



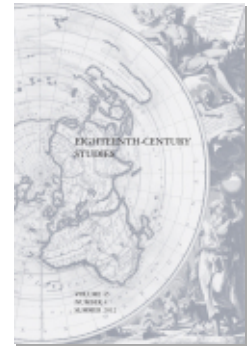
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## BEVIL'S EYES: OR, HOW CRYING AT *THE CONSCIOUS LOVERS* COULD SAVE BRITAIN

*Brett D. Wilson*

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Richard Steele's late comedy *The Conscious Lovers*, which debuted on 7 November 1722 at the Drury Lane theater he himself managed, was the product of a career-long effort to demonstrate the moral and political power of the stage. As dramatist, essayist, and self-appointed "Censor of Great Britain," the appellation he gave himself in *The Tatler*,<sup>1</sup> Steele aspired both to regulate and reform English morals through English drama. His earliest dramatic works, *The Funeral* (1701), *The Lying Lover* (1704), and *The Tender Husband* (1705), show gentle humor and a tolerance of folly as they model gentlemanly conduct. When he secured the patent to Drury Lane in January 1715, after the accession of George I in August 1714, Steele's reformist project could become even more visible.<sup>2</sup> Along with his theatrical management, he had pioneered theatrical criticism in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* and had also launched the "Censorium," a performance space in York Buildings whose premise was to elevate elite tastes by showcasing the best in music, theater, and even scientific demonstrations.<sup>3</sup> Disputes both aesthetic and political marred his tenure at Drury Lane—he was suspended from management after clashing with the Lord Chamberlain in 1720, then restored in 1721—but Steele's sense of an improving mission was persistent. In his journal *Town-Talk* he declared that the theater should never be regarded as "inconsiderable," for "a skillful and honest Direction of the powers of Arts and Sciences which so strongly affect the Senses, and engage the Understanding, would be a great Service to the Common-wealth."<sup>4</sup> Theatrical performance, according to Steele, ought to benefit the British public, and indeed the British state.

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When *The Conscious Lovers* premiered, Steele had just been elected a member of the House of Commons, representing Wendover in Buckinghamshire. He had held other seats before, standing for Stockbridge in Hampshire (1713–14, until being expelled for sedition for writing *The Crisis*<sup>5</sup>), and Boroughbridge in Yorkshire (1715–22). He would represent Wendover actively between 1722 and 1724, and serve nominally until his death in 1727.<sup>6</sup> His public service also included a steady outpouring of political tracts, including the thrice-weekly reviews *The Guardian* (12 March–1 October 1713); *The Englishman* (first series, 6 October 1713–15 February 1714; second series, 11 July 1715–21 November 1715), and the shorter-lived *The Reader* (22 April–10 May 1714). Steele's productivity marked him as the chief Whig party pamphleteer of those days, and most likely earned him the Drury Lane patent. He wrote in support of the "Revolution Principles" that, he argued, underlay the settlement of 1688: on the one hand, the right to resist a government that oversteps its bounds and infringes upon the civil and religious liberties of the subject; on the other, the need to protect that laboriously achieved settlement from destruction by insurgents who embrace arbitrary power and persecution. In *The Crisis* Steele avowed that his objective was to "reviv[e] the proper Sentiments in the Minds of Men for what they ought to esteem most dear"—the imperiled nation and its constitution.<sup>7</sup> Both his theatrical and partisan writings evoke sentiments, or affective responses, that bolster a particular vision of governance and political belonging.

During Steele's tenure in politics inside and outside of Westminster, a succession crisis had erupted as the childless Queen Anne's health began to decline. Despite an Act of Succession designating as Anne's rightful successor George, the Elector of Hanover (a committed Protestant), not the exiled would-be James III (scion of the Catholic James II), rumors abounded that the Jacobites might seize the opportunity to take back the throne for the Stuart dynasty. George's peaceful accession only momentarily assuaged anxieties—or dampened hopes, depending on one's perspective—and rioting and violence flared up for years. Anti-Hanoverian political dissidents invented aggressive new modes of protest, including street-level direct actions and vitriolic, sometimes seditious, pamphleteering. A major Jacobite uprising occurred in 1715, followed by abortive efforts in 1719 and 1722.<sup>8</sup> Striving to control the disorder posed by unruly subjects, the Whig-majority Parliament passed the Riot Act (1714),<sup>9</sup> suspended habeas corpus (1722), and would soon pass the Waltham Black Act (1723).<sup>10</sup> All of these moves gave the government new tools with which to enforce civil order, making more conduct criminal and felonious, defining groups as mobs, and intensifying penalties and punishments. The king and Parliament pronounced that Jacobite incendiaries had conspired to alienate the people from their sovereign: they had become "disaffected" and "malcontents." Just a month before the debut of *The Conscious Lovers*, King George addressed Parliament at the opening of the 1722 session, denouncing the "dangerous conspiracy" against him that had been uncovered over the summer—the Atterbury Plot—and crystallizing the vocabulary of the season:

I cannot but believe the hopes and expectations of our enemies are very ill grounded, in flattering themselves that the late *discontents*, occasioned by private losses and misfortunes, however industriously and maliciously fomented, are turned into *disaffection* and a spirit of rebellion . . . I shall

wholly rely upon the Divine Protection, the support of my Parliament, and the *affections* of my people, which I shall endeavour to preserve, by steadily adhering to the Constitution in Church and State, and continuing to make the laws of the realm the rule and measure of all my actions. ("The King's Speech on Opening the Session," emphasis added)<sup>11</sup>

Supporters of the Whig government and of the Hanoverian succession, Steele prominent among them, considered the nation to be suffering an ongoing crisis not only of sovereignty, but also of political affect.

Against this backdrop, theatrical matters took on a new urgency; and it is in this context, I contend, that the effusive emotionalism of *The Conscious Lovers* should be read. The play is Steele's attempt to generate a mode of affect that might reverse, or at least ameliorate, the sentiment of disaffection at large in the British body politic. Known as the consummate "sentimental comedy," *The Conscious Lovers* is also a play with civic significance, meant to be timely and useful in advancing the good of the nation through its sentimental preoccupations.<sup>12</sup> Steele wrote in 1715 that "The best Vehicle for conveying right Sentiments into the People, is certainly the Theatre"<sup>13</sup>; his play is an instrument for accomplishing that sentimental transfusion in the political realm. *The Conscious Lovers* is political not only because the playwright is a Whig partisan and a defender of King George's regime. As we will see, the displays of benevolence, tenderness, and fellowship around which the play revolves—and which have long been read as morally reforming—also catalyze a form of social cohesion. In its paratextual apparatus—the dedication, preface, prologue, and epilogue—Steele ultimately associates the feelings the play solicits with political loyalty as an affective phenomenon.<sup>14</sup> The sensibility induced by the totality of this work occasions a spirit of sympathetic belonging, a spontaneous solidarity that is precisely the inverse of the bleakness wrought by the malcontents that, according to Steele and his fellow travelers, besets the political nation. Ascertaining how *The Conscious Lovers* works affectively so as to work politically illuminates both the particular case of Richard Steele and, more broadly and even more importantly, the concurrent ethical, aesthetic, and political effects of the early eighteenth-century British stage.<sup>15</sup>

#### "A PLEASURE BUILT UPON THE MOST SINCERE DELIGHT"

The buzz about *The Conscious Lovers* in rehearsals in 1722 was that "this play is the best modern play that has been produced."<sup>16</sup> The *Daily Journal* declared that "a greater Concourse of People was never known to be assembled" than the audience that crowded Drury Lane for the play's debut.<sup>17</sup> The *Freeholder's Journal* remarked that "The Play of the *Conscious Lovers* had such a Reputation before it was known, that a Man of no very great Curiosity would have ventur'd to squeeze into the Crowd that went to see it the First Night."<sup>18</sup> The title *The Conscious Lovers* came late; while the long-delayed, much-revised play was slowly nearing completion it was billed as "The Unfashionable Lovers," "The Fine Gentleman," or "The Gentleman."<sup>19</sup> The play was puffed as an unprecedented innovation in comic plotting and characterization, refining what had been coarsened, setting right what had gone amiss on the British stage.

The exemplary “fine gentleman” in *The Conscious Lovers* is Bevil Junior, son of Sir John Bevil, who at his father’s urging is set that day to marry Lucinda, daughter of the “great India Merchant” Mr. Sealand.<sup>20</sup> But Bevil Junior is in love with another woman, Indiana Danvers, whose life has been marked by a series of distresses. Her entrepreneurial father left his family to seek his fortune in the Indies, but when he sent for his wife and young daughter they were attacked by a French privateer; Mrs. Danvers died at sea and Indiana was spirited away to France, where she lost contact with her father. The privateer adopted and raised her, but when he died Indiana was left at the mercy of a ruthless lawyer who barred her from claiming any of her goods. Bevil Junior had met the beautiful orphan while traveling on the Continent; he paid her debts and brought her to England, where he has maintained her in posh apartments. A punctilious young man, he has always treated her honorably and never made any romantic overtures—but the nagging rumors that she is his kept woman prompt both Sir John and Mr. Sealand to investigate whether the Bevil Junior–Lucinda marriage will end in scandal. Lucinda has other suitors as well: Charles Myrtle, a hotheaded friend of Bevil Junior’s whom she favors; and Cimberton, a philosophical gentleman of leisure whose suit is preferred by his cousin, Mrs. Sealand. The play’s plot has three main concerns: Bevil Junior’s pangs of conscience as he weighs how to get out of the match without displeasing his father; Myrtle’s jealousy; and Indiana’s gloomy ponderings about whether Bevil Junior is in love with her, lusts after her, or simply sees her as a worthy recipient of his charity. Comic relief is provided by Cimberton’s ogling of Lucinda; Myrtle’s dressing in costumes, first as a jargon-happy lawyer, then as an older Cimberton relative, simply to create complications for Mrs. Sealand’s plan to marry Lucinda to Cimberton; and a “low” subplot involving a rather demonstrative pair of servants, Tom and Phillis.

