575-1642, p. 184.
had started against immorality in the Jacobean period, now reached fever pitch in the Caroline period. The domestic tragedy writers had recognized the immorality of the time and sought to remedy it through the illustration of vice and its rewards. But this instrument of morality reached its end for the time being along with the other forms of drama when in 1642 the theatres were ordered closed. The King was beheaded in 1649, and England was declared a Commonwealth. Until 1660, when the son of Charles I was restored to the throne, the theatres remained closed. The Restoration of Charles II brought the drama back to England. Charles had been living in France when he was declared King and returned to his native country. With him came French influence in the drama.

The French dramatists of the seventeenth century, Corneille and Racine in particular, were living up to their predecessors in their practice of the Renaissance theories of the drama. Their tragedies, especially, were beautifully wrought according to the neo-classic traditions. The French influence during the years of the Commonwealth in England was easily seen in the dramatic writing after the Restoration. With the influx of French dramatic material, and of many scholars and nobles familiar with the French theatre, controversies began on the respective merits of French and English drama.
The state of English drama is seen plainly in John Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, which appeared in 1668. The essay is in the form of a dialogue between Dryden and three contemporary men of letters, Sir Robert Howard, Sir Charles Sedley, and Lord Buckhurst. The dramatic problems of the day were aired and debated by the four. The issues included (1) Ancient versus Modern in drama, (2) French plays versus English plays, (3) the problem of tragi-comedy, (4) single plot versus plot and underplot, (5) narrative versus represented action, and (6) rhyme versus blank verse in drama. 

In *The Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, Dryden takes the stand that the English plays are better than the French; they are more natural and original. Dryden also is on the side of tragi-comedy, saying that this form is more enjoyable than any the ancients knew. As for the plot versus sub-plot, Dryden says that while the French use the single plot to show more passion and less confusion, their verse is the coldest and solemnest he has ever read. He also thinks that, in the case of represented action versus narrative, if the English show too much action, the French certainly show too little. On the question of rime versus blank verse, Dryden faces himself with the question, which is more natural? Though no one would naturally speak rime, no one

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would naturally speak blank verse, either.  

At the time *The Essay of Dramatic Poesy* was published, Dryden had already written *The Rival Ladies*, a rimed heroic tragedy. Dryden spoke of the employment of couplets in tragedies as "not so much a new Way amongst us, as an old Way new Reviv'd". The rimed tragedy was termed "heroic" because its figures were of high rank, and "heroism is cast out of the world altogether and carried to an Eastern or an antique realm of exaggerated emotions, mythical and hopelessly ideal."

Allardyce Nicoll gives as the explanation of the change from the heroism of the Elizabethan age to the "heroic" of the Restoration age a breakdown of ideals. He feels that the true heroism and integrity which permeated the Elizabethan society had been lost. No longer could the audience actually feel akin to the courage and nobility they saw in such plays as *As You Like It* and *Othello*. According to Nicoll, this breakdown occurred gradually with the romances of Beaumont and Fletcher, which were removed slightly from life, and Jonson's comedies, which dealt not with dignity, but with the lack of it. By the time of the Restoration a feeling of unreality was predominant in the

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heroic play. The characters were stilted and unnatural. The heroic play was on a parallel with the opera, which began its popularity in England about the time that the heroic play reached the conclusion of its popularity, 1677.

The English opera can be traced back to the masque. It became popular as a dramatic form during the latter years of the seventeenth century. The operatic form was not that of the Italians, with the recitative and the aria portions, but was quite dramatic, with songs and dances interspersed throughout the play. Its features were much like those of the heroic play, and the greatest drawing point to the audience of the time was the vast number and array of scene machines used in the performances. Both The Tempest and Macbeth were landmarks in the development of English opera made by D'Avenant and Dryden. The adaptations included many special effects such as the "flying" of the witches in Macbeth.¹³

While the Beaumont and Fletcher romantic tradition influenced the heroic drama, the Jonsonian comedy of humours, picturing the follies of men, was drawing the interest of London toward satire. Any play which made light of popular silliness was almost sure of success. Thomas Shadwell, with plays like The Squire of Alsatia, and Sir Robert Howard, with The Committee, were great favorites of

¹³ Ibid., p. 124.
Comedies of intrigue, influenced by the Spanish intrigue plots, were popular, also. The plays of Mrs. Behn stand as examples of the comedy of intrigue. Some of Dryden's plays fall into this category. His tragi-comedies often had sub-plots of comic intrigue. The Spanish Friar, or The Double Discovery is perhaps the best example of these.

The type of play which was most popular in the Restoration period was the comedy of manners. George Etherege is regarded as the first true comedy of manners playwright. His The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter is considered as an example of the form of the comedy of manners. The distinguishing feature of the comedy of manners is its heartlessness. The type is smooth, witty, and artificial. Though its artificiality is quite apparent, it supposedly was patterned after the life of the nobility of the time. Or rather, it was patterned after an idealization of the life of the time. The language is rich and witty, often obscene in its implications, but seldom crude. The plots are usually immoral in nature.

With the plays of Congreve, Love for Love and The Way of the World, the comedy of manners reached its perfection of style. The gross immorality of the earlier comedies of manners was glossed over with delicacy and wit by the later dramatist.
The life pictured in the comedies of manners was bound to draw censure from the more puritanical of the population. In William Wycherley, rebellion against the decadence of the age was the factor which gave his plays the biting satire that made them famous. Wycherley's pen lashed at the vulgarity of the period by picturing the vices of the age all too clearly. Wycherley, says Congreve, was sent "to lash the crying Age, but he has lashed its sores into more fulsome aspects; until we have naught to do but to turn our eyes away in misery and in disgust." While the comedies remained purely intellectual, they were bearable, but Wycherley's writing contained emotion—the horrified emotion of a Puritan. And the other writers were quick to temper their work with at least a little morality.

Vanbrugh, whose plays were in their essence artificial comedies of manners, added a fifth-act reformation scene to The Relapse. The play had all the comedy of manners characteristics, but in the fifth act all changed. The forced moral ending destroyed the tone of the play. Colley Cibber, too, in his plays, was tacking sentimental endings to comedies of manners.

An accurate picture of the life of the Restoration gallants was bound to draw censure, and it did. An attack on the immorality of the stage was launched by Jeremy Collier

in 1689, when he published *A Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage*. Collier attacked especially the contemporary dramatists whom he considered immoral. "To put Lewdness into a Thriving condition, to give it an Equipage of Quality, and to treat it with Ceremony and Respect, is the way to confound the Understanding, to fortifie the Charm, and to make the Mischief invincible." He named especially Vanbrugh for his play *The Relapse* and Congreve for his plays *Love for Love*, *The Old Bachelor*, and *The Double Dealer*.

Saintsbury tells us that Collier knew the ancient critics, which he brought to the fore to show that the drama of his own age was immoral. And Saintsbury asserts that this point helped him win a victory which did away to a great extent with the bawdiness of the stage, and ushered in the sentimental period of the drama. Collier's entrenchment of ancient authority and practice influenced his generation. Though he was replied to by Vanbrugh and Congreve, neither had much to say in defense of his work, but each only succeeded in attacking Collier on the grounds of stupidity and evil-mindedness.

One critic could face Collier on his own ground of knowledge, and did. John Dennis, in the same year, 1689,

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published a lengthy defense of the stage, entitled *The Usefulness of the Stage to the Happiness of Mankind, to the Government, and to Religion*. But Puritan feeling against the immorality of the theatre had been growing during the Restoration period. By the time of the Collier controversy, the attacks on the theatre reached a culmination, and Collier's treatise seemed the turning point in the morality of the drama.\(^\text{17}\) His outburst carried enough weight to startle London's play-goers and actors. On January 24, 1696, the Lord Chamberlain had issued an order requiring all plays to be fully licensed. The year 1697 saw a command for scurrilous sentiments and profane expressions to be deleted from plays. A stricter order followed in 1698/9, after the publication of *A Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage*.\(^\text{18}\)

By 1701 the age of sentimental drama had begun. From the brittle, heartless, and highly amusing Restoration drama, England was turning to a type of play which, while it still had many characteristics of the older drama, clothed any immorality it might possess with a strict and obvious expression of at least one moral at the end of the fifth act. The taste of the theatre audience seemed to have changed; those who saw sentimental comedy relished it. The

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\(^\text{18}\) *Loc. cit.*
"she" tragedies, which pictured the fates of frail heroines, were becoming popular. Of the "she" tragedies, the outstanding writers were Southerne, Otway, and later Rowe.

It was into this world of the theatre that Steele stepped. England had begun her theatre again, and during the forty years since the Restoration had experimented with many types of drama. One, the comedy of manners, was new; one, the comedy of humours, was old; the rest were hybrid forms with old and new elements in them; the comedy of intrigue, the sentimental comedy, the heroic tragedy, and the "she" tragedy. Steele, with these forms behind him, was writing his first play, _The Funeral_, in 1701.

The purpose of this chapter has been to trace through history the drama, and its moral intent wherever present, to the time of Steele's arrival on the English stage as a dramatist. It is hoped that the picture of the state of the theatre presented by this chapter will help to clarify the later portions of this study, since the problem of tracing Steele's moral intent in his plays and dramatic criticism can be solved only by analyzing and evaluating his work with reference to that which went before him.
CHAPTER III

STEELE'S EARLY PLAYS

Steele wrote three plays before he began his periodical writing with The Tatler in 1709. These plays were Steele's first attempts at dramatic writing. The Funeral, or Grief a la Mode, was Steele's first play. It was published by Jacob Tonson in 1701. It was followed by The Lying Lover, or The Ladies' Friendship, which Barnard Lintot published in 1704. Steele's third play, The Tender Husband, or The Accomplished Fools, appeared in 1705, printed by Tonson.

These three plays were Steele's only attempts at dramatic writing which were completed before 1722, when The Conscious Lovers, Steele's fourth and last complete play, appeared. The first three represent Steele's early efforts at dramatic writing. They show Steele's achievement as a dramatist in his first attempts. The Conscious Lovers, as Steele's last play, with a span of seventeen years between it and the third of his plays, must be considered the culmination of Steele's dramatic development.

The aim of this chapter is to study Steele's first three plays, The Funeral, The Lying Lover, and The Tender Husband, in an attempt to discover Steele's practice at the
beginning of his career as a dramatist, and the development of this practice in these plays, to the point at which Steele began his periodical writings in 1709. An analysis will be made of the plays according to plot, or situation; the main theme or idea; Steele's moral intent in the play; characterization; and the general effect of the play in so far as Steele's moral point of view is concerned.

**THE FUNERAL**

The Funeral was written in the summer of 1701 and in October was given to Christopher Rich, the manager of Drury Lane, to be produced. It was acted shortly after and was printed by Jacob Tonson between December 18 and 20 of the same year.  

*Plot synopsis.* The plot of The Funeral concerns the machinations of a widow, who supposes her husband dead. Lady Brumpton is the young wife of a rich old earl, who doted on her to the point of turning out and disinheriting his son by a former marriage.

At the start of the play Lord Brumpton has supposedly died. Actually he has been in a deep coma. He is aroused by his faithful servant Trusty, who takes the opportunity of his master's supposed death to show him what a hypocrite Lady Brumpton is. Lady Brumpton tells her confidante and

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19 Richard Steele, *Plays*, ed. by G. A. Aitken, p. 2. All following references in this chapter will be to this book.
maid, Tattleaid, how much she hated her husband when he was alive, and of her plans for enjoying widowhood. The two are unaware that their conversation is overheard by Lord Brumpton and Trusty.

Lady Brumpton's wicked actions, which are observed by her husband, consist for the most part of her contrivances to sell the two innocent girls who have been left in her hands at her husband's supposed death. Lady Sharlot and Lady Harriot are orphan girls, the wards of Lord Brumpton. Lady Brumpton orders them locked in their room to prevent their escape, after they confront her with their discovery that she is hypocritical in her sorrow for Lord Brumpton.

Lord Hardy, Lord Brumpton's son, loves Lady Sharlot; his friend Tom Campley loves Lady Harriot. The two young men conspire to get the girls away from Lady Brumpton, and with the help of Trim, Hardy's servant, succeed in rescuing Lady Harriot. Lady Harriot's disappearance frightens Lady Brumpton into arranging the disposal of Lady Sharlot. The widow sends a note to her brother, asking him to steal the girl during the funeral of Lord Brumpton. The note is intercepted by Trusty, who tells Lord Brumpton and his son Lord Hardy of the plan.

Lord Hardy and Campley gather Lord Hardy's regiment together to storm Lady Brumpton's lodging. They plan to steal the casket from her servants as it is being taken to
the burial place and carry it away. Lady Sharlot hides in the casket and is carried to Lord Hardy's lodgings.

When Lady Brumpton comes to the lodgings to protest the theft of Lord Brumpton's remains, Lord Hardy accuses her of poisoning her husband; he asks her to view the body. The casket is opened and out jumps Lady Sharlot. At this turn of affairs Lady Brumpton accuses Lord Hardy of murdering his father and stealing the body away to prevent recognition. Her argument is interrupted when Trusty brings forth Lord Brumpton to the astonishment of all. Lord Brumpton recognizes Lord Hardy as his son and heir, but Lady Brumpton reminds him that legally she has been named his heir. Trusty again rises to the occasion and presents a man, Cabinet, who reveals himself as Lady Brumpton's actual husband by a private marriage six months before she met Lord Brumpton. This turn of affairs brings about a happy ending to the play, with the dismissal of the false Lady Brumpton and the reuniting of the four lovers, as well as the reconciliation of Lord Brumpton and his son Lord Hardy.