The play reaches two emotional peaks. The first comes when Myrtle goads Bevil Junior into a duel over Lucinda; he accepts the challenge when Myrtle insults Indiana’s honor, but then reconsiders, composes himself, and manages to pacify his friend. The second climax comes when Mr. Sealand, having taken it upon himself to determine whether Bevil Junior has been above board about Indiana, visits her and finds her convincingly chaste and well-mannered. More importantly, he recognizes her bracelet as a token he had left his infant daughter when he departed for the Indies, and he reveals that his original name was Danvers. The joyous reunion of father and daughter leads to the resolution of the plot, as Mr. Sealand enthusiastically accepts the Bevil Junior–Indiana marriage; Sir John accepts his son’s romantic choice; Lucinda can marry Myrtle, as Cimberton backs out when he realizes the emergence of Indiana as a second heir to the Sealand fortune means that Lucinda’s value has just been halved; and a new network of kinship, friendship, and matrimony is knit.

The play’s first run stretched to eighteen performances, and provoked a flurry of critical comment. John Loftis contends that “few plays have attracted more attention on their first appearance than *The Conscious Lovers*.”<sup>21</sup> The anonymous writer of *Sir Richard Steele, and His New Comedy . . . Vindicated* called it “an Excellent Comedy, which has gain’d upon the People beyond any Comedy that has been brought on the Stage for this Twenty Years past, and been acted for three Weeks together with the most universal Applause.”<sup>22</sup> A letter signed “Dorimant”

written to the *St. James's Journal* in 1722 commends the "tender Scene upon the Father's discovery of his Daughter," which "has received the most reasonable and natural Applause of eighteen successive Audiences, their Silence and their Tears," indicating "A Pleasure built upon the most sincere Delight."<sup>23</sup>

While many theatergoers thrilled to the play's emotional payoffs, there was no shortage of detractors. John Dennis called it a massive fraud perpetrated on the public, reminiscent of the South Sea Bubble: "the Sentiments . . . are often frivolous, false, and absurd; the Dialogue is awkward, clumsy, and spiritless; the Diction affected, impure, and barbarous, and too often *Hibernian*." It was "the most absurd and most insipid Entertainment that ever came upon the English Stage."<sup>24</sup> The peevish Dennis, like Steele, was a Whig; the *Freeholder's Journal*, a Tory organ, also mocked the play's touted effects: "It *milk'd the Maudlin Eyes* of the Assembly, in a very pathetic Manner." Of the reunion of Indiana and Mr. Sealand, the reviewer sarcastically attests that "the Discovery at last is entirely Passionate, Melting, and Tragi Comical: The Audience are sent off with a sorrowful Impression, and Tears in their Eyes, not to be wip'd off by the final Event." By the play's conclusion, the actors and the audience "go lovingly Hand in Hand, as Companions and Allies in the Cause of Virtue."<sup>25</sup> Steele's play was known to its defenders and critics alike, across party lines, for being both tear-jerking and sententious.

Much of modern scholarship on *The Conscious Lovers* and sentimental comedy has linked the play's impact to its depiction of newly dominant middle-class norms, privileges, and morals. Laura Brown epitomizes this line of criticism, classifying the play as a work of "dramatic moral action" that displays such "bourgeois values" as "chastity, marital fidelity, financial economy, charity, civic responsibility, benevolence, and natural goodness . . . individualism, constitutionalism, nationalism, and mercantile expansionism."<sup>26</sup> Recent studies by Lisa Freeman, James Chandler, and Lisa Zunshine, among others, have glossed the pathetic and edifying sentiments of *The Conscious Lovers* as products of its distinctive handling of property, class, and capital.<sup>27</sup> The play certainly valorizes the figure of the enterprising merchant; famously, Mr. Sealand rebuffs Sir John's ill opinion of his "Genealogy and Descent" (4.2.4) by affirming that

we Merchants are a Species of Gentry, that have grown into the World  
this last Century, and are as Honourable, and almost as useful, as you  
landed Folks, that have always thought your selves so much above us.  
(4.2.50–53)

The play also lampoons antimerchant opinion by having its most absurd character, Cimberton, act dismayed that the Sealands persist in making their money by trade: "there's no hiding the Disgrace . . . he trades to all parts of the World" (5.1.11–13). In his disguise as Geoffrey Cimberton, Myrtle mockingly consoles him by saying that the Cimberton family has never been the sort "that did any thing" (5.1.15). It is doubtless the case that the ultimate union of Indiana and Bevil Junior means the integration of moneyed and landed interests.<sup>28</sup>

But while class is an important line of inquiry into *The Conscious Lovers*, I suggest here an alternative political reading of the play which identifies its tableaux of effusive feeling as generative of a particularly British sense of commonweal. Steele displays and prompts emotional response in order to stimulate not only private

morals but also public spirit; those “Maudlin Eyes” melting in “a Pleasure built upon the most Sincere Delight” are the seat—the sensorium—of a civic sentiment. By virtue of his feelings, sympathies, and quick apprehensions—that is, the powers of “Bevil’s eyes”—Bevil Junior emerges as not only a fine gentleman or an upstanding member of the bourgeoisie, but also a model Hanoverian political subject, Steele’s emblem of and instrument for “conveying right sentiments into the people.”

### DISINTERESTED LOVE AND THE IMPRESSIONS OF HUMANITY

To unleash these affects, Steele first contrives for Indiana a formidable succession of distresses, then stages their alleviation at Bevil Junior’s hands. Her arc extends from “helpless Infant” (1.2.180) to “ever-destin’d . . . acknowledg’d Wife” (5.3.223–24), through becoming Bevil Junior’s “Care, the Object on which to indulge and please himself” (5.3.112). Bevil Junior and Indiana’s love story, which arises from her travails, is also a story of sympathetic passion that reverberates with feelings of benevolent disinterest. While Indiana’s earliest feelings for Bevil Junior blend gratitude and affection, her aunt Isabella warns of the predatory possibility of the rake merely pretending to amiable sincerity: “There are, among the Destroyers of Women, the Gentle, the Generous, the Mild, the Affable, the Humble, who all, soon after their Success in their Designs, turn to the contrary of those Characters” (2.2.49–52). But Bevil Junior is genuinely genteel; he “has Sense enough to make even Virtue fashionable” (2.2.84–85). When Indiana tests her aunt’s proposition on him—that “no Man ever does any extraordinary Kindness or Service to a Woman, but for his own Sake” (2.3.105–6)—he is incredulous. Insisting that it is indeed possible for a man to assist a vulnerable woman without expecting anything in return, Bevil Junior inveighs against self-interest, advocating charity for “a Virtuous Spirit . . . supported above the Temptations and Sorrows of Life,” not for ulterior motives but for benevolent delight. Indiana calls this vision “so disinterested a Friendship,” but Bevil Junior (like the Earl of Shaftesbury) downplays the disinterest—his compassion is instead derived from pleasure in doing good for one who deserves it (2.3.120–21, 126–27).<sup>29</sup> Indiana still insists that “his having no private Interest in the Action” makes such charity “Prodigious, almost Incredible” (2.3.151–52); he replies that charity is no “mighty Heroick Business” (2.3.114) but a species of usury, so great is the return:

If Pleasure be worth purchasing, how great a Pleasure is it to him, who has a true Taste of Life, to ease an Aking Heart, to see the humane Countenance lighted up, into Smiles of Joy, on the Receipt of a Bit of Oar [Ore], which is superfluous, and otherwise useless in a Man’s own Pocket? What could a Man do better with his Cash? This is the Effect of an humane Disposition, where there is only a general Tye of Nature, and common Necessity. What then must it be, when we serve an Object of Merit, of Admiration! (2.3.153–63)

He says he would “delight in that Prospect” (2.3.124) of the beleaguered woman’s grateful face. With its emphasis on the “humane Countenance” reciprocating a “humane Disposition,” Bevil Junior’s rhetoric attests to fellow-feeling and community, and a desexualized affinity between helpful man and helpless woman.

A courtship plot rests rather uneasily with this ideology of civility and sociability across genders. Even the characters of *The Conscious Lovers* seem puzzled by Bevil Junior's skewness to the usual unfolding of theatrical eroticism. In fact, Indiana's response to his comments is erotic disappointment: "I begin to fear he is wholly disinterested, in what he does for me. On my Heart, he has no other View, but the meer Pleasure of doing it, and has neither Good or Bad Designs upon me" (2.3.172–75). Still skeptical, Isabella gestures toward this unsettled relationship of sympathy and desire, stating "some Men's Modesty serves their Wickedness . . . But I will own to you, there is one hopeful Symptom, if there could be such a thing, as a *disinterested Lover*" (2.3.192–95; emphasis added). This "disinterested Lover" is a fitting figure for Bevil Junior's brand of transformed masculinity—and transformed male gaze. Of course, he does love Indiana, and works to conceal it in order to avoid displeasing his father; but the rhetoric with which Steele festoons the character is dense with benevolence and fellow-feeling, and Steele associates Bevil Junior's brand of tenderness with the proper conduct for not just cultivated men, but, as we will see, politically loyal men.