Theme. As can be seen from the foregoing brief synopsis, the theme of the play is moralistic in nature. Steele's design, however, did not follow the usual pattern of the earlier sentimental drama of Cibber and Vanbrugh by showing the reformation of a character or group of characters.
Instead, Steele treated his subject in the manner of an expose. His approach to the play was much like that of Jonson, in his comedy of humours. Steele’s intent was to show the evils of the time, actions or attitudes which seemed outwardly good until exposed as evil by the dramatist. The plot framework of the play followed this idea, with Trusty showing the true nature of Lady Brampton to her supposedly dead husband. Upon this framework other exposures were placed. Into the mouths of those he would censure, Steele put admitted hypocrisy. Each character tells of his pretended honesty and of his actual guilt.

The main expose is that of the London widow, personified in the play by Lady Brampton. In the first scene of the play, she tells of the joys of widowhood:

Oh! how my head runs my first year out, and jumps to all the joys of widowhood! If thirteen months hence a friend should haul one to a play one has a mind to see, what pleasure ’twill be when my Lady Brampton’s footman’s called (who kept a place for that very purpose) to make a sudden insurrection of fine wigs in the pit and side-boxes. Then, with a pretty sorrow in one’s face and a willing blush for being stared at, one ventures to look round and bow to one of one’s own quality.

Lady Brampton’s hypocrisy is recognized by all but her husband. The fact that she is a widow immediately associates her with falseness in the minds of those with whom she comes in contact. In the first scene of the play.

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20 Steele, p. 18.
the undertaker Sable says: "... there is often nothing more inwardly distressed than a young bride in her glittering retinue, or deeply joyful than a young widow in her weeds and black train."\(^{21}\) The lawyer Puzzle reveals the same opinion of widowhood as Sable's, when he professes sympathy for Lady Brumpton in front of her maid, "Alas! Alas! Poor Lady!" and then, at Tattleaid's exit, he exclaims, "Damned hypocrites!"\(^{22}\) Thus Sable reveals his own hypocrisy as he denounces that of Tattleaid and Lady Brumpton.

Built upon the framework of Lady Brumpton's dissembling we find other deceptions. The profession of the undertaker is exposed in the character of Sable, with whom Lady Brumpton deals. In his Preface to the play Steele states his purpose in satirizing undertakers: "The subject of this drama 'tis hoped will be acceptable to all lovers of mankind, since ridicule is partly leveled at a set of people who live in impatient hopes to see us out of the world, a flock of ravens that attend this numerous city for their carcasses."\(^{23}\)

The first scene of the play takes place in the undertaker's establishment. In his directions to the servants Sable points out the artifices which his profession practices:

\(^{21}\) Steele, p. 12.  
\(^{22}\) Steele, p. 22.  
\(^{23}\) Steele, p. 5.
And you, Mr. Blockhead, I warrant you have not called at Mr. Pestle's, the apothecary. Will that fellow never pay me? I stand bound for all the poison in that starving murderer's shop. He serves me just as Dr. Quibus did, who promised to write a treatise against watergruel, a damned healthy slop, that has done me more injury than all the faculty.

Sharp practices are not confined to the undertakers in The Funeral. The law profession comes in for its share of satire in the character of Puzzle, Lord Brumpton's lawyer. In Act I, Scene 1, Puzzle comes to see Lady Brumpton about the will; and he gives his clerk advice as to following the profession of law. He explains his dealings with Lord Brumpton:

Now this gentleman entirely trusted me, and I made the only use a man of business can of a trust—I cheated him. For I, imperceptibly, before his face, made his whole estate liable to a hundred per annum for myself, for good services, &c. As for legacies, they are good or not as I please; for, let me tell you, a man must take pen, ink, and paper, sit down by an old fellow, and pretend to take directions; but a true lawyer never makes any man's will but his own; and as the priest of old among us got near the dying man and gave all to the church, so now the lawyer gives all to the law.

Puzzle explains his ability to steal from clients as an ability to be "eloquent in gibberish," to tie up in legalities all types of assets. "I hope to see the day when the indenture shall be the exact measure of the land that passes by it," Puzzle says, praising the legal tangle which enables him to enrich himself.

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24 Steele, p. 16.
25 Steele, p. 22.
26 Steele, p. 23.
Steele, again in the Preface to The Funeral, tells of his design to ridicule the legal profession, saying:

However, the daily legal villainies we see committed will also be esteemed things proper to be presented by satire: . . . it seems there is an art to be learned to speak our own sense in other men's words, and a man in a gown that never saw his face shall tell you immediately the design of the deceased, better than all his old acquaintance; which is so perfect a hocus-pocus that without you can report such and such words you cannot convey what is in your hands into another's; but far be it from any man's thoughts to say there are not men of strict integrity of the long robe, though it is not everybody's good fortune to meet with them.

The characters of both Sable and Puzzle have little to do with the main plot. Sable's presence is limited to two scenes; Puzzle's to one. Their main function in the plot seems to be moralistic. Their scenes are comic; ridiculous through strong satire. Steele's pen gives no redeeming qualities to them but is entirely condemning. Through them he continues to carry out his theme of hypocrisy in London life.

Lady Brumpton's deceptions, as has been said before, are the framework of the play. Opposite her on the scale of virtue are placed Lady Sharlot and Lady Harriot, Brumpton's wards. There is strong contrast between them and the scheming, heartless Lady Brumpton. But there is also contrast between the girls themselves. Lady Sharlot is shy, trusting, and avowedly in love with Lord Hardy.

—27 Steele, p. 7.
Lady Harriot, on the other hand, is more outspoken, wittier, and more suspicious. She is conscious of her obligations as a young lady of fashion. Consequently her lover Tom Campley, to win her, has to trick her into an honest admission of her love for him. Lady Harriot has common sense enough to recognize it when she sees it in Campley, and she tosses aside the false manners of the society in which she moves to be honest in proclaiming her love. Here, too, then hypocrisy is noted; but the obvious virtues of the character calls for an admission of it and a change to truth.

While Lady Sharlot and Lady Harriot are true gentlewomen, Lady Brumpton's friends are foolish, artificial models of fashion. In the second scene of the third act these friends arrive to pay their respects to the bereaved widow. Their shrewishness and foolishness show effective use of ridicule on the part of Steele. In the gossip that ensues when the visitors meet Lady Brumpton, the silly emptiness of their lives is easily seen. Reputation in the eyes of the world is all that matters to them; as Lady Brumpton says: "Sure all the world's hypocrisy. Well, I thank my stars, whatsoever sufferings I have, I've none in reputation."  

Lady Brumpton's friends do not trust one another, nor do servant and mistress, in the case of Lady Brumpton and

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28 Steele, p. 56.
Tattleaid. Their relationship in intrigue binds the two together, but Lady Brumpton voices her desire to poison her maid.

Distrust is the keynote of the play. Everyone is gulling or being gulled. Sham and reputation, rather than true worth, are the measure of judgment of good and bad. Even Madam D'Epingle, the sweetheart of Lord Hardy's servant, resorts to subterfuge to gain her ends. She is a French dressmaker earning her living in London. In the second scene of the third act she accidentally slips into perfect English rather than her broken accent, and she is confronted by Campley. She tries to explain the change:

Why, Mr. Campley, you must know I can speak as good English as you, but I don't for fear of losing my customers. The English will never give a price for anything they understand. Nay, I've known some of your fools pretend to buy with good breeding, and give any rate rather than not to be thought to have French enough to know what they are doing.  

From a lying, grasping widow to a struggling dressmaker who dissembles to live, Steele carries out his theme of hypocrisy in society.

Moral intent. Steele's moral intentions in the play activate its theme. The Funeral might be termed destructive rather than constructive from an ethical standpoint. Steele makes no attempt to reform his characters, but he does open their eyes to flaws in those around them. Lord

29 Steele, p. 59.
Brumpton sees Lady Brumpton as she really is. He overhears the conversation between Puzzle, the lawyer, and his clerk. He also observes the practices of Sable, the undertaker. Those revelations are arranged by Trusty. No change is brought about from bad to good in the characters themselves. They have no intention of changing and are only observed in their evil ways, not corrected.

There is only one reformation in the play, that of Cabinet, Lady Brumpton's first husband. His reformation comes through great fright rather than an honest desire to change his ways. Cabinet happens to catch a glimpse of Lord Brumpton and thinks he is seeing a ghost. His conscience pricks him to the point that he writes a note to Trusty, informing him that he, Cabinet, is actually Lady Brumpton's husband. This bit of news saves Lord Brumpton from any legal ties to Lady Brumpton. But there is no repentance coming from Lady Brumpton at the sight of Lord Brumpton's "return from the dead." She reminds him craftily that she is still his wife. Then Cabinet makes his appearance. Lady Brumpton, faced with her guilt, does not break down, but walks out, berating Cabinet as she goes. Our last glance of her is as a thoroughly unrepentant female.

The sentimental portions of the play are those showing the relationship between four lovers, between Lord Hardy and his father, Lord Brumpton, and between Lord Brumpton
and his faithful servant Trusty. The four lovers are consistently romantic. At first there seems to be a form of the cruel coyness of the comedy of manners tradition in the behavior of Lady Harriot. However, she soon comes to her senses and the four are avowed lovers, without customs or manners to follow except those of their natural good inclinations.

The sentimental situation between Lord Brumpton and his son is idealized by Steele. The affection Lord Hardy has for his father, even after he has been disinherited by him, is emphasized by Steele. The dialogue throughout the play is not too obviously didactic until the last scene of the meeting between Lord Hardy and Lord Brumpton. Here Steele places fatherly advice in the mouth of Lord Brumpton. The play, which to the last scene has contained little moral admonition, ends on a didactic note. Lord Brumpton warns his son of the duties of a peer:

You are to be a Peer, by birth a judge
Upon your honour, of others' lives and fortunes;
Because that honour's dearer than your own,
Be good, my son, and be a worthy lord
For when our shining virtues bless mankind,
We disappoint the livid malcontents,
Who long to call our noble Order useless.30

Certainly in this admonition is seen Steele's moral intent in instructing nobility in its responsibilities to the country. This patriotic note in Steele's writing is

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30 Steele, p. 92.
evident in the last scene, also, when Lord Brumpton tells the assemblage:

Our all's in danger, sir, nor shall you dally
Your youth away with your fine wives.
No, in your country's cause you shall meet death.
While feeble we with minds resolved do wait it.31

The final song of the play is a patriotic incitement:

Arise, arise, great deads, for arms renounced,
Rise from your urns and save your dying story,
Your deeds will be in dark oblivion drowned,
For mighty William seizes all your glory.
Again the British trumpet sounds;
Again Britannia bleeds;
To glorious death, or comely wounds,
Her godlike monarch leads.32

The Epilogue, spoken by Lord Hardy, follows the same trend of thought and tries to inflame the audience against the French. Here he asks them, in a chivalric, traditional passage, to fight for the ladies:

With gentle fires your gallantry improve,
Courage is brutal, if untouched with love;
If soon our utmost bravery's not displayed,
Think that bright circle must be captives made;
Let thoughts of saving them our toils beguile,
And they reward our labours with a smile.33

Thus we see that Steele's moral intent in the play was to instruct his audience in its responsibilities as subjects of the king as well as citizens in a hypocrisy-ridden world. Using ridicule as his weapon, he hoped to place suspicion on outwardly good, seemingly noble institutions. Steele makes use of short rimes to carry out his

31 Steele, p. 92.
32 Steele, p. 93.
33 Steele, p. 96.
moral intent, also. Each act ends in a didactic couplet or triplet, such as the one which closes the first act:

Short is the date in which ill acts prevail,
But honesty's a rock can never fail.\(^3^4\)

**Characterization.** An analysis of the characterization in the play shows that it is not complex. The characters are black or white, good or evil. The characters of Lord Hardy, Campley, and Trusty are models of nobility of person. Lord Brumpton's character is much more vaguely drawn. He might be one of the audience for the first four acts, as he does nothing but observe, with little comment, the actions of his wife. In the fifth act, however, we see more of his character. He admits his mistake in the passion he felt for his wife, but he says he cannot hate her and will see that she never wants. The moral precepts which permeate the last scene are uttered for the most part by Lord Brumpton. He becomes the author's voice. Trim, I think, is the most interesting character in the play. He is Hardy's servant and is a fairly stock characterization of the servant of a young lord. He is wily, whimsical, not completely honest, but faithful to his master. Sable the undertaker and Puzzle the lawyer are clever bits of caricature. Only glimpses of them are seen, but Steele's satirical treatment of them is sharp and quite amusing.

\(^3^4\) Steele, p. 26.
The women, as we have seen, come in for worse treatment. Lady Brumpton is wicked and hypocritical. There is no change in her character throughout the course of the play. Lady Sharlot's and Lady Harriot's characters are not complexly drawn. The ladies who come to visit Lady Brumpton are interesting sketches of fashionable ladies of the town. Foolish and artificial, they find their chief entertainment in gossip. Through such characterization Steele's moral intent is carried out in making ridiculous those he wants to reform.

**General effectiveness.** The comic effect in the play is largely derived from Steele's satire on different professions and individuals in society. The undertaker, the lawyer, and the French dress-maker all come in for their share of ridicule. The individuals in society ridiculed are the widow, the fashionable London lady, and the coquette. The characters, which bear comparison with those of Jonson in his comedy of humours, are more amusing than the situation. Five acts are needed to show ideal lovers as opposed to fashionable ones, the scullduggeries of the undertakers and the lawyers' professions, and the foolish futility of the fashionable London life with reputation as its measure. Steele's first play is a string of moral fragments; showing through illustrations the evil state of social conditions in England. There is no reformation except in the case of the lovers, when Lady Harriot
sees her folly in holding off Campley and casts aside the accepted rules of coquetry to actually acknowledge her love for him.