The way in which Bevil Junior regards the vulnerable Indiana harmonizes with how Mr. Sealand treats her; the bashful lover and the considerate parent, neither one affirming his true relation to her, interact and socialize in much the same manner. Indiana couches her prolonged conversation with Sealand in a language of care. She self-identifies as "wretched, helpless, friendless," eliciting from the suspicious Sealand the comment, "How could Mr. *Bevil* be such a Monster, to injure such a Woman?" (5.3.86, 90–91). The language of asexual pleasure and sociable companionship proliferates:

he never made one Amorous Advance to me—His large Heart, and bestowing Hand, have only *help't the Miserable*: Nor know I why, but from *his mere Delight in Virtue*, that I have been his Care, the Object on which to indulge and please himself, with pouring Favours. (5.3.106–14, emphasis added)

Indiana defines herself as a staging ground for Bevil Junior's exemplary behavior as a "disinterested lover." She continues anatomizing his perfect moral sense:

If to bestow, without a Prospect of Return; if to delight in supporting, what might, perhaps, be thought an Object of Desire, with no other View than to be her Guard against those who would not be so disinterested; if these Actions, Sir, can in a careful Parent's Eye commend him to a Daughter, give yours, Sir, give her to my honest, generous *Bevil*. (5.3.120–24)

In this programmatic statement of benevolence, Steele adumbrates a vision of affinity and sympathy predicated on selflessness and delight in protection. Lamenting to Mr. Sealand, Indiana catalogs her many miseries, and concludes: "why—why was I born to such Variety of Sorrows?" (5.3.126–33). Not yet aware that she is his presumed-dead daughter, Mr. Sealand responds to the disconsolate Indiana with "my Heart grows full with your Affliction" (5.3.150–51). This extravagant rendering of Indiana's woe, and Sealand's sympathy, is capped by the anagnorisis of Sealand and Indiana realizing they are father and "long lost Daughter"—"a Claim more tender yet" (5.3.176–77)—and the inevitable outcome is joyful tears: "These Passions are too strong for Utterance—Rise, rise, my Child, and give my



Tears their Way” (5.3.181–82). As we have seen, contemporary critics found this moment of recognition the play’s crowning emotional triumph.

From the match between Indiana and Bevil Junior—which is also a reunion of Indiana and Mr. Sealand—a new unity arises. Class conflict is obviated, and love, duty, and fortune flow together. Bevil Junior, like Richardson’s Pamela, earns “the Reward of all his Virtues” (5.3.193), and Indiana wins reincorporation into the fatherly family (as Sealand describes it, “soft paternal Dalliance” [5.3.200–201]). Adding himself to the joyous reunion, Bevil Junior insists that Indiana’s new fortune pleases him only insofar as “it may prove the Means to reconcile the best of Fathers to my Love—Let him be Provident, but let me be Happy” (5.3.222–23). As all the major characters congregate on stage, Sir John exults in this “Scene of Wonder” that has forged “mutual Happiness” (5.2.212, 213). Bevil Junior, says the elated Mr. Sealand, is “our general Benefactor”: “Excellent young Man, that could be, at once, a Lover to her Beauty, and a Parent to her Virtue” (5.3.240–42). Steele’s idealized Bevil Junior thereby blends heterosexual desire with parental cultivation and nurture. Reaffirming their sense of fair dealing, as well as their families’ harmonious concatenation, Sir John says to Indiana: “I congratulate my self, as well as you, that I had a Son, who could, under such Disadvantages, discover your great Merit” (5.3.226–28).

The marriage between Indiana and Bevil Junior, a relation predicated on beneficence rather than self-interest, ripples into a new arrangement that includes Lucinda and Myrtle. Myrtle testifies that “no Abatement of Fortune shall lessen her Value to me,” a sentiment welcomed by Lucinda with a hearty “Generous Man! . . . now I find I love you more, because I bring you less” (5.3.267–68, 273–74). When undertaking one of his quick-change acts, Myrtle earlier stated that “the next Delight to Transport, with the Fair, / Is to relieve her, in her Hours of Care” (4.3.76–77), and in their match passionate “Transport” merges with benign “Relief.” Bevil Junior and Myrtle formally quash their rivalry (“now our Competition ceases: I rejoyce in the Preheminence of your Virtue” [5.3.280–82]); Lucinda and Indiana embrace; and Sir John declares that “Ladies and Gentlemen, you have set the World a fair Example” (5.3.284–85). Although the intended rebuke of marriage for wealth and property falls a bit flat when one considers how much real estate still is changing hands, the play nonetheless commends and recommends “disinterested” behavior based on “merit” and “virtue” that ramifies into conventional romance. The play’s lovers feel for one another as fair dealers and fellow sympathizers.

In his preface to the play, Steele defends his departure from usual comic practice, declaring that “the chief Design of this was to be an innocent Performance” (299), and insisting that such scenes as the aborted duel and the father-daughter recognition ought not be condemned as “no Subjects of Comedy” (299):

any thing that has its Foundation in Happiness and Success, must be allow’d to be the Object of Comedy, and sure it must be an Improvement of it, to introduce a Joy too exquisite for Laughter, that can have no Spring but in Delight. (300)

The preface underscores the audience’s tearful response, notably that among men. Steele avows that these men “ought not to be laugh’d at for weeping,” for “the Tears which were shed . . . flowed from Reason and Good Sense” (299). Moreover,

"To be apt to give Way to the Impressions of Humanity is the Excellence of a Right Disposition, and the Natural Working of a well-turned Spirit" (300). These feelings of "Humanity" are synonymous with the affection that is antithetical to disaffection. *The Conscious Lovers* induces tears by design—in those equipped with the "right disposition" in both moral and political terms.

### MERE THINGS AND MACHINES

Steele strives to model for and inculcate into his audience the proper mode of seeing, the proper mode of feeling: these "right dispositions" are crucial to inspiring the particular form of good behavior that could secure a tenuous commonwealth; while wrong dispositions, like those held by disaffected malcontents, must be scourged and rooted out. Cimberton's pursuit of Lucinda is played for laughs, while the near-duel between Bevil Junior and Myrtle is deadly serious. But both scenes suggest the importance—and the humanity—of seeing one another ethically and considerately, not as pure flesh or, perhaps worse still, as machines. Cimberton's and Myrtle's untrained sentiments eschew the "Impressions of Humanity," revealing their kind as in need of an affective and political reeducation. Myrtle learns from Bevil Junior's model, and his reward is joining the new social network formed by the end of the play. Cimberton does not; he continues to lack sentiment, and, accordingly, never does manage to obtain membership in Steele's sympathetic polity.

Cimberton is a man of no feeling, a strong counterexample to Bevil Junior and his idealized sympathies. Cimberton has a singular view of the "Sentiments of Love and Passion," by which Lucinda is "us'd as nothing, or a meer Thing" (3.1.210, 207–8). He deplores modern women for having "Imaginations . . . bewilder'd in Flesh and Blood," their "Ideas of Happiness" extending only to "the Gratification of Hunger and Thirst" (3.1.218–21). He criticizes modern morals for speaking too openly about the "Propagation of the Species" (3.1.227–28); Mrs. Sealand even exclaims, "how abstracted, how refin'd, is your Sense of Things" (3.1.231–32). At the same time, he plies an objectifying gaze that "takes no more Notice of me [Lucinda], than of any other Moveable in the Room" (3.1.211–12). Again comparing his potential marriage partner to a possession—and not a cherished one at that—Cimberton avers that "the better sort of People . . . treat by their Lawyers of Weddings . . . and the Woman in the Bargain, like the Mansion-House in the Sale of the Estate, is thrown in" (3.1.298–302). His anatomizing perception falls upon Lucinda's lips, bosom, chest, arms, neck, and even the "Elasticity in her Veins and Arteries" (3.1.281).<sup>30</sup> Lucinda is repulsed by being "run over" as breeding stock, "to be thus survey'd like a Steed at Sale" (3.1.294). But Cimberton is concerned that her beauty will be so arousing as to be counterproductive; her body prompts in him "the Sensitive Life" and "the Animal" (3.1.165), and he worries that he will be unable to prevent himself from having so many heirs that he "overstock[s] my Family" (3.1.321–22), meaning his estate will be terribly encumbered: "I marry to have an Heir to my Estate, and not to beget a Colony, or a Plantation" (3.1.308–9). Mrs. Sealand opines, "What an Oeconomist!" (3.1.312), further enhancing Cimberton's status as a figure of exaggeratedly materialist empiricism and private interest.

Cimberton—who sees women as things, sometimes as bodies and sometimes as personal ("Moveable") or real property ("Mansion-House")—becomes

an exemplar of maladjusted sense. Armed with “learned Taste” (3.1.213), he is excessively contemptuous of the body and its senses, yet also immersed in carnality. Myrtle calls the merchant an “insensible Possessor” (5.1.55); to Phillis’s contention that “I don’t think he [Cimberton] likes her [Lucinda],” Mrs. Sealand exclaims, “That’s not material! Men of his Speculation are above Desires” (5.1.95–98). Cimberton’s “Sense of Things” gives him a level of exaggerated abstraction and objectification radically distinct from the benevolent (dis)interestedness of Bevil Junior. Lucinda takes exception to Cimberton’s empiricist gaze, and to her mother’s treating her as a token for the marriage market, an equivalently objectifying and inhumane practice. She balks at being “expos’d . . . in every County of Great Britain” (3.1.174–76), “barter’d for, like the Beasts of the Fields” (3.1.179–80). She describes her mother’s views on women’s licit kinds of pleasure: “To Love is a Passion, ‘tis a Desire, and we must have no Desires” (3.1.172–73). Lucinda is outraged that Mrs. Sealand has converted marriage from “an intire Familiarity, and Union of Soul and Body” (3.1.184–85) to a rank attempt to secure a “prodigious large Estate” (3.1.190). When the recognition scene between Indiana and Mr. Sealand enables Lucinda to marry Myrtle, she at last wins nonobjectifying treatment, no longer reduced to her flesh or her fortune.