For other social wrongs, however, Steele has no solution; he merely presents them to be laughed at by the audience. In all cases, the satire he presents is humorous. A study of the play as a whole, though, shows that the intricacies of the plot overshadow the effect of the satire. There are a few choice scenes of satire, but the plot itself is not satiric. Instead, it is merely an expose of a false woman, over whom virtue triumphs only to the extent that she is found out. There is doubt that the play could be classified as a sentimental comedy, if active reformation be considered an essential feature. Nor do natural goodness and sensibility come to the fore to show good qualities rather than bad. As has been said above, the characters are either good or bad in the beginning. There is no actual conflict between the two forces, with the good winning out. At the beginning of the play the evil is discovered and its potency is gone.

THE LYING LOVER

The Lying Lover; or The Ladies' Friendship, Steele's second play, was presented at Drury Lane Theatre on December 2, 1703. It was published January 26, 1704, by Bernard Lintot. The plot Steele adapted from Corneille's
Le Menteur. In the Preface to the play Steele stated that his purpose in writing the play was "to attempt a Comedy which might be no improper entertainment in a Christian commonwealth." He continued, mentioning the derivation of the plot: "In order to do this, the spark of this play is introduced with as much agility and life as he brought with him from France, and as much humor as I could bestow on him in England."

Plot synopsis. The Lying Lover concerns the escapades of an Oxford scholar, Young Bookwit, who comes to town to meet the ladies. He has put off his cap and gown for the clothes of a gallant and the manners of a soldier. Since he thinks the way to impress the London ladies is to tell tales of a soldier's adventures, he is prepared to act the part of a military man. He has cast lots with a brother scholar, Latine, to see which of the two should be master and which should be servant for their sojourn in town. Latine loses and becomes, for the time being, Bookwit's servant.

Bookwit meets Penelope, a fashionable young lady.

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35 Steele, p. 98.
36 Steele, p. 101.
37 Loc. cit.
38 This situation parallels closely that of The Beaux' Stratagem by Farquhar, which appeared in March, 1706-7. In this play two penniless gentlemen, Archer and Aimwell, masquerade as master and servant.
and convinces her that he is a soldier of fortune just returned from fighting in Holland. His charming, dashing manner intrigues her, and she immediately begins to compare him with her faithful, sincere, and tiresome suitor, Lovemore. Unknown to her, Lovemore is an old college friend of Bookwit's.

After Bookwit's first meeting with Penelope he notices Lovemore and another gentleman, Frederick, walking along, talking concernedly. Lovemore has heard that Penelope has been feted by another suitor with a party on the water. Bookwit, hearing only snatches of the conversation between the two men, decides to embroider the story and gain a reputation for himself as a gallant. Not knowing that any special lady is in question, or that she is the same lady to whom Lovemore is paying suit, he spins a tale of a sumptuous banquet on the water, with five barges, music, a group of ladies—the loveliest with him—and dancing until dawn. Lovemore, though he and Bookwit are friends, becomes immediately jealous when he recognizes Bookwit's tale as that which he had heard about Penelope. He is certain that Bookwit is a suitor of Penelope's.

In the meantime, unknown to Young Bookwit, his father arrives in town to find him a wife. He approaches Penelope and asks her to consider his son in marriage. She agrees to do so. When Old Bookwit tells his son of the arrangements
he has made, the young man, already attracted by the mysterious young lady whom he has met, tells another lie to his father rather than go through with a marriage to someone he has never seen. He tells his father that he was forced into marriage with a young girl at Oxford. He was surprised in her bedroom and chivalrously married her. The old man is shocked at his son's behavior but forgives him and returns to Penelope to tell her why his son cannot marry her.

While Bookwit is learning this news from his son, Penelope is confronted by a jealous Lovemore, who accuses her of accompanying Bookwit on a festive party. Penelope denies the story but is a little flattered and interested in this new, more exciting side to mild patient Lovemore. She teases him until he can stand it no longer. He leaves infuriated and sends a note to Bookwit, challenging him to a duel.

Penelope also sends Bookwit a note. She doesn't trust her friend Victoria, who was with her when she met the unknown soldier. Penelope thinks that Victoria is interested in him, too. To test Victoria, she has her send the note to Bookwit. If Victoria urges Penelope into a romance with Bookwit, it would seem as though Victoria wanted to have the unknown soldier. As Penelope suspected, Victoria is eager to help Penelope see Bookwit. She even signs her name to the note.
When the note is delivered Bookwit is recognized as the young soldier. In the meantime Old Bookwit reaches Penelope and tells her that his son is already married. Penelope and Victoria are now wary of each other because of their interest in the young man. Though they still profess friendship, they actually are jealous of each other. They arrive in the park to confront Bookwit with the fact that they know his identity. When they accuse him of being married, he says that he only told that story to his father to escape being married to a Mrs. Penelope, a great fortune, but not attractive. From the signature on the note he received, Bookwit supposed that the girl to whom he was attracted, Penelope, was named Victoria. Penelope, outraged at being called unattractive, stalks away. Victoria leaves, too, but not until she says she could never entertain a man who insulted her friend—not while her name is Victoria! Not until this moment does Bookwit know which of the ladies is Victoria.

That night he sends a note by way of Latine to Penelope. The two men are quite drunk, and Latine mistakenly gives the note to Victoria. He is thrown downstairs by Penelope’s footman. As he is coming out of the house he is seen by Lovemore, who has been lurking nearby in hopes of catching a last glimpse of Penelope before his duel with Bookwit. Seeing Latine come out, Lovemore waits to see if Bookwit will also appear. At this moment
Bookwit enters drunk. Lovemore accosts him and Bookwit draws his sword to fight Lovemore in the duel. Before Lovemore can defend himself, he is downed and Bookwit runs away. Lovemore is found by a constable, who takes him for dead. Bookwit is captured and suspected of murder by the constable, who says logically: "There's a man killed in the Garden, and you're a fine gentleman, and it must be you—for good honest people only beat one another—."  

Lovemore is not dead, however, but only weak from loss of blood. With his friend Frederick he disguises himself as a sergeant and goes to visit Penelope. Frederick breaks the news of Lovemore's death to her, and she realizes her love for him. She bemoans the loss of the object of a passion she has just discovered. At the sight of Penelope's grief Lovemore wants to reveal himself, but Frederick stops him, saying that Penelope needs to suffer longer.

At this point Old Bookwit enters in time to confront his son and Latine, who arrive with a gaoler. Young Bookwit pleads with his father not to grieve for him. Saying that his son has broken his heart, the old man faints away. Young Bookwit thinks he has killed his father, too, but Latine revives Old Bookwit. Frederick then asks Latine to tell the circumstances of Lovemore's death. Latine says that he killed him. Bookwit denies Latine's

39 Steele, p. 164.
statement and insists that he is the murderer. Greatly moved by the friends' loyalty to each other, Lovemore discovers himself. He is afraid that Penelope will change her mind upon seeing him alive again, but she says, "I know no rules should make me insensible to generous usage." This acceptance leaves Victoria and Bookwit together. Victoria will be won—if Bookwit will speak nothing but the truth—to this he agrees heartily.

Theme. The theme of this play, as can be seen from the foregoing synopsis, is of the tragedy, or near tragedy which is the effect of pride, affectation, jealousy, drunkenness, and dueling. This play shows forgiveness of immorality in the last act. In this play Steele's problem is not so much to present an expose of social conditions as to exhibit human follies and affectations. Hence the character drawing in this play is more complex than that in The Funeral. The characters are not extremely virtuous; each has his faults, but all are fundamentally good. When tragedy faces them, their better natures come to the surface.

For four acts The Lying Lover fits into the category of a comedy of manners. The situations are common to that type. A young man struggling to be thought well of by the ladies; a disappointed suitor kept at arm's length by his

\[40 \text{Steele, p. 184.}\]
lady because his love for her is acknowledged; and supposed friendship between two women, based actually on artificial rather than real feeling. The characters act in true comedy of manners style, also. The gallant searches for conquests, the disappointed lover sighs for his mistress, and the ladies of the play pay more attention to each other and their patch-boxes than to the feelings of those who truly love them.

The fifth act, however, brings about a great change in the tone of the play. When tragedy supposedly strikes in the form of a duel between the two friends, Bookwit and Lovemore, there is a distinct change in attitude. The realization of what terrible results dueling could have strikes Bookwit. In the first scene of the fifth act he explains that by dueling "Thus for the empty praise of fools, I'm solidly unhappy." That dueling is the stimulus to arouse praise to satisfy one's vanity is all too clear to Bookwit, who now sees the consequences. When Latine argues that his honor is at stake, Bookwit condemns dueling in violent words:

Honour! the horrid application of that sacred word to a revenge against friendship, law, and the reason is a damned last shift of the damned envious foe of human race. The routed fiend projected this, but since the expansive glorious law from Heaven came down--Forgive.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{41} Steele, p. 172.
\textsuperscript{42} Steele, p. 173.
The virtuous change continues in the love of Penelope for Lovemore. In the third scene of the fifth act, Penelope receives the news of his death and realizes her cruelty to him in life. Here, too, in the change in Penelope is a rebellion against the affectations of fashionable life:

Curses on him first flattered with his tongue,
On her that first dissembled in her silence—
What miseries have they entailed on life
To bring in fraud and diffidence in love?
Simplicity is the dress of honest passion,
Then why our acts, why to a man enamoured,
That at her feet effuses all her soul,
Must a woman cold appear, false to herself and him?\(^1\)

Also, in the father-son relationship between Young Bookwit and his father we see a virtuous spirit. Old Bookwit's sorrow at his son's trouble is so intense that he swoons. Young Bookwit thinks he has killed his father. The young man feels no self-pity, but only remorse that others must suffer through his follies. His devotion to his father and his consoling of the old man, when he himself is the one in grave danger, is certainly another touch of Steele's to arouse pity.

One more bit of artificiality is shattered in the fifth act when Victoria and Penelope admit their distrust of each other. They break their conventional friendliness to tell each other of their jealousy. Thereby they purge themselves of their distrust and are enabled to be true

\(^1\) Steele, p. 178.
friends.

The loyalty between Bookwit and Latine comes to the fore in the last act when Latine, who till this point has been apprehensive but willing to take part in Bookwit's schemes, attempts to save his friend's life. His confession to murdering Lovemore himself is the epitome of loyalty to a friend. This step causes Lovemore to reveal his identity, saying: "Lovemore still lives to adore your noble friendship, and begs a share in't. Be not amazed! but let me grasp you both, who, in an age degenerate as this, have such transcendent virtue." The "transcendent virtue" which Lovemore mentions is Steele's focal point in the play. The first four acts build to the duel scene at the end of the fourth act.

The situation following the duel scene is logical in some respects. The remorse of Bookwit is normal enough and does not crowd the bounds of credulity, nor does his father's grief. The imagination is strained, however, with the survival of Lovemore and his return, disguised, to see the effect of his supposed death upon the others. The play here seems forced into a happy ending with virtue, though late to transcend folly, at last rewarded.

Moral intent. The morality of the theme shows clearly Steele's intent in writing *The Lying Lover*. In his Preface

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Steele, p. 183.
to The Lying Lover Steele criticizes the state of the theatre in England, saying that it offends against religion, love, and good manners. He wishes to present a comedy which, instead of violating moral laws, "will strip vice of the gay habit in which it has too long appeared, and clothe it in its native dress of shame, contempt, and dishonour." He says that in presenting anguish and sorrow in the fifth act of the play he may be committing an injury on the rules of comedy, but he feels sure that he is justified through the laws of morality. Steele was successful in writing a moral play with characters quite in the comedy of manners style. He carries a step further the Restoration dramatists' practice of holding folly up to ridicule. He shows the consequences of continuing the existence condemned in his play. His purpose is to uplift his audience by picturing the effects of continued folly and vice. That those in the play are naturally good and have only the smaller follies of mankind is instanced in their behaviour after Lovemore is believed dead. In the Prologue Steele said he would show:

No gross vices to your sight,
Those too much horror raise for just delight;
And to detain the attentive knowing ear,
Pleasure must still have something that's severe. 46

Steele could not approve pleasure for pleasure's sake only.

45 Steele, p. 102.
46 Steele, p. 103.
He felt that pity had its place in the theatre as a moral influence upon the spectator. In the Epilogue to The Lying Lover, he says:

Our too adventurous author soared tonight Above the little praise, mirth to excite, And chose with pity to chastise delight. For laughter's a distorted passion, born Of sudden self-esteem and sudden scorn; Which, when 'tis o'er, and the men in pleasure wise, Both him that moved it and themselves despise; While generous pity of a painted woe Makes us ourselves both more approve and know. 47

Characterization. Turning from a study of Steele's moral intent in the play to an analysis of the characters in it, we find them to be more sharply drawn than those of The Funeral. They are persons, rather than types, though the difficulties in which they find themselves are stock situations.

Young Bookwit's character is amusingly drawn. G. A. Aitken, in his edition of The Lying Lover, traces relationships between the lying lover and Corneille's liar in Le Menteur closely enough to show us that most of the troubles which Bookwit's tongue get him into are derived from the French source. The fifth act is a departure from this course, however, and is Steele's original work. The best scenes in the play are those in which Steele's wit is taxed with the problem of worming Bookwit's way out of trouble. Bookwit seems shallow and heedless of his father's

47 Steele, p. 187.
admonitions and friend's warning until it is too late. His character is not rounded until the fifth act, when his reformation takes place. Until then we like him immensely for his cleverness.

Latine's role is much smaller than that of Bookwit. He and Frederick, Lovermore's friend, are the means of the play. Around their normal reactions the play revolves. Their attitudes are those of virtuous honourable men; but they seem as shadows compared with Bookwit and Lovemore—until the fifth act. In the last act Frederick takes the Lovemore-Penelope situation for his jealous friend into his own hands. And Latine tries to save his friend Bookwit by professing guilt himself.