Steele differentiates Cimberton’s unfeeling gaze and self-interest—qualities that make him a bad political subject as well as a bad marriage partner—from Bevil Junior’s mode of disinterest that can still love, sympathize, and perceive with acuity. Bevil Junior’s feelings can succeed in causing men to cohere as well; the duel scene between him and Myrtle induces a poignant epiphany about homosocial feeling. As is well known, Steele wrote that the plan for *The Conscious Lovers* sprang from a desire to represent the moral consequences of dueling.<sup>31</sup> As the scene begins, frustrated by his continued communication with Lucinda, the hot-tempered Myrtle deplores Bevil Junior’s “cool Manner”: “I see your Moderation tends to your own Advantage, and not mine; to your own Safety, not Consideration of your Friend” (4.1.106–9). Continued anxiety over Bevil’s unusual serenity (later enchained with “Coolness,” “Gravity,” and “Shew of Conscience” [4.1.127–28]) leads Myrtle to imagine him as selfish, inconsiderate, unsympathetic: “from your Fortune, your specious outward Carriage, and other lucky Circumstances . . . you know nothing of what it is to be alarm’d, to be distracted, with Anxiety and Terror of losing more than Life” (4.1.144–47). Myrtle accuses Bevil Junior of being uncaring toward Lucinda and louche toward the mysterious Indiana, whom he maligns as “your Ready, your Commodious, your Foreign Trinket” (4.1.143–44) and “your Rambling Captive, your Indian Princess, for your soft Moments of Dalliance, your Convenient, your Ready Indiana” (4.1.149–51). Bevil Junior’s placidity, Myrtle thinks, means that he must be consumed by a sense of cavalier luxuria. But even when provoked, Bevil works to maintain his sangfroid, opting to “recover myself . . . and . . . have Respect enough to all I have ever been receiving from Infancy, the Obligation to the best of Fathers, to an unhappy Virgin too, whose Life depends on mine” (4.1.162–66). Bevil Junior’s sympathetic commitments to father and beleaguered protégée bring him back from the brink of self-destructive and inhumane violence.

The friends’ reconciliation transpires by means of a style of seeing that Steele affiliates with shared bodily truth, negating the subject and object implicit

in Cimberton's libidinous gaze. Myrtle wonders, "with what Face can I see my Benefactor?" (4.1.188–89), and Bevil Junior says, "Thy Face is alter'd to that of another Man; to that of my Companion, my Friend" (4.1.197–98). As Bevil Junior laments that they had come so near the brink of a deadly duel, he exclaims, "Alas! what Machines are we!" (4.1.196). In an essay for Steele's periodical *The Guardian*, Deane Bartlett had written of "Machines," a "Sort of Beings that have the Outside or Appearance of Men, without being really such," referring to "Free-thinkers" who deny that they are "actuated by any incorporeal Being or Spirit, but that all the Operations they exert proceed from the Collision of certain Corpuscles." For denying the existence of the soul, freethinkers should be considered "it" rather than "him," "Automata, made up of Bones and Muscles, Nerves, Arteries, and Animal Spirits." The essay as a whole suggests that to be a gentleman is more than just imitating the proper gestural code: those are simply "mechanic Powers."<sup>32</sup> In the context of the *Guardian* essay, Bevil Junior's remark suggests that specious and outmoded social codes have driven the two friends, like pieces of clockwork, unthinkingly to the verge of self-destruction. When Bevil Junior names their shared mentality as that of a "machine," he claims instead the instantaneous sympathy of the friendly face.<sup>33</sup> In the end, their clash becomes an instrument of reform: Bevil Junior hopes that "the Memory of it will make us Dearer Friends than ever"; Myrtle solemnly testifies,

Dear *Bevil*, your Friendly Conduct has convinc'd me that there is nothing manly, but what is conducted by Reason, and agreeable to the Practice of Virtue and Justice. (4.1.209–11)

To be "manly," then, involves "the Practice of Virtue and Justice." Thanks to Bevil Junior's "Friendly Conduct" and "Superior Spirit" (4.1.203), the friendship, and the practice of humanity, are preserved. There are rewards for seeing with sympathy, Steele avers: emotional and moral rewards, yes; but, as we shall see, political rewards as well.

### STEELE'S THEATRICAL PUBLIC

Seeing with sympathy—which Bevil Junior and Sealand do with ease; which Myrtle learns by example; and which Cimberton cannot comprehend—leads back into Steele's macropolitical vision of sentimental theater, not just in *The Conscious Lovers* but in British society. From 2 January to 5 April 1720, as he finalized *The Conscious Lovers* and became ensnared in the imbroglio over the management of Drury Lane, Steele published a new journal, *The Theatre*. The semiweekly began life as a device for Steele to defend his management, promote his theory of the civic purpose of theater, and air grievances against what he believed to be unjust treatment. In addition to its stated preoccupation *The Theatre*, like Steele's other journalistic endeavors, discusses public affairs and moral philosophy for a mass public. The journal describes theatrical events, of course, but also the state of contemporary manners and the perilous condition of the South Sea Company, among other topics. But the diversity of topics is not digressive; in a neat formulation, Steele manages to represent the theater and the British public as figures for one another. His interlocutor "Dramatis Persona" states in the journal's second number that the theater is "a Pleasure more particularly adapted to the British Genius, and

the Excellence of our Writers in this kind show, that we are formed for it above all other People.” He goes on to say that in Britain, as opposed to France, “Persons of all Conditions and Characters are mingled together on the Stage, as they are (from the Freedom of our Government) in real life.”<sup>34</sup> Habitues of an improved stage will enjoy “such Representations as may give a Man, from an Evening spent at the Playhouse all the Pleasures and Advantages which he could reap from having been so long in the very best Conversation.”<sup>35</sup> Such use of the theater as a figure for civil society accords with a Shaftesburian vision of social virtues engendering public good; Lawrence Klein has teased out the partisan dimension of the 3rd Earl’s ideas of sociability, manners, and the moral sense, arguing that Shaftesbury’s philosophy works as ideological justification of the Hanoverian accession and Whig party hegemony.<sup>36</sup> Steele’s stage both embodies and enacts reform, yoking the diversity of characters to the diversity of spectators so as to inculcate a mannerly, sociable, Whiggish common good.

In the earliest numbers of *The Theatre*, Steele sets forth his project (voiced through his mouthpiece, Sir John Edgar) “to undertake (in this publick Manner) the Preservation and Improvement of the *English* Theatre,” saying he has been so implored by a certain Sophronia, an older woman at the center of a fashionable playgoing salon.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, in the journal’s very last issue, Steele says that his upcoming play—first called *Sir John Edgar* after the persona elaborated as *The Theatre*’s writer, later *The Conscious Lovers*—was written “in order to introduce agreeable Characters in Opposition to the false Customs and Habits which have prevail’d amongst us.”<sup>38</sup> The mission of theater and play alike is the improvement of the national taste and manners.

In the journal’s second issue, Steele advocates for the theater as part of officialdom:

My Design therefore is, since the Government has thought fit to establish a Theatre, to make it deserve its Encouragement; and I shall endeavour to enable the Proprietors of it to make their Representations as beneficial, and instructive, as they are delightful to the People.

Excusing in advance any deviations from theatrical criticism, Steele avers that “I shall with the same Spirit and Industry employ my Pen on any other Subject, whenever the Service of my Country shall call upon me,” and since the world of public affairs is but another kind of stage, he dubs himself “*Auditor-General of the real and imaginary Theatres.*”<sup>39</sup>

In the third issue, Steele continues to sketch out this theatrical civics; he sets up an elaborate joke about idealizing the public taste, constructing an elective parliamentary body to serve as “*Auditors of the Drama.*” These “real Representatives of a *British* Audience” stand for various segments of the theatrical public: actors, writers, class- and gender-specific officeholders for each of the seating areas. Figuring forth a republican, deliberative vision of the workings of taste, Steele endows this comical body with sweeping authority:

[the] full Power, in the Right of the Audiences of *Great Britain*, to approve, condemn, or rectify whatever shall be exhibited on the *English* Theatre . . . in Matters merely relating to the Conduct of the Theatre, the

said elected *Auditors*, from time to time, shall be deemed able, and to have Right, to give Laws for ever.<sup>40</sup>

His candidates, represented by position statements, reappear (in slightly different form) as characters in *The Conscious Lovers*—Lucinda, Mr. Sealand, Charles Myrtle, and the trusty elderly servant Humphrey. *The Theatre* thus suggests that Steele intends the characters of *The Conscious Lovers* to be a representative body, staple of Whig constitutionalism and subject of English civic pride.

The theater embodies representative government and offers up “agreeable Characters” like those in *The Conscious Lovers* for a perhaps surprising political end: to check the advance of arbitrary power. Shaftesbury had made a similar argument about the connection between refined, “agreeable” sociability and political liberty:

A public spirit can come only from a social feeling or sense of partnership with humankind. Now there are none so far from being partners in this sense, or sharers in this common affection, as they who scarcely know an equal nor consider themselves as subject to any law of fellowship or community. And thus morality and good government go together. There is no real love of virtue without the knowledge of public good. And where absolute power is, there is no public.<sup>41</sup>

These apprehensible feelings of mutual, social benefit cannot exist under tyrannical political systems; but such public spirit can indeed arise in Britain—especially, for Steele, in the theater. In *The Theatre* 10, Steele includes prologues for Drury Lane performances of Dryden’s *All for Love* and Delarivier Manley’s *Lucius, the First Christian King of Britain*, which highlight the location of tyrannical oppression on the stage rather than in British daily life.<sup>42</sup> In the lines for *Lucius* which supply this issue’s epigraph, Steele writes:

Rescu’d from foreign Bonds, the happy Age  
Sees no abuse of Power, but on the Stage.  
.....  
On such dire Forms, long shall this happy Isle,  
As only Stage-Events, in Safety Smile.<sup>43</sup>

Stage tyranny, no matter how “dire” its “Forms,” has a didactic and a pleasurable purpose; the right kind of theater celebrates England’s lack of “foreign Bonds,” and even contributes to keeping that freedom intact. For Steele, the isle remains happy and smiling in the theater as well as *through* the theater.

### ALLEGIANCE, HUMANITY, AND “RIGHT SENTIMENTS”

The sentimentalism that hedges round Bevil Junior, Indiana, and Mr. Sealand—the “Joy too exquisite for Laughter”—becomes not just moral reform but British civic virtue by the operations of the dedication, preface, prologue, and epilogue to *The Conscious Lovers*. In accordance with Steele’s program of morally uplifting and nationally beneficial theater, crying at *The Conscious Lovers* emerges as not only humane, but masculine, and furthermore, patriotic.

The first edition of the printed play appeared on 1 December 1722, postdated to 1723 on the title page.<sup>44</sup> Significantly, Steele chooses to dedicate *The*

*Conscious Lovers* to King George himself. In his epistle dedicatory, Steele asserts his own “Laudable Ambition . . . of following the Cause of Liberty” and associates that liberty with the theater, for to manage Drury Lane under George’s aegis is “highly conducing to the Prosperity of the Common-wealth.” Amid hyperbolic praise for George’s goodness and mercy, Steele takes aim at the “Insinuations of Malecontents” fomenting “Disrespectful Ideas of their Gracious and Amiable Sovereign,” malcontents who rapidly transform rhetorically into “rebels”: “‘Tis to be a Savage to be a Rebel, and they who have fallen from You have not so much forfeited their Allegiance, as lost their Humanity” (297–98). The problem of rebellion is not only political (“allegiance”) but affective (“humanity,” i.e., humaneness). In November 1722, the term “rebel” would carry the resonance of the latest attempted Jacobite uprising, the Atterbury Plot, which had been exposed just the previous August, and was the hot topic in Parliament during the 1722–23 session. The conspirators—led symbolically by Francis Atterbury, Bishop of Rochester—planned to assassinate George, imprison his government, seize the nation’s financial centers, and simultaneously launch an invasion.<sup>45</sup> (Steele in his capacity as MP was tapped to serve on a committee to draft an address “expressing the indignation of this House against the horrid and detestable Conspiracy.”<sup>46</sup>) In the dedication, Steele extols George’s “Passion for Justice, and Her constant Assessor Mercy,” although he acknowledges that “Calm Dominion, Equal Grandeur and Familiar Greatness do not easily affect the Imagination of the Vulgar, who cannot see Power but in Terror . . . [the People] only begin to apprehend the Greatness of their Master, when they have incurr’d his Displeasure” (297). Steele’s reference to “Terror” in the vicinity of “Malecontents” evokes a treatise—by Francis Atterbury—pleading for clemency for the Jacobite conspirators of 1715:

Let the People not only hear of the Lenity of the Government, but feel it, and there will be hardly a Heart to oppose his Majesty . . . Is Terror to become the only National Principle? If so, I am afraid it will have no other Effect than to make Men more cautious Rebels, which would be our great Misfortune; but it will never make them better Subjects. To do which, is the most reputable Ambition of a Prince.<sup>47</sup>

Atterbury calls for royal mercy as productive of “better Subjects”; Steele, too, wants to generate better, more loyal subjects capable of apprehending George’s greatness—not through the intimidation of state violence but through the noncoercive regulatory method of theater. For Steele, it is the presence of malcontents that makes even more urgent the kind of moral reform the theater can provide; watching a play like *The Conscious Lovers* instructs British subjects anew in their own humanity, leading in turn to their ready allegiance to the House of Hanover.

The moments of *The Conscious Lovers* that trigger the surge of “joy too exquisite for laughter” embody both the “right Sentiments” Steele says are inculcated in the theater and the “Humanity” that the dedication to King George suggests rebels and malcontents lack. Even a general, the preface tells, wept at Indiana’s plight; “I’ll warrant he’ll fight ne’er the worse for that,” opined the actor Robert Wilks (300). Leonard Welsted, one of Steele’s cohorts from Button’s Coffee House and the Kit-Cat Club, provides a prologue that beseeches Britons to “Lib’ral Mirth, like Lib’ral Men, defend” (line 22), and importunes them for their

approval of the “chasten[ed]” and “moralize[d]” comedy—which will redound to “your Country’s Fame” (28–32). With this play, the prologue claims, manners become patriotic, and ultimately the British national character can be redeemed. Welsted’s epilogue leavens the mix of patriotism and feeling with gender, setting forth young Bevil as a subject for emulation:

The Nymph with *Indiana’s* Worth who vies,  
A Nation will behold with *Bevil’s* Eyes (24–25).<sup>48</sup>

Bevil becomes both a model spectator and a model spectacle, as the nation watches him watching the pitiable Indiana: “Bevil’s Eyes” are “Maudlin Eyes.” This Möbius loop of tearful spectatorship onstage and off—as the *Freeholder’s Journal* reviewer sneered, “Actors and Audience go lovingly Hand in Hand, as Companions and Allies in the Cause of Virtue”—is, Steele reassures audience and king in his dedication, “highly conducing to the Prosperity of the Common-wealth.” Moreover, the anonymous *The Censor Censur’d* explicitly links Steele’s voluminous political output to *The Conscious Lovers*. This piece, a dialogue between Sir Dicky Marplot (Steele) and the commonsensical Jack Freeman, suggests that Steele’s play is terribly flawed on its own terms but buoyed by the zeal of politically prejudiced readers prone to siding with his politics. The Steele surrogate admits, “if I thought the World would forget to apply the Character of my fine Gentleman, which I am so fond of, I would take the Pains to write a long Preface to prove him an exemplary Whig.”<sup>49</sup> Steele’s reformed stage aims to create a legion of sympathetic, Whiggish loyalists who not only champion women’s welfare—acting as neither machines nor flesh; treating others neither as flesh nor things—but also provide a bulwark against the encroachment of arbitrary power: in short, a nation of Bevils.

In this way, Steele’s play, in furtherance of his theatrical theory, undertakes to outfit the entirety of the British nation with “Bevil’s Eyes.” Watching *The Conscious Lovers* tearfully and sympathetically keeps arbitrary power at bay and quashes the baleful influence of disaffected malcontents. Steele, or at least someone in his cohort, wrote in *The Guardian* in 1713 that Britain was a nation defined and defended by its good humor—that is to say, its comedy:

This frank and generous Disposition in a People, will . . . never fail to keep up in their Minds an Aversion to Slavery, and be, as it were, a standing Bulwark of their Liberties. So long as ever Wit and Humour continues, and the Generality of us will have their own way of Thinking, Speaking and Acting, this Nation is not like to give any Quarter to an Invader, and much less to bear with the Absurdities of Popery, in Exchange for an established and reasonable Faith.<sup>50</sup>

The essayist suggests that the British people will never abide the enforced conformity that despotism requires; British quirkiness is allied to their “wit and humour.” *The Conscious Lovers* is hardly witty, of course. On this occasion Steele adapts the insight of the *Guardian* essay to suggest that there are indeed mindsets or “structures of feeling” (per Raymond Williams), that might validate the political and constitutional framing of the British nation. But the best route to cultivating this “frank and generous Disposition” that negates the menace of the slave-mongering invader turns out, in this case, to be not laughter but upwelling sympathy.



Steele argues implicitly in his prefatory and occasional materials to *The Conscious Lovers* that a sentimental reaction to theater has a prophylactic effect, preventing the spread of the contagion of Jacobite malcontent. By showing sympathy toward the pitiable Indiana's expressions of woe, Steele's tender-hearted protagonist Bevil Junior emblemizes an affinity that doubles as benevolent disinterest. The sentimentalism that ripples around Bevil Junior and Indiana is also civic virtue. Steele in *The Conscious Lovers* not only shows his audience exemplary characters; he also detonates an emotional response to those characters—and that feeling, or sentiment, redounds to the national benefit as loyalty, allegiance, and “right Sentiments.” To see with Bevil's eyes, to derive exquisite joy from theatrical sympathy, conjures into being a British nation that can never fall prey to disaffection.

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#### NOTES

My thanks to several generous, sensitive, and sociable respondents to this essay and its principal ideas, including Toni Bowers, Michael Gamer, John Richetti, Adam Potkay, Erin Minear, Julia Simon, the anonymous readers for *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Elanore Lampner, and Julie Northcott-Wilson.