Lovermore, though a patient, mild lover to Penelope, has a jealous nature. To Steele this is a grave fault for which he is punished by his wound from Bookwit. Lovemore realizes his jealousy was wrong after Penelope's love is shown him at the news of his death. He recognizes the evil of jealousy; and at her promise to marry him, he vows:

Then doubts, and fears, and anxious cares be gone,  
All ye black thoughts that did corrode my breast;  
Here enter faith, and confidence, and love!  
Love that can't live with jealousy, but dwells  
With sacred marriage, truth, and mutual honour.  

Old Bookwit is a likable man. His main characteristic

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48 Steele, p. 184.
is his love for his son. He is treated with reverence by Steele. Only once is he characterized as a romantic old man, of the type ridiculed in the French play from which The Lying Lover was adapted. When he comes to court Penelope for his son, he compliments her prettily—so prettily that for a moment he becomes lost in his own gallantry. But he quickly recovers himself, saying: "I did not think I had such a memory. I find the women are now certainly daughters of the women before 'em: Flattery still does it." In the part of Old Bookwit Steele saw a chance to instil pity; that moral instructor, into his play. The scene in the last act in which the old man bewails the loss of his son contains the most sentimental language in the play. The parting of the two was plainly designed to touch the sensibility of the audience.

Q. Book. I have too much upon me, child, to speak—and, indeed, have nothing to say, but to feed my eyes upon thee e'er we part for ever, if tears would let me. When you have slept in your cradle, I have waked for you—and was it to this end! Oh, child, you've broke your father's heart. (swoons).

Y. Book. Good Heav'n forbid it—guard him and protect him.

He faints; he's cold, he's gone; (running to him.) He's gone, and with his last breath called me parricide. "You've broke your father's heart!" Oh, killing sound! I'm all contagion; to pity me is death. My griefs to all are mortal but myself."

The two women in The Lying Lover, Penelope and Victoria,

49 Steele, p. 124.
50 Steele, p. 181.
are typical comedy of manners heroines. They are self-centered, affected, and mistrustful. We have no idea that they have hearts at all until the fifth act, when they admit their mutual dislike. They draw much closer when their hypocritical attitudes are gone. Then Penelope tells Victoria that she will consider Lovemore's suit. However, the habit of fashion is still strong in her when, a moment later, Frederick is announced. Penelope says she cannot forbear a little tyranny, and at his entrance she tells him she will hear nothing he would have to say about Lovemore. All her pose is dropped, however, when she hears of Lovemore's death. After Lovemore appears alive, she is faced with the admission she has made of her true feelings. Her reformation is complete. Much like Lady Harriot in The Funeral she realizes that pride and affectation have no place in true love, and she denounces the fashionable "rule" in love.

Victoria's character resembles that of Penelope. She, too, is a false friend. When she becomes interested in Bookwit, jealousy of Penelope gets the better of her, and she does her best to persuade Penelope to marry Lovemore or the young scholar whose father approaches Penelope. Victoria is not made to experience any strong emotional change throughout the play; consequently her character remains shadowy and vague. Since Steele was experimenting
with the changes in fundamentally good people in this play, he did little sketching of actual individual characteristics. Instead, he let situations be the cause for character development.

**General effectiveness.** *The Lying Lover* succeeded as a moral drama more than Steele's earlier play *The Funeral*. *The Lying Lover* not only exposed folly, it showed its bitter effects. Through his characterization Steele managed to show the characters in their true colors which had seemed in high fashion to earlier authors. These characters were not malicious; their vices were not great. But the situations Steele created around his characters contained lessons which Steele felt to be virtuous instruction. These situations were more dramatic than those of *The Funeral*. However, the abruptness with which the characters meet misfortune and discover their mistakes robs the play of its sincerity. The denouement seems trumped-up. Steele's intention was to impress his audience of the right through arousing their pity. The fifth act of *The Lying Lover* attests to his attempt at this. In arousing this pity he turned to blank verse.

The sentimental passages throughout the play are in blank verse. Almost the entire fifth act of the play is in verse, with a song ending the act as in *The Funeral*. There is also the use of rhyming couplets and triplets to
end the first four acts. The last act ends with a four-line couplet spoken by Bookwit, which admonishes his audience to follow his example.

Since such deserved misfortunes they must share,
Who with gay falsehoods entertain the fair;
Let all with this just maxim guide their youth,
There is no gallantry in love but truth. 51

This verse may well serve as an illustration of Steele's practice throughout his play of pointing out vice, its consequence, and the rule of conduct one should rightly follow.

THE TENDER HUSBAND

Steele's third play was The Tender Husband; or The Accomplished Fools. This comedy was produced by Rich at the Theatre Royal on April 23, 1705. It was published by Tonson May 9 of the same year. 52

Plot synopsis. The title of the play, The Tender Husband, refers to the first plot of the play. The tender husband, Clerimont Senior, has an affected wife who enjoys indulging in such petty vices as gambling. Clerimont Senior plays a trick upon her by having his mistress Fainlove masquerade as a man to woo her. He plans to denounce his wife, either forcing her to reform or to part with him.

Mrs. Clerimont, who wishes to ape French manners, is

51 Steele, p. 186.
52 Steele, p. 191.
taken with Fainlove’s pretty ways. The two are left alone quite often by Clerimont Senior, and finally Fainlove receives a note from Mrs. Clerimont making an assignation. Fainlove shows the note to Clerimont Senior, who decides that the moment has come to denounce his wife. He hides while Fainlove meets her. Mrs. Clerimont tells Fainlove that he is a pretty gentleman, though not so bold as her husband. Her remarks reveal her fondness for her husband which would not have been fashionable to admit.

As Fainlove kisses Mrs. Clerimont, her husband runs in flourishing a pistol, which he aims at his masquerading mistress. Mrs. Clerimont protects Fainlove and tries to brazen out the situation with her husband. But when he shows her the note she sent Fainlove, she swoons. When she awakens her husband is congratulating Fainlove on her role with a kiss. At the sight of the two Mrs. Clerimont rushes for Fainlove, who runs away.

Clerimont Senior then accuses his wife of infidelity. His speech opens her eyes to her follies, and she begs forgiveness for them, saying that she will change her ways immediately. Clerimont forgives her and welcomes her back to him with open arms.

The second and more amusing plot of the play concerns Clerimont Senior’s younger brother, Captain Clerimont. The plot threads are connected, since Clerimont Senior wishes his younger brother, a penniless soldier, to marry a
fortune. The winning of Biddy Tipkin, a romantic young girl with a thousand pounds a year, is the subject of the second plot.

To enable his younger brother to secure an heiress, Clerimont Senior enlists the aid of Samuel Pounce, a lawyer and the brother of his mistress Fainlove. Pounce tells of a great fortune, Miss Biddy Tipkin, who is being given by her banker father to a son of his brother-in-law, Sir Harry Gubbin. Gubbin is a country squire who has come to town "to dispose of a hundred head of cattle, and his son."53 Humphrey Gubbin is a big country booby who is afraid to marry his cousin Biddy because his father wants him to, and because she is related to him.

Biddy does not care for Humphrey, either. She meets through Pounce, Captain Clerimont, who has been warned of her romantic dreamy nature. By calling her "Parthenissa", Clerimont intrigues her. There is no comparison for Biddy between the rough, hulking country boy and the dashing glib Captain Clerimont.

Humphrey, too, is romantically inclined toward another. He meets Fainlove in the guise of a young gentleman and is greatly taken by the mistress's pretty ways. Fainlove, with an eye upon Humphrey's fortune, which amounts to fifteen hundred pounds a year, tells him that he, Fainlove, has a

53 Steele, p. 208.
sister who would very much like to meet him. Humphrey is greatly impressed with the idea and says that if the sister resembles the brother, he would like to marry her.

Humphrey, hoping to meet Fainlove's sister, and Biddy, hoping to see Captain Clerimont again, tell each other that they hate each other heartily. They become good friends once they discover that despite their fathers' plans neither one wants to marry the other.

Captain Clerimont, again helped by Pounce, comes to see Biddy in the guise of a painter. Her foolish maiden aunt wants her to have her portrait done before she marries Humphrey. With Humphrey and the aunt in the room Captain Clerimont woos and wins the imaginative Biddy. As the painter, he tells her of a situation where a younger brother loves an heiress. He knows no other way to see her, so he disguises himself as a painter and comes to paint her portrait. Both the aunt and Humphrey think that would be a silly situation, but romantic Biddy understands Captain Clerimont. She is enjoying his way of courting her when the situation is brought to a deciding point. Humphrey, not as foolish as he seems, finally understands the conversation. He likes the painter and tells Biddy she ought to marry him. He volunteers to take the aunt out of the room for a few moments.

While Humphrey and the aunt are out of the room Clerimont asks Biddy to elope with him. She is loath to
plunge into marriage without all the romantic intrigue of a courtship. Clerimont persuades her that it would be just as exciting to run away and be married. Humphrey, when he returns, offers to help the young couple.

As Mr. Tipkin and Sir Harry Gubbin are wrangling over the settlement Biddy will bring with her, Humphrey, Biddy, Clerimont Senior, Fainlove, and Captain Clerimont enter. Humphrey tells his father that he is married and introduces him to Fainlove, still in man's clothing. Sir Harry, always a strict parent, beats them both off the scene.

Mr. Tipkin suspects that his daughter may also have married when he sees what has happened to Humphrey. He is frightened at the prospect of someone taking her fortune away. Then he is introduced to Captain Clerimont, Biddy's new husband, who tells him that Pounce will see that Biddy's fortune is correctly placed. Mr. Tipkin, who thought that Pounce was helping him to keep the fortune himself, is taken aback to see that the lawyer has been helping the lovers. He is left to make the most of a bad bargain. But at this point Sir Harry returns with Humphrey and Fainlove. Humphrey is really married, and since Sir Harry discovers from Fainlove that she has some money of her own, he is willing to approve the match.

Theme. The preceding synopsis of the play shows the difficulty in maintaining a single theme, since the two plots of The Tender Husband differ in mood. The
Clerimont Senior—Mrs. Clerimont plot has sentimental elements. The Biddy Tipkin—Captain Clerimont plot contains the elements of comedy popular when Steele started writing. The wealthy fool versus the clever but penniless younger brother to win the heiress was a situation which had been treated by the seventeenth century dramatists with much success. The Prologue to The Tender Husband, written by Joseph Addison, states Steele's purpose in presenting "very hopeful monsters for the stage" that "won't be blockheads in the common road." The comic situation does contain a variety of fools. No particular vices are ridiculed, however, except the enforcement of heavy restrictions. Restrictions call for an excuse to break them, according to Steele's attitude. The close reins about both Humphrey Gubbin and Biddy Tipkin are easily broken by the two.

The serious plot situation also contains the problem of restriction. Mrs. Clerimont has jumped to an extreme in her actions for a lack of restriction. Her reformation brings about a desire for restraint when she realizes that her unthinking selfishness and unbending pride have brought her marriage close to catastrophe.

Steele states his underlying theme at the end of the play in the last speech, which he gives to Clerimont Senior. He admonishes the audience to avoid domestic strife by.

54 Steele, p. 195.
"generous bonds":

You've seen the extreme of the domestic life,
A son too much confined—to free a wife;
By generous bonds you either should restrain,
And only on their inclinations gain;
Wives to obey must love, children revere,
While only slaves are governed by their fear. 55

Moral intent. Steele's moral intent is less easily seen in The Tender Husband than in his earlier plays. The situations are less moralizing than those of The Funeral and The Lying Lover. Steele's sentimental reformation of Mrs. Clerimont in the fifth act seems forced. However, he states his intent in his dedication to Joseph Addison. Steele dedicated the play to Addison as "no improper memorial to an inviolable friendship." 56 In this play he felt he must be careful "to avoid everything that might look ill-natured, immoral, or prejudicial to what the better part of mankind hold sacred and inviolable." 57

Characterization. The characterization in The Tender Husband depicts once more the social follies of the characters in Steele's earlier plays. The serious plot has elements of Restoration comedy in it with the situation of an affected wife unwilling to admit love for her husband, as it is not fashionable to do so. She has traveled abroad and is so greatly impressed by stylish manners that she sets fashion above all else. She has

55 Steele, p. 224.
56 Steele, p. 192.
57 Steele, p. 193.
taken up gambling because it is a fashionable pastime. Not until the fifth act do we discover that she is worth troubling about. Her husband, who by keeping a mistress has behaved none too well himself, forgives her for her follies and even pities her enough not to demand that she give them all up at once. Instead, he insists that she rid herself of them gradually.

The character of Clerimont Senior is rather heartless during the first four acts. He is using his mistress to dupe his wife. He makes no attempt at a reconciliation with Mrs. Clerimont until he can catch her in an act to show her failings. Then his coldness turns to pity and he forgives his wife immediately. His entire character seems unnatural, especially when compared with the characters in the comic plot.

Fainlove is amusing. Her remarks upon playing the role of a gentleman are some of the wittiest in the play. She is far cleverer than either Clerimont Senior or his wife. She seems an amoral creature, with no compunctions about the plot against Mrs. Clerimont or about intriguing with Humphrey Gubbin.

In the comic plot Captain Clerimont is the typical rogue of Restoration comedy. He is bold, talks well, and is intelligent enough to know how to win Biddy when the others scoff at her romantic nature. Nowhere in the play do we learn that he actually does love her; even at the
close of the play her fortune seems to be his main consideration. Certainly there is no true sentiment between hero and heroine here.

False sentimentality is ridiculed in Biddy Tipkin. Biddy, whose name is Bridget, longs for a lovely name like Partenissa. She hates to divulge the fact that her real name is Bridget to Clerimont when she first meets him.

Niece... but if you ask my name, I must confess you put me upon revealing what I always keep as the greatest secret I have—for would you believe it, but they have called me—Bridget.

Cler. Bridget?

Niece. Bridget.

Cler. Bridget?

Niece. Spare my confusion, I beseech you, sir; and if you have occasion to mention me, let it be by Parthenissa, for there's a name I have assumed ever since I came to years of discretion.

Cler. The insupportable tyranny of parents, to fix names on helpless infants which they must blush at all their lives after! I don't think there's a surname in the world to match it.

Niece. No? What do you think of Tipkin?  

Biddy has read all the romances of long ago, and she despises her humdrum normal existence. She dreads her cousin Humphrey Gubbin because he is not her idea of a lover. She is only disappointed in Clerimont's insistence that they be married right away. She longs for a courtship with serenades and secret meetings. She does decide to marry him, though she tells him: "but it looks so ordinary to go out at the door to be married. Indeed, I ought to be taken out of a window, and run away with."  

58 Steele, p. 224.
59 Steele, p. 248.
Humphrey Gubbin is agreeable enough to Biddy's elopement plans. He is a big hulking country boy, two and one half feet across the shoulders. He has been beaten by his father since childhood, and now he expects whippings as a matter of course. Humphrey measures his age by the year the hen-house was built. He is now twenty-three years old and should be handling his own fortune. He is determined no longer to let his father keep his control over him. The youth is enamoured by the ways of the pretty little gallant, Painlove, and wishes he could ape them. Steele makes Humphrey rather stupid and oafish, but nevertheless, his satire is not bitter. Humphrey, though a bit foolish, is likable.

Sir Harry Gubbin is an ill-natured country squire. He has kept Humphrey under his control with a big stick. Though he treats Humphrey contemptuously, he wants a pleasant marriage for his son. And he is not at all worried about the impression Humphrey will make on Biddy. "As for the young girl, she cannot dislike Numps," he says, "and as for Numps, I never suffered him to have anything he liked in his life." Sir Harry's chief characteristic is his severity. He prides himself on his disciplining of "Numps," and says that he himself was caned the day before his marriage.

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60 Steele, p. 209.
The characters of Sir Harry Gubbin and Mr. Tipkin are the only two in the play whom we do not like. And satisfaction is derived by the audience from the tricks played upon the two. Both men are shrewd and close with their money, over which they seem to wrangle more than their children. Circumstances slap them in the face when Pounce, Tipkin's lawyer, turns from him to help Captain Clerimont gain Biddy's entire fortune. Humphrey, too, marries an adventuress, though Sir Harry is more easily mollified than is Mr. Tipkin when Fainlove tells the boy's father that she has a little money.

Pounce, who is Tipkin's lawyer, is humorous, but rascally; he is sly and full of the love of intrigue. He describes himself to the younger Clerimont thus:

> You know, sir, my character is helping the distressed, which I do freely and without reserve; while others are for distinguishing rigidly on the justices of the occasion, and so lose the grace of the benefit. Now 'tis my profession to assist a free-hearted young fellow against an unnatural long-lived father; to disencumber men of pleasure of the vexation of unwieldy estates; to support a feeble title to an inheritance.

Obviously the lawyer in Steele's later play was distrusted as much as the one in The Funeral, for once again we find satire on that profession.

**General Effectiveness.** A study of the play as a whole shows that the comedy in The Tender Husband is less sentimental than that in The Lying Lover and less didactic than

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that in *The Funeral*. There is a true spirit of gaiety in the play. The humour is not derived so much from situation as from character. Humphrey, Biddy, Mr. Tipkin, and Sir Harry Gubbin are all well-rounded humorous characters. We see their foolishness in the instances in which they are contrasted with the clever characters in the play. Captain Clerimont and Pounce are wily enough to make the most of the Gubbin's and Tipkin's shortcomings.

The sentimental portions of the play seem forced and unnatural. Very little is seen of the sentimental situation, which appears in only three scenes. The characters are not developed, and the reformation in the fifth act of Mrs. Clerimont is so abrupt that the play takes a decided drop in credibility at this point.

The comic portion of the play is resolved before the fifth act. All that remains for Humphrey and Biddy to do is to tell their fathers of their marriages. The conflict is gone; the denouement is weak. The two fathers feel they must comply with a bad bargain, and the play ends in what must seem a very half-hearted dance.

Steele's prose is brisker and more to the point than in either of his other two plays. The absence of blank verse seems to show that the author's purpose was not to present emotions elevated by pity, as in the first two plays. He does keep the rimed couplets at the end of some scenes. But even these occur only three times, and are.
more whimsical and less didactic than those in his first two plays. Only one might be termed didactic; it sums up Steele's treatment of the Captain Clerimont—Biddy Tipkin plot as well as that of Mrs. Clerimont and Clerimont Senior. After Mrs Clerimont's reformation scene Steele points out the exemplary conduct of Clerimont toward his wife. Here we see Steele's use of the couplet to illustrate his manner of instructing his audience.

They only who gain minds, true laurels wear;  
'Tis less to conquer, than convince, the fair. 62

**SUMMARY**

Within a span of five years Steele had written three plays. All three, though they differ in character types and plot situations, show an unvarying moral tone in respect to character, plot, and dialogue. Steele was most cautious in no way to offend virtue with his writing. That there was a reforming motive underlying Steele's writing can be clearly seen.

The *Funeral* exposed social evils in England in its satire upon various professions. It flayed hypocritical widowhood. Steele pointed his finger at vice but did not attempt to reform his characters. His basic idea, however, was moral, for he wished to expose to ridicule and hence to purgation the flaws he saw around him. The *Lying Lover*,

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62 Steele, p. 254.
Steele's second play, was more sentimental than the first. Steele again exposed vice to the public eye. In this play he went a step further to show the consequences of a bad life. A reformation of the characters followed the discovery of vice. Steele now had a solution to his problem of moral uplift. Pity elevated men's souls. So pity carried the fifth act of *The Lying Lover*. In *The Tender Husband*, Richard Steele's third play, the fifth act once more presented the reformation of a person whose vices found him out. Both Steele's second and his third plays contained this sentimental element. The fifth acts saw a reformation of character. The natural goodness of man came to the fore when it was needed. Combined with this sentimental element are characters and situations already familiar in the writings of the Restoration dramatists. In *The Lying Lover* these elements reached a sentimental conclusion when Young Bookwit renounced his former life. In *The Tender Husband* the older comedy elements were entirely separate from the sentimental elements and reached a separate artificial conclusion. There were two plots in the play and their morals were but slightly compatible.

Though Steele's themes varied in the three plays, one factor remained constant: Steele's ultimate aim was to present pleasure, not for pleasure's sake alone, but for the purpose of moral instruction.
CHAPTER IV

STEELE'S PERIODICAL WRITINGS

Richard Steele's dramatic criticism appeared in his periodicals The Tatler, The Spectator, and The Guardian between the years 1709 and 1713. An analysis of Steele's critical writings on the subject of drama is of great importance in making a study of his moral intent in drama. The years during which Steele wrote his critical reviews helped occupy the space between The Tender Husband in 1705 and The Conscious Lovers in 1722. No plays by Steele appeared in the intervening years. The aim of this chapter is to analyze Steele's periodical writings on the theatre in an effort to find in them the moral intent in his theory of drama. The articles will not be studied in the order in which they appeared to the public. Instead they will be analyzed according to the major interests Steele developed in his criticism. These interests might be catalogued as: the moral effects of the theatre on its audience; the moral standards of the audience; Steele's standard of a good play; Steele's judgment of others' plays; and Steele's reasons for being a critic of the drama. Under these categories Steele's writings will be analyzed.

On April 12, 1709, the first issue of The Tatler appeared. The periodical was issued three times weekly at
a penny a copy. It was a single folio sheet, with news about entertainments, writers, and items of general interest to the London reader. Steele was the originator of the paper. He regarded himself as a public censor. Since his own actions were far from exemplary he decided it would be better to keep his name secret, so the papers were printed anonymously.

The Tatler continued in existence for 271 numbers before its publication came to a halt on January 2, 1711. Steele's silence was short. Barely two months later the first issue of his second periodical, The Spectator, appeared. The Spectator was circulated daily from March 1, 1711, until December 6, 1712. Once again, a very short time elapsed between the publication of Steele's periodicals. The Guardian appeared on March 12, 1713, and continued until October of that year.

Though Steele wrote periodicals after The Guardian, it is only these three periodicals which come within the scope of this study, as they contain the bulk of Steele's dramatic criticism. Steele was not the only writer of these periodicals. Though he began The Tatler alone, he was soon joined by Joseph Addison and later by Pope, Budgell, and others. Only those portions of the periodicals which have been assigned to Steele will be studied.

Steele was a moralist. As such he was an observer of mankind and a self-styled censor. He observed play,
playwright, actor and audience. He was interested in knowing the effect of a play upon the public. He felt that the theatre was a strong influence upon society and as such should be harnessed to benefit mankind. Steele, as a moralist, wrote of the effect of plays upon an audience. He also was critical of the morality of the audience itself. As a playwright, he set his standard of a good play, against which he measured the plays of the Greeks and Romans, Shakespeare, Jonson, the Restoration dramatists, and those of his own time. Most of the new plays were mentioned in connection with particular performances and certain actors. Into the pages of The Tatler, The Spectator and The Guardian went Steele's personal reactions to the affairs of the stage. The purpose of this study is to discover Steele's moral intent in drama from his periodical writings as well as his own plays. Therefore, Steele's criticism of the physical theatre of his own day, where it does not express personal impressions, is outside the purpose of this work. Where these reactions clarify Steele's moral intent they will be studied.

The moral effects of the theatre on its audience.

Steele's writings on the moral effects of the theatre on its audience will be examined first in number three of The Tatler. In this paper Steele mentions the influence of plays upon the welfare of a people when he says: "a good play acted before a well-bred audience, must raise
very proper incitements to good behavior, and be the most quick and most prevailing method of giving young people a turn of sense and breeding." 63

In number eight of that paper Steele censures a public which enjoys a play like "that heap of vice and absurdity," The London Cuckolds. He says the only step to improve the morals of the audience and the standard of their appreciation is "to be made by people of condition, by encouraging the representation of the noble characters drawn by Shakespeare and others from whence it is impossible to return without strong impressions of honour and humanity." 64

A clear statement of the strength of influence that the theatre had on his own life is summed up by Steele in the ninety-ninth number of The Tatler:

I have been this evening, recollecting what passages, since I could first think, have left the strongest impressions upon my mind; and, after strict inquiry, I am convinced that the impulses I have received from theatrical representations have had a greater effect than otherwise would have been wrought in me by the little occurrences of my private life! . . . it is not the business of a good play to make every man a hero; but it certainly gives him a livelier sense of virtue and merit, than he had when he entered the theatre. 65

Morally the theatre is of influence not only in making the audience appreciate virtue upon the stage, but also in carrying over that virtue to help the spectator

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63 A. Chalmers, editor, The British Essayists, I, 26. The following references in this chapter to page 110 will refer to the above series of volumes.
64 Chalmers, I, 66.
65 Chalmers, II, 80.
on other occasions. In No. 182 of The Tatler Steele says: "... The opposition of right and wrong on the stage would have its force in the assistance of our judgment on other occasions."\(^66\)

In No. 290 of The Spectator Steele, in reviewing Ambrose Philips' play The Distressed Mother, again presents the belief that the morality learned in plays should be applied by the audience to problems of real life: "and since there is none can flatter himself this life will always be fortunate, they may here see sorrow, as they would wish to bear it whenever it arrives."\(^67\)

In number forty-three of The Guardian Steele has a last warning on the moral influence of the theatre:

The love of virtue, which has been so warmly roused by this admirable piece [Addison's Cato] in all parts of the theatre, is an unanswerable instance of how great force the stage might be toward the improvement of the world, were it regarded and encouraged as much as it ought. There is no medium in this case, for the advantage of action, and the representations of vice and virtue in an agreeable or odious manner before our eyes, are so irresistibly prevalent, that the theatre ought to be shut up, or carefully governed, in any nation that values the promotion of virtue or guard of innocence among its people.\(^68\)

Steele, then, felt that the theatre was a strong moral influence on its audience. An attempt to raise the standard of taste of the audience would be a step forward in

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\(^66\) Chalmers, IV, 193.

\(^67\) Chalmers, X, 175.

\(^68\) Chalmers, XVI, 226.
improving their morals, since a good play would heighten the sense of virtue in mankind and would also give it a guide to follow in patterning its actions.

The moral standards of the audience. Steele wrote in his journals of the moral standards of the audience of his time. That these standards needed improvement was a subject that he stressed. He approved the support of only one playhouse in London, which, he thought, was a step toward educating the audience to a finer appreciation of virtue. He wrote in number ninety-nine of The Tatler of the policies of the two houses which were formerly active. These tried to drive each other out with buffooneries.

Thus, to please the people, two houses must entertain them with what they can understand, and not with things which are designed to improve their understanding; and the readiest way to gain good audiences must be, to offer such things as are most relished by the crowd; that is to say, immodest action, empty show, or impertinent activity.69

In No. 134 of The Tatler Steele mentions the charge of Rapin, the French critic, that the English theatre audience delighted in bloodshed. To please the audience, Rapin had contended, stabbings and poisonings that in other countries were done behind scenes must be done before the eyes of an English audience to satisfy its lust. Steele answered Rapin's accusations evasively with a satiric thrust at the audience of his time. "The truth

69 Chalmers, III, 80.
of it is, the politeness of our English stage, in regard to decorum, is very extraordinary. We act murder, to show an intrepidity; and adulteries, to show our gallantry.  