1. Steele, writing as Isaac Bickerstaff, dubs himself the “Censor of Great Britain” in order to chastise “the Manners of the People, and to check any growing Luxury.” Earlier, he had written that “In a Nation of Liberty, there is hardly a Person in the whole Mass of the People more absolutely necessary than a Censor.” See *Tatler* 162 (22 April) and *Tatler* 144 (11 March 1710), in *The Tatler*, ed. Donald F. Bond, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), 2: 403, 2: 318. On the link between the censor and the satirist, see Matthew Kinservik, *Disciplining Satire: The Censorship of Satiric Comedy on the Eighteenth-Century London Stage* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2002).

2. Steele's patent, reproduced in *Town-Talk* 6, emphasizes that on the basis of his particular abilities—“not only from his Publick Services to Religion and Virtue, but his steady Adherence to the true Interest of his Country”—he had been chartered to provide entertainment that was both morally sound and, to wit, politically correct: “We further Enjoyn the strictest Regard to such Representations, as any way Concern Civil Policy, or the Constitution of Our Government, that these may contribute to the support of Our Sacred Authority, and the Preservation of Order and good Government.” One passage of the patent specifies that a reason for tapping Steele was that “in the Representations of Civil Government, Care has not been taken to create in the Minds of Our good Subjects just and dutiful Idea's [*sic*] of the Power and Authority of Magistrates” (*Town-Talk* 6; qtd. in Kinservik, *Disciplining Satire*, 51). In other words, the roles of both subjects and sovereigns warrant reinforcement on the British stage, “Power” and “Rights” conveyed by both ratiocination (“Idea's”) and affect (“Sense”). This stage is intended to foster virtue in several forms: religious, sexual, and civic. I share Kinservik's emphasis on how Steele's patent highlights the way in which offensive plays have been injurious to government. See *Town-Talk* 6 (20 January 1716), in *Richard Steele's Periodical Journalism 1714–16*, ed. Rae Blanchard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), 229 (“not only,” “in the Representations”); 231–32 (“We further Enjoyn”). (I cite this volume subsequently as *PJ*.)

The patent to operate the Theatre Royal (issued 19 January 1715) is related to but distinct from a license (issued 18 October 1714) that authorized Steele to maintain a theatrical company together with a trio of noted actors, Colley Cibber, Thomas Doggett, and Robert Wilks. (After his death, Doggett was replaced by Barton Booth.) Collectively, the group believed that their direct sanction by the king superseded the traditional authority to regulate the theaters possessed by the Lord Chamberlain. Jurisdictional confusion, clashes of will, and internecine partisan wrangling—over the Peerage Bill of 1719 and the South Sea Bill of 1720—led to several controversies, culminating in the revocation of the patent and Steele's suspension from management in 1720. Steele returned on 2 May 1721, when rancor had cooled and his new patron, a rising star named Robert Walpole, had been elevated to ministerial prominence. The indispensable study of Steele's stint as the patentee is John Loftis, *Steele at Drury Lane* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1952).

3. The Censorium project is best delineated in Steele's journal *Town-Talk* 4, wherein it is billed as a device for “an improvement of the public taste in pleasures . . . This Project will be to the Stage, what

an Under-plot is to a Play. It may unavoidably have a good effect upon the Theatrical Representations, and the approbation of persons of genius of both sexes assembled frequently together may diffuse itself through the age, and insensibly correct their false notions of delicacy" (*PJ*, 228). The political stakes of the Censorium are less clear, but Steele calls it a "Loyal House" in his "Prologue Spoken at the Sensorium on His Majesty's Birth-day" (*Town-Talk* 7, in *PJ*, 239–40). Here Steele puns on the relationship between "Censorium" as an enterprise by a censor, and "Sensorium," the seat of instantaneous, precognitive sensory perception. The most detailed modern account of the Censorium is John Loftis, "Richard Steele's Censorium," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 14 (November 1950): 43–66.

4. *Town-Talk* 6 (20 January 1716), in *PJ*, 228. As early as his comedy *The Lying Lover* (1704), Steele argued that "it ought to be the Care of all Governments, that publick Representations should have nothing in 'em but what is agreeable to the Manners, Laws, Religion, and Policy of the Place or Nation in which they are exhibited"; accordingly, his new play was calculated to be "no improper Entertainment in a Christian Commonwealth." See *The Lying Lover, Or, The Ladies Friendship* (London: Printed for Bernard Lintott, 1704), a1r. An "Epilogue spoken at the Censorium on the King's Birth-Day" extols Steele as a "Sage" whose mission is "to watch the Publick Weal"; *Town-Talk* 4 (6 January 1716), in *PJ*, 212. This focus on the nation and the public is what I wish to underscore in these passages: in Steele's hands, the theater will instruct its audience in better behavior, better manners, and virtue; but also in better citizenship, better belonging to the commonwealth.

5. Steele's compendium of laws, principles, and Whig philosophies of government ran afoul of the Tory majority because it implied that the nation under their party's administration was in a perilous state; see *The Crisis: or, a Discourse Representing, from the Most Authentick Records, the Just Causes of the Late Happy Revolution: and the Several Settlements of the Crowns of England and Scotland on Her Majesty; and on the Demise of Her Majesty Without Issue, upon the Most Illustrious Princess Sophia, Electress and Dutchess Dowager of Hanover, and the Heirs of Her Body Being Protestants; by Previous Acts of both Parliaments of the Late Kingdoms of England and Scotland; and Confirmed by the Parliament of Great Britain. With Some Seasonable Remarks on the Danger of a Popish Successor* (London: printed by Sam. Buckley; and sold by Ferd. Burleigh, in Amen-Corner, 1713 [1714]). Steele parried his foes' attacks in *The Englishman* 57 (15 February 1714), in *The Englishman: A Political Journal by Richard Steele*, ed. Rae Blanchard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 227–49. Steele was ultimately expelled from his seat in the House of Commons for "scandalous and seditious libels" on 18 March 1714. He defended himself anew in *Mr. Steele's Apology for Himself and his Writings, Occasioned by his Expulsion from the House of Commons* (London: printed and sold by R. Burleigh in Amen-Corner, 1714) and reentered Commons in the election of 1715.

6. Steele was elected on 12 March 1722, and the session opened on 9 October 1722. On Steele's tenure in Parliament, see Calhoun Winton, *Sir Richard Steele, M.P.* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1970). Winton ably covers the first half of Steele's life in *Captain Steele: The Early Career of Richard Steele* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1964).

7. Steele, *The Crisis*, 136.

8. The best recent work on Jacobite uprisings and sentiments includes Bruce Lenman, *The Jacobite Risings in Britain 1689–1746* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980); Paul Kleber Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People 1688–1788* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989); Margaret D. Sankey, *Jacobite Prisoners of the 1715 Rebellion: Preventing and Punishing Insurrection in Early Hanoverian Britain* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005); and Daniel Szechi, *1715: The Great Jacobite Rebellion* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2006).

9. The Riot Act is formally titled "An Act for preventing Tumults and riotous Assemblies, and for the more speedy and effectual punishing the Rioters." It begins by alluding to "many rebellious Riots and Tumults . . . in divers Parts of this Kingdom, to the Disturbance of the Publick Peace, and the endangering of his Majesty's Person and Government, and the same are yet continued and fomented by Persons disaffected to his Majesty . . . and by such Rioters his Majesty and his Administration have been most maliciously and falsly traduced, with an Intent to raise Divisions, and to alienate the Affections of the People from his Majesty." *An Act for preventing tumults and riotous assemblies, and for the more speedy and effectual punishing the rioters* (London: printed by John Baskett . . . , 1715), 243–48. The statute (officially designated 1 Geo. 1 St. 2 c. 5) frequently refers to affection and disaffection, betokening awareness that politics is affective.

On popular disturbances during this period, see Douglas Hay et al., *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975); Nicholas Rogers,

*Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Ian Gilmour, *Riot, Rising, and Revolution: Governance and Violence in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Pimlico, 1993); Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995); and Adrian Randall, *Riotous Assemblies: Popular Protest in Hanoverian England* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2006).

Wilson refers to street politics as “counter-theater” (103); *The Conscious Lovers*, then, might be considered counter-counter-theater.

10. See Pat Rogers, “The Waltham Blacks and the Black Act,” *Historical Journal* 17 (September 1974): 465–86; E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975); Eveline Cruickshanks and Howard Erskine-Hill, “The Waltham Black Act and Jacobitism,” *Journal of British Studies* 24 (July 1985): 358–65; and John Broad, “Whigs and Deer-Stealers in Other Guises: A Return to the Origins of the Black Act,” *Past and Present* 119 (May 1988): 56–72.

11. “The King’s Speech on Opening the Session,” reproduced in *Cobbett’s Parliamentary History of England*, Vol. 8, A.D. 1722–1733 (London: Printed by T.C. Hansard, 1811), 26–27.

12. Several able critics have weighed in on the taxonomy of eighteenth-century comedy in general and on the placement of *The Conscious Lovers* therein. On “sentimental comedy,” see Ernest Bernbaum, *The Drama of Sensibility: A Sketch of the History of English Sentimental Comedy and Domestic Tragedy, 1696–1780* (1915; repr., Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1958); Joseph Wood Krutch, *Comedy and Conscience after the Restoration*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1949); James J. Lynch, *Box, Pit and Gallery: Stage and Society in Johnson’s London* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1953); Arthur Sherbo, *English Sentimental Drama* (Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1958); John Loftis, *Comedy and Society from Congreve to Fielding* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1959); Paul E. Parnell, “The Sentimental Mask,” *PMLA* 78 (1963): 529–35; Robert Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976); Richard Bevis, *The Laughing Tradition: Stage Comedy in Garrick’s Day* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1980); Robert Hume, “The Multifarious Forms of Eighteenth-Century Comedy,” in *The Stage and the Page: London’s “Whole Show” in the Eighteenth-Century Theatre*, ed. Geo. Winchester Stone (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981), 3–32; John Traugott, “Heart and Mask and Genre in Sentimental Comedy,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 10 (October 1986): 122–44; and Frank H. Ellis, *Sentimental Comedy: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991).