A trait of the theatre audience which dismayed Steele was its sensuality. Number fifty-one of The Spectator tells of the prostitution of the playwright for his audience. Usually in such cases the playwright is lazy, or lacks wit, and falls back on bawdiness to amuse his audience. "Dull poets in this case use their audiences, as dull parasites do their patrons, when they cannot longer direct them with their wit or humour, they bait their ears with something which is agreeable to their temper, though below their understanding."  

In No. 208 of The Spectator Steele becomes angry at what he calls the depraved state of the theatre audience. He is angry at its perverseness in giggling at sly expressions, while "a good sentence that describes an inward sentiment of the soul, is received with the greatest coldness and indifference."  

In analyzing his audience Steele divides the women into prudes, who laugh at tragedies and cry at comedies only to be perverse; coquettes, who think of actors only as rivals; and the fashionable ladies, who supposedly are

70 Chalmers, III, 274.
71 Chalmers, VI, 236.
72 Chalmers, IX, 68.
so familiar with the play that it affects them not at all. "Thus, the whole audience is afraid of letting fall a tear, and show as a weakness the best and healthiest part of our sense."73

Further in his criticism of the audience, Steele could not forbear mentioning what he thought of great importance: "Nay, it is not only visible that sensuality has devoured all greatness of soul, but the under-passion (as I may so call it) of a noble spirit, Pity, seems to be a stranger to the generality of an audience."74

Steele condemns the physical roughness of the audience in No. 502 of The Spectator. In this article he contrasts the Roman and English audiences. He thinks the English audiences of his day, which like physical action, are gross and can appreciate nothing but vulgarity. The Roman audience, on the other hand, had great sensibility and could appreciate finer sentiments. Steele makes this observation on the audience of his time.

There cannot be greater argument of the general good understanding of a people, than a sudden consent to give their approbation to a sentiment which has no emotion in it . . . . The gross of an audience is composed of two sorts of people; those who know no pleasure but the body, and those who improve or command corporeal pleasures, by the addition of the fine sentiments of the mind. At the present the intelligent part of the company are wholly subdued by the insurrections of those who know no satisfactions but what they have in

73 Chalmers, IX, 68.
74 Chalmers, IX, 67.
common with all other animals.\textsuperscript{75}

In Steele's argument for improving the theatre audience, he takes into consideration their normal standards. Physical roughness and sensuality are the main faults of the theatre audience. To a great extent Steele blames the playwrights for this state, since they are lazy in their writing. They prefer to write down to the public instead of bringing the audience up to their level. Steele as a moralist constantly begged for improvement of the theatre and its audience through uplifting drama by the playwrights.

**Steele's standard of a good play.** Richard Steele the critic of drama could not be separated from Richard Steele the moralist. He evaluated a play on its moral significance. In much of his writing he used the material and ideas of famous playwrights as illustrations in setting forth his own ideas as to what a good play should be. In many different instances Steele analyzed the elements needed to write a good tragedy. In number forty-seven of *The Tatler* Steele says that one must feel sorrow in writing, not merely write about sorrow.

> It is a common fault . . . of you gentlemen who write in the buskin style, that you give us rather the sentiments of such who behold tragical events, than of such who bear a part in them themselves . . . The way of common writers in this kind is rather the description than the expression of sorrow.

\textsuperscript{75} Chalmers, XIII, 228.
There is no medium in these attempts, and you must go to the very bottom of the heart, or it is all mere language.  

Steele cites Shakespeare as a good example of a dramatist feeling emotion and says that those who would write of great men should have souls as noble and capable of elevated thoughts as those of whom they would write. Steele felt that tragedy should be written with emotion as well as portrayed with it. He satirizes the objective method of tragic writing in number twenty-two of The Tatler. He says that he maintains a book of commonplaces filled with ideas which would enable him to finish a tragedy by the fifth day of the month. Included in the book are "the farewell of a general, with a truncheon in his hand, dying for love, in six lines!" and, "the principles of a politician (who does all the mischief in this play) together with his declaration on the variety of ambition in his last moments, exposed in a page and a half." He lists many more items such as these. He ends his article with the comment, "I will not pretend to give you an account of the plot, it being the same design upon which all tragedies have been writ for several years last past."  

Steele's satire on the cut-and-dried rules of tragic writing is seen in another article in which Steele

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76 Chalmers, II, 73.
77 Chalmers, I, 176.
attacked the French rules of the unities. In No. 115 of The Tatler, Steele reviews George Powell's puppet-show. Steele, who cannot understand why Punchinello should be so popular, derides the French practice of dramatic criticism by using its ideas to judge a puppet show.

I have for this purpose provided myself with the works of above twenty French critics, and shall examine, by the rules which they have laid down upon the art of the stage, whether the unity of time, place, and action, be rightly abused in any one of their celebrated productions.78

Steele's emphasis on the appeal to emotions in constructing tragedy is seen in number sixty-eight of The Tatler. In this number Steele explains the psychology of tears. "The mind has not a sufficient time to recollect its force, and immediately gushes into tears before we can utter ourselves by speech or compliments."79 Steele has seen the tragic representations and has discovered that tears come from the sympathy aroused in the audience by the author's skill. He acclaims Shakespeare the master at stirring sympathy in a simple situation: "...Shakespeare can afford instances of all the places where our souls are accessible; moreover, command our tears."80

Silence, too, is a great spring to the emotions in viewing tragedy. In No. 133 of The Tatler Steele says he believes writers of tragedy are defective, "and that they

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78 Chalmers, III, 174.
80 Chalmers, II, 221.
might have given great beauty to their works, by certain stops and pauses in the representation of such passions as it is not in the power of language to express." Steele cites Otway's *Venice Preserved* as an excellent example of a play making use of the effect of silence.  

In Steele's opinion the prime requisite of characterization in drama is in the drawing of moral nobility. He criticizes Ambrose Philips' characters in *The Distressed Mother* in No. 290 of *The Spectator*. He notes:

> The persons are of the highest quality in life, even that of princes; but their quality is not represented by the poet, with directions that guards and servants should follow them in every scene; but their grandeur appears in greatness of sentiment, flowing from minds worthy their condition. To make a character truly great, this author understands, that it should have its foundation in superior thoughts, and maxims of conduct.

We can see that Steele, in judging a play, was interested in characterization as an appeal to the emotions. Only by understanding and appreciating the feelings of the different characters on the stage could the audience feel enough akin to them to feel any great emotion for them. If the audience felt kinship toward the characters, moral instruction was easy. Exemplary actions on the part of the characters would be more likely to be imitated by a sympathetic audience.

**Steele's judgment of others' plays.** As a critic.

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81 Chalmers, III, 267.
82 Chalmers, X, 175.
of other dramatists' works, Steele emphasized moral worth. His writings were divided into three periods. The first was that of Shakespeare, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher. The second was the Restoration period, in which he criticized the plays of Wycherly, Congreve, Etherege and Lee. The third period was that of his own day.

Steele's writings are filled with references to Shakespeare, whose writings he used as examples of perfection in dramaturgy. Steele was a great admirer of Shakespeare's plays, and especially of the moral precepts he found in them. In writing on the prevalence of irreligious principles in No. III of The Tatler, Steele said of Shakespeare:

The admirable author, as well as the best and greatest man of all ages, and of all nations, seems to have his mind thoroughly seasoned with religion, as is evident by many passages in his plays, that would not be suffered by a modern audience; and are, therefore, certain instances that the age he lived in had a much greater sense of virtue than the present.83

One of the passages to which Steele was referring here as not being acceptable to the present age was the passage in Hamlet beginning, "It faded on the crowing of the cock," and ending, "So hallow'd and so gracious is the time."84 Steele thinks these lines show the religious tenor of this play and of Shakespeare's writing in general. In drawing the comparison between Shakespeare's age and his own,

83 Chalmers, III, 152.
84 Chalmers, Loc. cit.
Steele was out of patience with those men who, for want of anything better to rant at, ranted at religion. "I love", Steele said, "to consider an infidel, whether distinguished by the title of deist, atheist, or free-thinker, in three different lights; in his solitudes, his afflictions, and his last moments." 85

In comparing Shakespeare's age with his own, Steele states in number forty-seven of The Tatler that he wishes the writers of his own day would follow Shakespeare's way in feeling emotion themselves in order to carry it into their attempts at dramatic writing. "There is no medium in these attempts, and you must go to the very bottom of the heart, or it is all mere language." 86 As an example of fine subjective writing, he uses Shakespeare's Henry IV, I. He refers to the scene in which Northumberland learns of his son's death. The effect on Steele of this scene was to cause him to write in appreciation of it: "Reading but this one scene has convinced me, that he, who describes the concern of great men, must have a soul as noble, and as susceptible to high thoughts, as they whom he represents." 87

In his essay on the causes of tears in the sixty-eighth number of The Tatler, Steele cites a passage in Macbeth as another example of Shakespeare's ability to

85 Chalmers, III, 153.
86 Chalmers, II, 73.
87 Chalmers, II, 74.
move his audience. In the play Shakespeare dissolves us in tears in the scene when there is a sudden start from the thread of discourse about the deaths of Macduff’s children. Steele asserts that "Shakespeare can afford us instances of all the places where our souls are accessible; and even commands our tears. But it is to be observed, that he draws them from some unexpected source, which seem not wholly of a piece with the discourse." 

Othello, too, comes in for its share of laudation by Steele. Tatler No. 188 contained a criticism of the character of Desdemona. Steele says that Desdemona has all the sentiments of a virtuous maid and a tender wife. Her own integrity will not let her believe Othello is jealous. "Othello is a great and noble spirit, misled by the villainy of a false friend to suspect her innocence; and resents it accordingly. . . . I believe I may venture to say, there is not any other part of Shakespeare’s work more strong and lively pictures of nature than in this." 

Though Steele read his Shakespeare, most of his references were to the plays which he saw in the playhouse. Steele regarded Shakespeare as a wholesome influence upon the stage. After seeing a performance of The London Cuckolds, Steele remarks in number eight of The Tatler that such low plays should be avoided by people of

88 Chalmers, II, 221.
89 Chalmers, IV, 221.
condition, who might better the theatre

by encouraging the representation of the noble
characters drawn by Shakespeare and others from
whence it is impossible to return without strong
impressions of honour and humanity. . . . Were
dramas of this sort more acceptable to the taste
of the town, men who have genius would bend their
studies to excel in them. 90

A comment by a playgoer upon Betterton as "Hamlet"
caused Steele to write in number seventy-one of The Tatler
on the effect of Shakespeare's work upon the audience:
"This is entering youth into the affections and passions
of manhood beforehand and, as it were, antedating the effects
we hope from a long and liberal education." 91 Throughout
his writing Steele set his standard of a good play by
Shakespeare's example.

In his periodical writing Steele reviewed only two
plays of Jonson, but he praised him highly. In number four-
teen of The Tatler, The Alchemist is reviewed. Steele gives
the play praise, saying: "This comedy is an example of Ben
Jonson's extensive genius, and penetration into the passions
and follies of mankind." 92 The playwright's ability to moti-
vate the actions of his characters was considered by Steele
as showing that Jonson had "to a great perfection, that dis-
cernment of spirit which constitutes a genius for comedy." 93

90 Chalmers, I, 66.
91 Chalmers, II, 243.
92 Chalmers, I, 115.
93 Chalmers, I, 118.
On May 27, Steele saw *Volpone*. The next day number twenty-one of *The Tatler* appeared with the admonition addressing the playhouse managers never to show the play to a modern audience, who would never enjoy another play after seeing it. Jonson's characterization is so thorough that Steele feels that "if the present writers were thus examined, and the offences against this rule [of good characterization] cut out, few plays would be long enough for the whole evening's entertainment."

Jonson's skill at exposing the follies of his characters is brought out in both reviews. Concerning two of Jonson's contemporaries, however, Steele has not such favorable comments. Steele's criticism was adverse in his review of the characters in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Scornful Lady* in *The Spectator* No. 270. Though he says that the character of the scornful lady is well-drawn, Steele has much fault to find with the character of Sir Roger, a religious pedant. Steele feels that such a character gives the church a bad name:

> It is so mean a thing to gratify a loose age with scandalous representation of what is reputable among men, not to say what is sacred, that no beauty, no excellence in an author ought atone for it; nay, such excellence is an aggravation of his guilt, and an argument that he errs against the conviction of his own understanding and conscience... An author shall write as if he thought there was not one man of honour or woman of chastity in the house, and come off with applause: for an insult

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94 Chalmers, I, 165.
upon all the ten commandments with the little critic is not so bad as a breach of unity of time and place.95

Steele was extremely critical of Beaumont and Fletcher. He says: "Sallies of imagination are to be overlooked, when they are committed out of warmth in the recommendation of what is praiseworthy; but a deliberate advance of vice, with all the wit in the world, is as ill an action as any that comes before the magistrate, and ought to be received as such."96

Steele thought that the age of Shakespeare and Jonson was more virtuous than his own, except for such dramatists as Beaumont and Fletcher. He held a different opinion of the Restoration period. He thought the drama of Wycherley, Etherege, Congreve, and Lee immoral. However, he defended Wycherley's The Country Wife, in number three of The Tatler, on the grounds that the age in which it was written demanded an immoral drama, "and a poet had at that time discovered his want of knowing the manners of the court he lived in, by a virtuous character in his fine gentlemen, as he would show his ignorance by drawing a vicious one to please the present audience."97 Steele excused Wycherley for his immorality on these grounds: "The poet, on many occasions, where the propriety of the character will admit of it, insinuates, that there is no defense against vice but the

95 Chalmers, X, 80.
96 Chalmers, X, 82.
97 Chalmers, I, 25.
contempt of it." 98

While Steele forgives Wycherley for the immorality in The Country Wife, he is far from forgiving Sir George Etherege. In number fifty-one of The Spectator Steele says that other authors are base enough to cater to their audiences by playing on their sensual appetites with what are commonly termed "luscious expressions." Etherege was, at least, "forthright enough to write a play on the subject, She Would If She Could." 99 Steele thinks the choice of this subject shows Etherege's inability to write entertainingly on a moral subject.

In another article, in number sixty-five of The Spectator, Steele condemns The Man of Mode, or Sir Fopling Flutter, by Etherege, as "a perfect contradiction to good manners, good sense, and common honesty; and there is nothing in it but what is built upon the ruin of virtue and innocence." 100 Steele says that the play has always had the reputation of being a model of genteel comedy. This evaluation Steele thinks, is very unjust. His re-evaluation is quite different. He notes:

To speak plain of this whole work, I think nothing but being lost to a sense of innocence and virtue, can make anyone see this comedy, without observing more frequent occasion to more sorrow and indignation, than mirth and laughter. At the same time I

98 Chalmers, I, 25.
99 Chalmers, VI, 235.
100 Chalmers, VII, 22.
allow it to be nature in its utmost corruption and degeneracy. 101

William Congreve's *The Old Bachelor* was well liked by Steele. In numbers nine and 193 of *The Tatler* Steele mentions the play. In the first of these articles he tells of the excellent character of the old bachelor that is drawn by Congreve. In *The Tatler* No. 193, Steele compliments Congreve on the play:

... in which comedy there is a necessary circumstance observed by the author, which most other poets either overlook or do not understand, that is to say, the distinction of characters. It is very ordinary for writers to indulge a certain modesty of believing other men as witty as themselves, and making all the persons of the play speak the sentiments of the author, without any manner of respect to the age, fortune, or quality of him that is on the stage. Ladies talk like rakes, and gentlemen make similes... but this writer knows men; which makes his plays reasonable entertainments, while the scenes of most others are like the tunes between the acts. They are perhaps most agreeable sounds; but they have no ideas affixed to them. 102

Restoration tragedy received its share of criticism from Steele in his comments on Nathaniel Lee's *Alexander*, or *The Rival Queens*. In No. 191 of *The Tatler* mention is made of the play's being made into a burlesque. Steele agrees that such a thing should be done with the play, since it is a ridiculous caricature of a noble person. Steele is angry because Lee did not observe history in

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101 Chalmers, VII, 22.
102 Chalmers, IV, 224.
writing the play. He made Alexander a despicable character rather than the heroic figure that he was.

Steele's main objection to Restoration drama is a moral one. He blames the times partially; and partially he blames the playwrights. He feels in the case of Wycherley that the immoral environment influenced his writing. To Etherege Steele gives no such excuse but seems to feel that his writing was a bad influence on the times.

Richard Steele's criticism of contemporary works was based almost entirely on performances he had seen. Mention of different performances is quite frequent in The Tatler, less frequent in The Spectator, and occurs still less in The Guardian. Steele was less interested in the plays of his own time than he was in those of earlier dramatists. His criticisms of contemporary plays were for the most part of the acting and the play's reception. In some cases, however, he wrote a criticism of some element of the play itself.

Mrs. Centlivre's play, The Busy Body, is mentioned by Steele in number nineteen of The Tatler. Steele considers the play subtle in plot and incident, "which is peculiar to females of wit."103 In the same article, he discusses Vanbrugh's The Trip to the Jubilee, which is to be acted the next day. Steele says only that the dialogue

103 Chalmers, I, 151.
in itself is something too low to bear criticism, and "this performance is the greatest instance we can have of the irresistible force of proper action." Thus Steele alludes to the ability of actors to compensate for a bad play.

In number fourteen of The Tatler Steele criticizes Banks' *The Earl of Essex*, a tragedy "in which there is, not one good line, and yet a play which was never seen without drawing tears from some part of the audience." Those who analyze the play carefully are not wrought upon by pity, but he whose gift of understanding is not so great, is deeply influenced by "the force which the circumstance has put upon his imagination."  

In his dramatic criticism Steele judged his own work modestly as an illustration of the faults of the playwrights of his time. He printed a portion of a letter in number fifty-one of The Spectator which censured a passage in *The Funeral*. It is interesting that Steele should receive such a letter and instead of using it to form a rebuttal should print it, acknowledging himself in error. According to the article in The Spectator, a young lady wrote to Steele saying that she had been offended by a passage in *The Funeral* that was a speech of Campley's: "Oh that Harriot! to fold these arms about the waist of that

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104 Chalmers, I, 151.
105 Chalmers, I, 115.
beauteous, struggling, and at last yielding fair." Steele agrees that the passage is immodest but begs her to excuse it because "writers are hard put to fill five acts with pure wit. Where they lack wit, they stoop to bawdiness." 106

G. A. Aitkin's edition of The Funeral has an interesting note to the effect that this passage was changed by the influence of this letter. The second edition of the play reads: "0 that Harriot! to embrace that beauteous..."107

Steele regarded Colley Cibber's The Careless Husband as the model of a good moral comedy. In No. 182 of The Tatler Steele says that he is helping a young author write a play; he is taking him to see The Careless Husband as an ideal play after which to pattern his own.

Steele does not have such high praise for Cibber's Ximena; or The Heroic Daughter, an adaptation from Corneille's The Cid. Steele, writing in No. 546 of The Spectator, tells of attending a rehearsal of Cibber's Ximena. Cibber was teaching his actors tricks to rouse the pity of the audience. Steele criticizes this practice in the article since in this case emotion would arise from the stage tricks rather than true tragic writing in the production of Ximena. He feels any additions to the play by the actor should be acknowledged:

106 Chalmers, VI, 235.
The advantages of action, show, and dress, on these occasions, is allowable, because the merit consists in being capable of imposing upon us to our advantage and entertainment. All that I was going to say about the honesty of an author in the sale of his wares was, that he ought to own all that he had borrowed from others, as I lay in a clear light all that he gives his spectators for their money, with an account of the first manufacturers.

Here then we have Steele's answer to the question of how much a play should depend upon theatrical effect. Steele thinks theatrical setting is "allowable," but certainly the play should not have to depend upon the physical theatre for its effectiveness.

Steele's criticism of Addison's Cato appeared in number thirty-three of The Guardian. It is the most complete panegyric Steele wrote in his periodical criticism. The article has nothing but praise for the tragedy. He regards the characters in Cato as extremely virtuous and realistic. They are capable of warm sentiment as well as cold stoicism. The lovers are "more warm, though more discreet than ever yet appeared on the stage." The character of Cato himself, however, is the main object of praise in Steele's article.

The principal character is moved by no consideration but respect to that sort of virtue, the sense of which is retained in our language under the word Public Spirit. . . . There is nothing uttered by Cato but what is worthy of the best of men; and the sentiments which are given him are not only the

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108 Chalmers, XIV, 152.
109 Chalmers, XVI, 170.
most warm for the conduct of his life, but such as we may think will not need to be erased, but consist with the happiness of the human soul in the next. 110

Appended to the article, Steele has Doctor Samuel Garth's prologue to the play and Alexander Pope's epilogue to it. The review of Cato by Steele is his last criticism of a play in a periodical. In the review he is careful to say that his position now is as a guardian, not a spectator, so he must limit his writing in that area.

Steele's reasons for being a critic of the drama. Passing from a study of Steele's criticism of playwrights of Shakespeare's time, the Restoration, and his own day, we glance at his periodical writings as a theatre-goer. Steele, as a journalist, felt himself bound to explain his interest in the theatre and his continued writing about it. In No. 182 of The Tatler he said:

It may possibly be imagined by severe men, that I am too frequent in the mention of theatrical representations; but who is not excessive in the discourse of what he extremely likes? . . . By communicating the pleasure I take in them, it may in some measure add to men's gratification this way . . . It is a very good office one man does another, when he tells him the manners of his being pleased.

Later in The Spectator, in No. 370, Steele wrote of a reason for frequenting the playhouse other than mere interest in the theatre itself or desire to pass judgment

110 Chalmers, XVI, 169.
111 Chalmers, IV, 193.
on plays. This was a moral reason. At the beginning of his article, Steele quotes the lines above the Drury Lane Theatre, *Totus mundus agit histrionem*—or "The whole world acts the play." Steele agrees:

> all that is done which proceeds not from a man’s very self, is the action of a player. For this reason it is that I make so frequent mention of the stage. It is with me a matter of the highest consideration, what passions or sentiments are indulged or cultivated; and consequently what manners and customs are transferred from the stage to the world, which reciprocally imitate each other."

From this statement one can assume that Steele saw the stage as a mirror of the world. We can also assume that from the stage man could learn betterment of his nature. Thus is Steele’s basic idea seen in his periodical writing on the theatre. The purpose of drama is to instruct. On the stage the follies of the world are exposed to the ridicule of the audience in the hopes that through laughter that audience will purge itself of its follies. The picturization on the stage of virtue should enlighten the audience on the modesty of behavior by which to pattern their own lives. The theatre as a means of entertainment should be moral and uplifting. And in order to uplift, drama must be written with emotion as well as portrayed with it; in this way can the pity of the audience be roused. Steele felt that by making the audience feel

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112 Chalmers, XI, 316.
strongly they could be easily instructed in the right.

The bulk of Steele's critical writings shows these ideas plainly. First Steele was a moralist; then he was a playwright. As a moralist, his criticism centered first on the value of the play ethically. Character meant more than plot. Steele believed virtue springs from nature rather than action. Virtuous action is the result of virtuous nature, or character. The degree of moral intent in a play was the standard by which Steele judged it.
CHAPTER V

A STUDY OF THE CONSCIOUS LOVERS

The Conscious Lovers is Steele's fourth and last complete play. It was first acted at the Drury Lane Theatre on November 7, 1722. The play can be called the culminating point in Richard Steele's career as a dramatist, since it is his last complete piece of dramatic writing. The method of analysis in this chapter will be the same as that in Chapter II. The Conscious Lovers will be analyzed according to plot, the main theme, Steele's moral intent in the play, characterization, and the general effect of the play insomuch as Steele's moral intent is concerned.

Plot synopsis. The Conscious Lovers concerns a young man named Bevil Junior who has met a young girl, Indiana, while abroad. He has saved her from a wicked guardian. As a child of seven, Indiana, with her mother and aunt, had set sail for India to meet her father, a merchant. The ship in which the women were sailing was captured by a privateer. The death of Indiana's mother was caused by hardships endured while captive. The child and her aunt were taken by the captain of the privateer

113 Richard Steele, Plays, edited by G. A. Aitken, p. 266. All succeeding references in this chapter will be to this book.
to his home at Toulon, and Indiana was reared as his child. At his death his brother inherited his property. The licentious brother fell in love with Indiana. He became infuriated at her resistance to his advances and was about to have her imprisoned for debt when Bevil Junior found her. He protected Indiana and settled with the guardian's brother for the girl's release. He then managed to bring her, with her aunt, back to England, where he arranged to care for her.

At the start of the play Bevil Junior is engaged to Lucinda, the daughter of Sealand, a wealthy Indian merchant. Bevil's father has made the match and is anxious for the two to be married. Bevil Junior's friend, Myrtle, is in love with Lucinda and is quite jealous of him. Bevil writes to Lucinda asking her to call off the match, since he is in love with someone else. And he knows she loves Myrtle.

In the meantime, Lucinda's father has already called off the match. Word has reached him that Bevil is supporting a young girl. He tells Bevil's father of his decision. Bevil Senior goes to see his son. However, he is afraid to ask about the girl, and only asks if he still intends to marry Lucinda. Young Bevil, sure that Lucinda will carry out his plan and call off the match when she receives his letter, seems quite determined to marry her. His father leaves satisfied, sure that he will make Sealand change his mind about the marriage.
Mrs. Seal and has made another match for her daughter. She favors Cimberton, a brash rude scholar. Cimberton's brusque boorish manners have intrigued her, since she has mistaken them for fashionable ways. She wishes to have a marriage contract drawn up for the two, so she sends for Sergeant Target and Lawyer Bramble. Myrtle, in order to put off Cimberton as a suitor, disguises himself as Bramble. Tom, young Bevil's servant, is disguised as Target. Between them they manage to confuse Mrs. Seal and successfully put off the drawing up of the contract.

During this escapade Myrtle learns that Tom has been carrying messages from Bevil to Lucinda. He does not know that the messages ask for a breach of engagement. He becomes jealous and sends Bevil a note demanding a duel. When he goes to see Bevil, his friend tries to reason with him. But when Myrtle speaks disparagingly of Indiana, Young Bevil becomes infuriated and prepares to fight the duel. He recovers himself in time and tries to calm his friend. Finally he quiets him by showing him a letter Lucinda has sent, telling of her love for Myrtle, and asking the two friends to help her escape Cimberton's suit.

Bevil and Myrtle devise a plan to smuggle Myrtle into Lucinda's house as Sir Geoffrey, Cimberton's uncle, who has been invited down to approve the match. Once there,
Myrtle shocks the family and confuses poor Cimberton.

Indiana, in the meantime, instinctively feels Bevil's love and hopes he will declare it. She has been patiently awaiting the time when he would ask her to marry him. She is puzzled at his reticence until she hears of Lucinda. Old Sealand, not understanding Bevil's feelings toward Indiana, goes to see her. He is answered rather coolly when he questions her about the relationship between her and Young Bevil. Indiana takes offense at his remarks and starts to leave. A bracelet slips from her wrist, and Old Sealand recognizes it as one which belonged to his long-lost daughter, whom he has believed dead in a ship-wreck many years before. Indiana's aunt, Isabella, is recognized by him as a sister-in-law, and the three hold happy reunion.