On Steele and *The Conscious Lovers* in particular, see Shirley Strum Kenny, “Richard Steele and the ‘Pattern of Genteel Comedy,’” *Modern Philology* 70 (August 1972): 22–37; Kenny, “Humane Comedy,” *Modern Philology* 75 (August 1977): 29–43; Maximillian E. Novak, “The Sentimentality of *The Conscious Lovers* Revisited and Reasserted,” *Modern Language Studies* 9 (Autumn 1979): 48–59; and Stuart Tave, *Lovers, Clowns, and Faeries* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993).

These studies, which tack between finding *The Conscious Lovers* and related plays (like Edward Moore’s *The Foundling* and Richard Cumberland’s *The West Indian*) “sentimental,” “exemplary,” or “humane” in focus, wrangle over whether the mode’s distinctiveness arises from its tableaux of tender emotion or its modeling of ideal conduct, while attempting to pinpoint when it emerged and whether it ever became dominant. Hume memorably maintains that Oliver Goldsmith’s ready distinction between “laughing” and “sentimental” comedy is contrived to flatter the contributions of Oliver Goldsmith; see “Goldsmith and Sheridan and the Supposed Revolution of ‘Laughing’ against ‘Sentimental’ Comedy,” in *The Rakish Stage: Studies in English Drama, 1660–1800* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1983), 312–55. Whatever its moniker, few find much to recommend in the mode, deeming its sentiments cheap and its resolutions artificial and altogether too convenient. Most of these critics deem Steele’s play exasperating, cloying, or both. More recent analyses of *The Conscious Lovers* are discussed below.

13. *Town-Talk* 2 (23 December 1715), in *PJ*, 194.

14. My readings of the convergence between sentiment and national feeling harmonize with recent work by Evan Gottlieb and Juliet Shields. While each of them focuses on the particular case of Scotland as productive of literary and philosophical forms of sentimental identification, my interest here is in tracing an earlier moment of political instability that spurred comparable attempts to elaborate deeply felt forms of political and social unity. See Gottlieb, *Feeling British: Sympathy and National Identity in Scottish and English Writing, 1707–1832* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2007); and Shields, *Sentimental Literature and Anglo-Scottish Identity, 1745–1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010).

15. I take a similar approach to drama and “governmentality,” especially as pertaining to tragedies centered on women’s civic agency, including Nicholas Rowe’s *Jane Shore* (1714) and Catharine Trotter’s *Revolution of Sweden* (1706), in *A Race of Female Patriots: Women and Public Spirit on the British Stage, 1688–1745* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell Univ. Press, 2012).

16. Newspaper advertisement of 2 October 1722, reproduced in *The Epistolary Correspondence of Richard Steele*, ed. John Nichols (London: John Nichols and Son, 1809), 2: 621; qtd. in *The Plays of Richard Steele*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 281n1.

17. *Daily Journal*, 8 November 1722; qtd. in W. Van Lennep, E. L. Avery, et al., *The London Stage, 1660-1800; A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments & Afterpieces, Together with Casts, Box-Receipts and Contemporary Comment*. 11 vols. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1960-68), 2: 694.

18. *Freeholder’s Journal* (14 November 1722), in *Essays on the Theatre from Eighteenth-Century Periodicals*, ed. John Loftis (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1960), 20.

19. Kenny notes these alternative titles in her introductory materials to the play in *The Plays of Richard Steele*, 281n1. For accounts of Steele’s fitful development of the play that would become, in finished form, *The Conscious Lovers*, see Kenny, *Plays*, 275–79; and Loftis, *Steele at Drury Lane*, 183–93. The evidence indicates that Steele was drafting the play—or at any rate, a new play of an exemplary bent—by 1713, and perhaps even earlier. Notwithstanding the details of its original composition, Steele’s play in its late stages and especially in its finished form acquires an enhanced political utility. As I delineate below, Steele attests to the immediacy of the play in the season of its public debut (November 1722) and first publication (December 1722) in the play’s paratextual materials. In any event, throughout the time Steele worked on *The Conscious Lovers*—from draft stage to late edits—he was also penning a voluminous amount of topical political material, and it is a key contention of this article that Steele’s comedy, like many of his pamphlets, is a text that works to counteract sedition and buoy loyal spirits. *The Conscious Lovers* has a moral agenda and a political agenda that substantially overlap, mutually reinforcing one another.

20. Richard Steele, *The Conscious Lovers*, in Kenny, *The Plays of Richard Steele*, 1.1.49. (Subsequent references are to this edition and indicate either act, scene, and line or page number.)

21. Loftis, *Steele at Drury Lane*, 212. Tracts on *The Conscious Lovers* proliferated, including—even before the play’s premiere—John Dennis’s score-settling *A Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter, A Comedy Written by Sir George Ethereidge. In Which Defence Is Sheun, That Sir Fopling, That Merry Knight, Was Rightly Compos’d by the Knight His Father, To Answer the Ends of Comedy; and That He Has Been Barbarously and Scurrilously Attack’d by the Knight His Brother, in the 65th Spectator. By Which It Appears, That the Latter Knight Knows Nothing of the Nature of Comedy* (London: Printed for T. Warner, 1722). Titles in Steele’s defense included Benjamin Victor, *An Epistle to Sir Richard Steele, On His Play, Call’d, The Conscious Lovers* (London printed for W. Chetwood . . . S. Chapman . . . [et al.], 1722); *Sir Richard Steele and His New Comedy, Call’d The Conscious Lovers, Vindicated, From the Malicious Aspersions of Mr. John Dennis. Wherein Mr. Dennis’s Vile Criticism’s [sic], in Defence of Sir Fopling Flutter, Are Detected and Expos’d* (London: Printed for T. Payne, 1723). Dennis returned fire with *Remarks on a Play Call’d, The Conscious Lovers, A Comedy* (London: Printed for T. Warner, 1723); also lambasting Steele’s comedy was the lengthy and anonymous *The Censor Censur’d; Or, The Conscious Lovers Examin’d: In a Dialogue between Sir Dicky Marplot and Jack Freeman* (London: Printed for T. Warner, 1723). Dennis’s contributions to the debate are reprinted in *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1939), 2: 241–74.

22. *Sir Richard Steele . . . Vindicated*, 13.

23. *St. James’s Journal* (8 December 1722) in Loftis, *Essays on the Theatre*, 31. Dorimant is, of course, the rakish protagonist of George Etherege’s *Man of Mode*. Dennis and Steele had quarreled over both character and play in their pamphlet war; see note 21 above.

24. Dennis, *Remarks on the Conscious Lovers*, a1v–a2r (South Sea Bubble); 42 (“the Sentiments”); a2v (“the most absurd”). “Hibernian” is a shot at Steele’s Irish birth; Dennis claimed that the speeches in *The Conscious Lovers* sounded like “a Parcel of Teagues talking Tipperary together” (42). Notwithstanding, even Dennis admitted that “The Catastrophre [sic] is very moving,” although he insists “it would be more so, if it were rightly and reasonably handled” (25).

Dennis wrote his own zealously Whiggish dramas, such as *Liberty Asserted* (1704). However, as he had done with Addison's *Cato* (1713), he finds fault even—perhaps especially—with fellow partisans when they offend against his principles of criticism. Dennis treats *The Conscious Lovers* as a comedy that botches its supposed comic purpose—holding up faults and foibles to ridicule—and therefore represents an insulting diminution of the theater's, hence the nation's, prestige. His complaints about the play are not, it must be said, political in nature; but Dennis had no compunction about deriding authors who shared his politics when they contradicted his aesthetics.

25. The *Freeholder's Journal* added that Steele was advancing not only virtue, but religion: the play had induced a “very amazing Revolution; it has almost chang'd the Old House in Drury-Lane, to a Monastery [*sic*]”; *Freeholder's Journal* (18 November), in Loftis, *Essays on the Theatre*, 25 (“It milk'd”); 27 (“The Discovery”); 24 (“go lovingly”); 24–25 (“very amazing Revolution.”) Along similar lines, Henry Fielding's Parson Adams remarks in *Joseph Andrews* that “I never heard of any plays fit for a Christian to read, but *Cato* and *The Conscious Lovers*; and I must own in the latter there are some things almost solemn enough for a sermon”; *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, and of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams and An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 232.

26. Laura Brown, *English Dramatic Form 1660–1760: An Essay in Generic History* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), 147. Douglas Canfield similarly notes that the play stages the “triumph of bourgeois ethics” while keeping servants, women, and sexuality under “absolute control”; “Shifting Tropes of Ideology in English Serious Drama, Late Stuart to Early Georgian,” in *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theater*, ed. Canfield and Deborah C. Payne (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1995), 221 (“triumph”); 223 (“absolute”).