The play ends with Sealand offering his new found daughter to Bevil; Indiana is given half of her father's fortune. Cimberton, discontented with accepting Lucinda with only half a fortune, steps aside for Myrtle.

**Theme.** In searching for Steele's theme in his play we study first the Preface to it. In Steele's Preface to *The Conscious Lovers* he says that the first design of it was to be "an innocent performance."\(^{114}\) He is quick to admit that the play was written for the scene in the fourth act during which Myrtle tries to force Bevil

\(^{114}\) Steele, p. 270.
Junior into a duel with him. The author hopes "it will have some effect upon the Goths and Vandals that frequent the theatre, or a more polite audience may supply their absence." In the scene in which the duel almost takes place, Myrtle presents Steele's conclusion about the dangerous practice:

Betrayed by honour, and compelled by shame,
They hazard being, to preserve a name:
Nor dare inquire into the dread mistake,
Till plunged in sad eternity they wake.

The Lying Lover also censured dueling, and the actual duel in the play brought about the play's sentimental conclusion.

The Conscious Lovers is void of ridicule except that of small follies. The folly of vanity is seen in Mrs. Sealand, who wants to be rid of her daughter so that she herself will seem younger. Her silliness makes her easy prey to the flattery of Cimbernon. For the most part, however, there is little ridicule. The atmosphere is light and happy throughout the play, with few touches of sarcasm. If any single theme could be traced, it would be that of the inherent goodness of mankind. The main characters are exemplary creatures. They have human faults, such as jealousy and distrust, but when faced with temptation, they choose the virtuous way.

115 Steele, p. 270.
116 Steele, p. 335.
Moral intent. The theme of The Conscious Lovers and the moral intent of the play are so closely integrated that a separate analysis of the moral intent would be almost superfluous. Since Steele is a moralist, and his theme is completely moralistic, a study of that theme is sufficient for this study. However, there is a statement in the prologue to the play, written by Leonard Welsted, which serves as a concrete example of Steele's moral intent in The Conscious Lovers. The prologue contained a plea to the audience to elevate comedy by its approbation of this moral play. Welsted saw Steele's work as an instrument to raise the standard of the theatre, when he said in the Prologue to the play:

Ye modest, wise and good, ye fair, ye brave,  
To-night the champion of your virtue save;  
Redeem from long contempt the comic name  
And judge politely for country's fame.117

Characterization. An analysis of characters in The Conscious Lovers is interesting, since it marks the height of development in character drawing by Steele. Young Bevil is a paragon of virtue. He has rescued Indiana from danger, provided for her, and thought of her only with the highest regard. His relationship with his father, too, is most admirable. He has strong ties of filial love. His integrity is strong enough to cause him to avert a duel which he would be justified in fighting. His cleverness

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117 Steele, p. 273.
is apparent when he helps Myrtle win Lucinda.

Myrtle has traces of the Restoration type of lover in his character. He is jealous and impetuous, but he does love Lucinda truly. With his excitable ways, he is a good foil for steady young Bevil.

Mr. Sealand has traits which fit well with the scheme of a sentimental comedy. He is virtuous enough to want the right man for his daughter, Lucinda. He can see that Cimberston is not the man. His scene when he finally meets Indiana shows nobility of character in the pity he feels for her, and the rage he feels against Bevil.

Sir John Bevil is another instance of an affectionate father. He wants to be fair to his son, but he feels he has the advantage of the wisdom of age. With Humphry, his servant, Sir John is short, but, with his son he bends toward the other extreme. His love for his son is his best quality. His character is the opposite of that of Squire Gubbin, Humphrey's father in The Tender Husband.

Humphry, Bevil Senior's servant, reminds us of Trusty, the faithful servant in The Funeral. He is loyal to both his master and his master's son. The contention between the two goes on in the presence of Humphry, and Humphry must try to calm their arguments. Humphry has sensibilities which are touched when he is told by Young Bevil of Indiana's childhood loss.
Tom, Bevil Junior’s servant, is an entertaining character. Practically the only humor in the play is carried by Tom and Phillis, Lucinda’s maid. Their elevated conversation is in amusing contrast to their actual station in life.

Cimberton is a coxcomb and a fortune hunter. He is the most amusing character of high station in the plot. His boorish attitude toward Lucinda is an amusing, interesting contrast to Bevil’s gentility. His supercilious air stays with him to the very end of the play, when he discovers that Lucinda’s fortune will not be entire. He betrays his disappointment:

I was in treaty for the whole; but if that is not to be come at, to be sure there can be no bargain. Sir, I have nothing to do but to take my leave of your good lady, my cousin, and beg pardon for the trouble I have given this old gentleman.118

Mrs. Sealand, the second wife of Mr. Sealand, and Cimberton’s cousin, is vain but not vicious. Her affectations and anxiety to keep her youth seem a little pathetic in the presence of the two young girls. Her presence never dominates the scene, and her frivolity is an amusing contrast to the two younger girls and their more serious problems.

Indiana is as virtuous a woman as Bevil Junior is a man. Her unhappy childhood gives her a serious mein, and

118 Steele, p. 358.
her natural bent is gravity rather than gaiety. Her modesty does not let her believe that a man of Bevil Junior's worth and nobility could love her. Indiana's character is drawn as rather intense. We see this characteristic in her nature illustrated in her scene with Mr. Sealand when she renounces Bevil: "What have I to do but to sigh, and weep, and rave, run wild, a lunatic in chains, or hid in darkness, mutter in distracted starts and broken accents my strange, strange story."[119]

Lucinda's character is drawn less sentimentally than Indiana's. Lucinda is the more dashing of the two. She has a quick tongue and a mannish air. She quarrels readily with Cimberton and speaks up to Myrtle when he is disguised as old Sir Geoffrey Cimberton. She is sharp-witted enough to fall in cleverly with Myrtle's plan when he divulges his identity to her.

The characters are somewhat more complex in The Conscious Lovers than in Steele's earlier plays. Possibly this is because Steele is condemning few vices and needs to expose no one to ridicule. His characters need be neither black nor white. Follies are exposed only in the characters of Mrs. Sealand and Cimberton. Jealousy is quickly overcome in the character of Myrtle when he learns of Lucinda's love for him. This could not be a reformation

[119] Steele, p. 354.
since the reason for jealousy is removed. In all other cases, the characters are constant in their reactions throughout the play. The only changes are those of situation.

**General effectiveness.** An analysis of the play as a whole shows that its mood is pleasant. The sentimental themes of a pair of lovers united and a long-lost daughter returned to her father carry through the entire play instead of appearing in the fifth act, as the sentimental portions did in *The Lying Lover* and *The Tender Husband*. A comparison of *The Conscious Lovers* with Steele's earlier plays shows other marked changes also. There are few of the comedy of manners elements in it which may be observed in Steele's preceding plays. The plot situations are different in *The Conscious Lovers* from those in his earlier ones. In *The Funeral*, *The Lying Lover*, and *The Tender Husband* there are found mixed elements. There are immoral characters from the comedy of manners stage mixed with the didactic themes in blank verse. There are sentimental plots and comedy of manners sub-plots. But in *The Conscious Lovers* there is prose throughout, a single sentimental plot, and the main characters are all sentimental ideals in nature.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has been to analyze Richard Steele's moral intent in his plays and dramatic criticism. A preliminary chapter of this study reviews the history of drama in England to Steele's time with special reference to the moralizing purpose. Emphasis is placed upon the Restoration drama, since this was the period closest to Steele and the one, consequently, which influenced him most. The analysis of Steele's plays and dramatic criticism has been divided into three parts: (1) a study of Steele's earlier plays; The Funeral, The Lying Lover, and The Tender Husband; (2) a study of Steele's dramatic criticism in his periodical writings in The Tatler, The Spectator, and The Guardian; and (3) a study of Steele's last play, The Conscious Lovers.

In the first and third parts of the analysis the following divisions are used: (1) plot synopsis, (2) theme, (3) moral intent, (4) characterization, and (5) general effectiveness. Steele's dramatic criticism in his periodical writings has been discussed under four headings: (1) the moral effects of the theatre on its audience, (2) the moral standards of the audience, (3) Steele's standard of a good play, (4) Steele's judgment of others' plays, and (5) Steele's
reasons for being a critic of the drama.

This analysis of Steele's plays and dramatic criticism has shown that his purpose, as a moralist-dramatist, was to delight, instruct, and uplift. This idea had been used by dramatists for centuries before Steele began to write. By the time of the Restoration, however, to create delight seemed to be the main objective of playwrights; instruction and uplifting were relegated to the background. To amuse their audience these playwrights appealed to its senses through suggestive writing. Many dramatists of the Restoration, when faced with charges of indecency in their writing by moralists such as Jeremy Collier, said that they wrote with the purpose of instructing. Their stand was that by showing the audience what not to do, they were teaching the proper thing to do. Such writers as Vanbrugh and Congreve said they were instructing their audience by holding folly up to ridicule.

Steele's first play, The Funeral, showed this attitude toward instruction. He held vice and folly up to ridicule, but in no way attempted to reform his audience. The Lying Lover, however, showed a change in Steele's attitude. In this play he demonstrated the consequences of continuing folly. His characters upon facing the consequences of their folly reformed their evil ways, and thus showed that they were naturally good. In this contention Steele deviated from the theory of the Restoration dramatists,
who believed that the wiliest, not the best, succeeded.

Steele continued his method of instructing his audience by showing them exemplary conduct on the stage in his remaining plays. He was careful never to put anything on the stage which would horrify his audience; he felt that horror was not an emotion to be cultivated in an audience. He was decorous in what he presented to his public. His dialogue contained no indecent implications, and the actions of his characters were exemplary. He felt that the audience should carry away only pleasant instructive thoughts from the theatre.

Steele's purpose was, as has been told, to delight, instruct, and uplift. We have analyzed his application of the word "instruct" and find it to be different from that of the Restoration dramatists. His intention in delighting his audience was quite different, also. By "delight" he did not mean "move to laughter", for this, he said in his Epilogue to The Lying Lover, was a "distorted passion." He agreed with Ben Jonson that the prime purpose of drama is to delight through instruction but that laughter is only a passion. In the Restoration period the main intention of the playwright was to amuse his audience. Topical allusions, suggestive remarks, and other devices for the approval of the audience were popular with the dramatist. The laughter

120 Richard Steele, Plays, p. 187.
of the audience was the measure of a playwright's popularity. Steele was careful to remark in his prologues that he might easily be sacrificing his popularity by emphasizing moral issues, but he felt that the instruction of his audience was of prime importance. His ultimate goal in his writing was to create work which would instruct and uplift as well as delight. He never completely reached this goal. He came closest to it when he gained subtlety in his instructing. Only in *The Conscious Lovers*, a completely sentimental play, did his desire to instruct seem unapparent. His story was so skillfully woven around a moral theme that the exemplary actions in it seemed quite natural. In his earlier plays the delight one might experience was lost by the obviousness of the didactic elements.

Steele's theory of the moral value of pity was basic in his work. Steele felt that all drama should be uplifting. He considered as moral the emotions aroused by pity, and he felt that those who experienced the emotions were made better. The ability to excite pity was considered the prime essential of a good playwright, and the presence of pity-invoking circumstances was a main requisite of a good play. As in the time of Aristotle, pity was a prime emotion to be evoked. However, Steele felt that pity was an ennobling emotion rather than one which should be purged, as Aristotle had thought.
Steele, then, thought drama should delight, instruct, and uplift those who saw it. In *The Funeral* Steele's moral intent was to purge vice and folly through ridicule. In *The Lying Lover* Steele vanquished vice by showing the consequences of pursuing it. *The Tender Husband* showed the repentance of a foolish woman. Steele felt that the emotions of the audience would be enriched by the pity seen in Clerimont Senior's forgiveness of his wife. Steele sacrificed credibility in the last act for the scene of sentimentality. Always sincere, he was sometimes unbelievable because of his excessive sympathy with his characters. But this trait also was responsible for many warmly amusing characters. In his character drawing his observing eye brought forth some well-rounded characters, whose peculiarities were not sarcastically pictured, as they might have been in Restoration days. In *The Conscious Lovers* the idea that man is fundamentally good appeared in every scene of the play. The situations were sentimental; and the play was moral throughout.

A study of the dramatic criticism in the periodical writings of Richard Steele shows that his judgment of a play was based almost wholly on the moral value of that play to its audience. This is true whether he was criticizing characterization, plot, or dialogue. In his criticism of characterization he based his judgment on the
imitable qualities of the character. An audience, he felt, should be shown on the stage admirable qualities which they could adopt. The plot of the play should contain situations which were met by the characters on the stage as they would be met ideally in real life. Steele insisted that such instruction as to the correct way of life, if done sincerely by the playwright, would leave a permanent effect on the audience. This same theory applied to dialogue as Steele criticized it.

Steele disapproved of the playwrights' practice of writing down to the moral level of their audience. He was displeased with the language of the playwrights, who clothed obscenity in fashionable language. To gain popularity the playwrights appealed to the baser senses of the audience rather than its higher emotions. Steele felt that the audience could be uplifted only when playwrights began writing plays which did not contain suggestive implications as well as lewd scenes.

Steele blamed the writers of his time for not writing sincerely. He thought the playwrights drew all their characters in one image and depended upon costumer and actors alone for differentiation between characters. Emotions expressed by the authors were those which they observed, not those they felt. Steele, however, wrote from the heart. The elements he enjoyed in plays were those
which appealed to the emotions. As a critic, then, he was incapable of analytical, objective judgment. In many cases his work is mediocre because he used his heart rather than his intellect. But when the combination of the two was a happy one, as in the case of *The Conscious Lovers*, he emerged with writing which was popular in its time and is of value to us as pure writing of the sentimental period in English drama.
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