27. In many recent readings, *The Conscious Lovers* encodes a world of commerce and commodification ascendant over patrilineal inheritance. Lisa Freeman regards the play as a showcase for ascendant bourgeois notions of “good breeding” that supersede aristocratic norms, Steele's intent being to extend his periodicals' program for polite sociability by producing a “behavioral normativity” to suit a still-patriarchal world of marketplaces. Freeman also reads eighteenth-century critical skepticism about the sentimental comedy as tied to concern that it might over-regulate and prescribe behavior that ought to be individualistically English. See “Sentimental Comedy, or the Comedy of Good Breeding,” in *Character's Theater: Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth-Century English Stage* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 193–234. James Chandler takes *The Conscious Lovers* as one point of departure in order to discuss how sentimental literature relies on coincidence, “face-to-faceness,” and “sentimental probability” congruent with the world of commercial interaction. See “Moving Accidents: The Emergence of Sentimental Probability,” in *The Age of Cultural Revolutions: Britain and France, 1750–1820*, ed. Colin Jones and Dror Wahrman (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2002), 137–65. Peter Hynes argues for the play as a “departure from traditional comic forms” that creates critical distance from its own comic heritage, amplifying the mainplot's concerns with patrilineal inheritance, in “Richard Steele and the Genealogy of Sentimental Drama: A Reading of *The Conscious Lovers*,” *Papers on Language and Literature* 40 (Spring 2004): 142–66. Lisa Zunshine focuses on how Steele's play participates in an imaginative “commitment to obfuscating the connection between real life bastards and fictional foundlings,” an oblique venting of cultural anxiety about patriarchal legitimacy qua patrimony, in “Bastard Daughters and Foundling Heroines: Rewriting Illegitimacy for the Eighteenth-Century Stage,” *Modern Philology* 102 (May 2005): 501–33, 524. Nicole Horejsi finds the play's emotional displays to veil British imperialist guilt; the pairing of Indiana and Bevil Junior “represent[s] the happy union of sentimentality and trade as well as the happy influence of the one upon the other.” See “(Re)Valuing the ‘Foreign Trinket’: Sentimentalizing the Language of Economics in Steele's *Conscious Lovers*,” *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 18, no. 2 (2003): 11–36.

28. After both characters satirize one another's class proclivities, Sealand urges that “Comparisons are odious, and more particularly so, on Occasions of this Kind, when we are projecting Races, that are to be made out of both Sides of the Comparison” (4.2.61–64). The fathers' meeting presages a leveling of social distinctions. Steele anticipates Daniel Defoe's statement that “Trade is so far *here* from being inconsistent with a Gentleman, that *in short* trade in *England* makes Gentlemen, and has peopled this nation with Gentlemen,” Letter 22, “Of the Dignity of Trade in England more than in other countries,” in Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman, in Familiar Letters* (London: Charles Rivington, 1726), 376.

29. The subject of interest and disinterest is, of course, a frequent topic of eighteenth-century moral philosophy. Francis Hutcheson avows that "there is in human Nature a *disinterested ultimate Desire* of the Happiness of others" in *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (London: Printed by J. Darby, 1725). Shaftesbury, however, inclines away from disinterest and toward public interest as a motor for compassionate action throughout the *Characteristicks* (1711), especially in "Sensus Communis"; see Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Lawrence Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999).

30. Myrtle, in disguise as Geoffry Cimberton, also amplifies that objectifying gaze, as he uses spectacles and a magnifying glass (!) to examine Lucinda's body (33–36).

31. *The Theatre* 19 (5 March 1719–20) describes a play in which the protagonist "denies a Duel, and still appears a Man of Honour and Courage. This Example would have been of great Service," writes Steele's narrator, by inducing young theatergoers to pursue "true Gallantries" in lieu of mindless anger (*The Theatre* 1720, ed. John Loftis [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962]: no. 19: 82–86, 83). Subsequent citations are to the page numbers in this compiled edition. The preface to *The Conscious Lovers* claims that "the whole was writ for the sake of the scene of the Fourth Act, wherein Mr. *Bevil* evades the Quarrel with his Friend, and hope it may have some Effect upon the Goths and Vandals that frequent the Theatres" (299).

32. Deane Bartlett, *The Guardian* 130 (10 August 1713), in *The Guardian*, ed. John Calhoun Stephens (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1987), 434–35.

33. John O'Brien touches upon Bevil Junior's exclamation "Alas! what Machines are we!" in *Harlequin Britain: Pantomime and Entertainment, 1690-1760* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2004), 82. For a provocative account of the relation of male sensibility to clockwork automata—two manifestations of programmed response—see Alex Wetmore, "Sympathy Machines: Men of Feeling and the Automaton," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 43, no.1 (2009), 37–54. Joseph Drury ably discusses mechanism, subjectivity, and novelistic character in "Haywood's Thinking Machines," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 21, no. 2 (Winter 2008-09), 201–28.

34. *The Theatre* 2 (5 January 1720), 7–8.

35. *The Theatre* 2 (5 January 1720), 8.

36. Of course, Shaftesbury himself makes frequent use of the tropology of the theater in his *Characteristicks*: for example, when referring to the exchange of ideas as a "fair stage" that should rightfully be unburdened by the "tragic buskin" ("Sensus communis," 35). See Lawrence Klein, *Shaftesbury and the Culture of Politeness: Moral Discourse and Cultural Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1994); and David Marshall, *The Figure of Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986).

37. *The Theatre* 1 (2 January 1720), 3.

38. *The Theatre* 28 (5 April 1720), 123.

39. *The Theatre* 2 (5 January 1720), 8 ("My Design"); 9 ("I shall," "Auditor").

40. *The Theatre* 3 (9 January 1720), 10 ("real Representatives," "full Power"). O'Brien addresses the "representativity" of Steele's imagined audience in *Harlequin Britain*, 168.

41. Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, 50.

42. Delarivier Manley was strongly Tory identified. She collaborated with Swift to produce *The Examiner*, the house organ of Robert Harley, and her *New Atalantis* (1710) and *The Secret History of Queen Zarah and the Zarazians* (1705) briskly recount scandals and innuendo afflicting the Whig party. However, by the time of the publication of *Lucius* in 1717, Manley and Steele had achieved rapprochement; the play is dedicated to Steele.

43. *The Theatre* 10 (2 February 1720), 47.

44. Kenny analyzes forty-seven separate editions of the play in "Eighteenth-Century Editions of Steele's *Conscious Lovers*," *Studies in Bibliography* 21 (1968): 253–61. See also Rodney M. Baine, "The Publication of Steele's *Conscious Lovers*," *Studies in Bibliography* 2 (1949–50): 169–73. Kenny quotes the publisher Jacob Tonson as claiming an "unusually large edition, 'many thousand,'" which was still insufficient to meet demand.

45. On the Atterbury Plot, see G. V. Bennett, *The Tory Crisis in Church and State 1688–1730: The Career of Francis Atterbury, Bishop of Rochester* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); and Eveline Cruickshanks and Howard Erskine-Hill, *The Atterbury Plot* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

46. Richard Steele, “The Commons’ Address of Congratulation on the Discovery of the Plot,” *Cobbett’s Parliamentary History*, 8: 199. The committee’s statement, approved by the House of Commons and presented on 20 March 1723, expresses “concern and horror,” praising King George as a “bulwark” for the Protestant succession and abhorring the Pretender and the “miseries and slavery inseparable from Popery and a Popish government” (199–200). Steele’s membership in the committee is mentioned by Rae Blanchard in *The Correspondence of Richard Steele* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), 176.

47. Francis Atterbury, *An Argument to Prove the Affections of the People of England to Be the Best Security of the Government; Humbly Offer’d to the Consideration of the Patrons of Severity, and Applied to the Present Juncture of Affairs* (London: Printed for W. Jones, 1716), 20 (“Let the people”); 21–22 (“Is Terror”).

48. Benjamin Victor supplied an alternate epilogue that took the place of Welsted’s on opening night but, as a contemporary newspaper states, was “omitted in the printed Play.” Victor’s contribution is bawdier, deriding the unusual coolness the *Freeholder’s Journal* noted in the character of Bevil Junior. In the end, however, Victor endorses the play’s movement away from “Scenes of this coarse Kind” and toward “a different Way of thinking” (lines 28, 32). The copy of *The Conscious Lovers* held by the Annenberg Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Pennsylvania includes a tipped-in leaf, clipped from a newspaper, printing Victor’s epilogue. It is also found as “Epilogue to *The Conscious Lovers* Spoken by Mrs. Oldfield” in Benjamin Victor, *Original Letters, Dramatic Pieces, and Poems* (London: T. Becket, 1776) 3: 75–76.

49. *The Censor Censur’d*, 8–9.

50. *The Guardian* 144 (26 August 1713), in Stephens, *The Guardian*, 476. Stuart Tave glosses the passage to mean that “English humor . . . is the national shield, the mark and defense of a free nation” in *The Amiable Humorist: A Study in the Comic Theory and Criticism of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960), 101.

In 1783, Hugh Blair virtually recapitulated the claim of this *Guardian* essay: “Humour is, in a great measure, the peculiar province of the English nation. The nature of such a free Government as ours; and that unrestrained liberty which our manners allow to every man, of living entirely after his own taste, afford full scope to the display of singularity of character, and to the indulgence of humour in all its forms.” Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. Harold F. Harding (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1965), 2: 541–42, qtd. by Jean Marsden in “Performing the West Indies: Comedy, Feeling, and British Identity,” *Comparative Drama* 42 (Spring 2008): 75. Marsden’s incisive discussion of Cumberland’s *The West Indian* as a bid to anglicize the practice of benevolence, and perhaps to make benevolent the praxis of Englishness, is congruent in many ways with my interpretation of Steele’s deployment of affect for political purposes in *The Conscious Lovers*.