

**THEATRICAL CRITICISM OF ADDISON AND STEELE**

**BY**

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**A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND  
IN CANDIDACY  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH**

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**JUNE, 1955**

## PREFACE

The purpose of this paper is to bring together in one body all, or as many as possible, of the references made by Addison and Steele to the theater in The Tatler, The Spectator, and The Guardian. In order to do this, it has been necessary to scan all of the papers included in these three periodicals to find those which contained a mention of the theater, for only rarely did Addison or Steele devote an entire paper to any one subject. It is hoped, therefore, that in going through these essays no significant comments on the theater have been overlooked.

I would like to express my appreciation for the help given me in the writing of this paper by Dr. Samuel W. Stevenson and Dr. Edward C. Peple, who guided me so patiently in my work by their suggestions and comments, and who read the paper after it was completed. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Benjamin C. Holtzclaw for his help and consideration.

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## INTRODUCTION

The title originally intended for this paper was "The Dramatic Criticism of Addison and Steele," but it soon became apparent that the word "dramatic" would have to be changed to "theatrical," for quite frequently Addison and Steele made references in their periodicals to forms of entertainment which could not be called properly by the name of drama, such as the comments on the puppet shows, on acrobats, and the like. Included here, then, will be any references found in The Tatler, The Spectator, and The Guardian to theatrical entertainment, regardless of the form it takes.

To summarize concisely Addison's and Steele's theories concerning the theater would be an almost impossible task because of the diversification of their comments, both in subject matter and in approach. They wrote about every phase of the theater from the Punch and Judy shows to opera and from the audience's behavior in the theater to the classical

rules governing the writing of tragedy. At times they wrote quite seriously with a definite purpose of changing, if possible, something that they felt was detrimental to the theater itself or to the people who frequented it. At other times they wrote facetiously, making polite fun of their contemporaries or even themselves.

In spite of this, however, a few specific theories can be noted in their writings--such as Steele's concern about the moral tone of the comedies which were popular at that time, both his and Addison's conviction that the theater had a great responsibility because of its influence on the lives of the people who witnessed the performances, or Addison's views on tragedy. When such consistencies of opinion appear, they will be noted and discussed as such, and an effort will be made later to determine whether or not they applied these principles to the writing of their own plays.

## I. THE TATLER

When the first number of The Tatler appeared on April 12, 1709, Sir Richard Steele presented to his readers the plan which he intended to follow in reporting the news in the forthcoming papers:

All accounts of gallantry, pleasure, and entertainment, shall be under the article of White's Chocolate-house; poetry, under that of Will's Coffee-house; learning, under the title of Grecian; foreign and domestic news, you will have from St. James's Coffee-house; and what else I shall on any other subject offer, shall be dated from my own apartment.<sup>1</sup>

While this plan was in effect, news of the theater appeared at least once a week, and sometimes more often, dated from Will's Coffee-house. Out of the 271 numbers of The Tatler, 51 contain some mention of the theater. Of these 51 papers, 43 are attributed to Steele, 7 to Addison, and

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1. Addison and Steele, The Tatler, Vols. I-V of The British Essayists, edited by James Ferguson, No. 1. All subsequent references to The Tatler will be to this edition. Since the papers are short, references will be made to the essay number rather than to the page number.

one paper (Number 111) is believed to be a collaboration of the two writers.

Steele began his dramatic criticism in the first paper, which contains an account of the presentation of Congrove's Love for Love for the benefit of the actor Thomas Betterton, and also an announcement that one of Thomas D'Urfey's plays was soon to be performed. In his account of the benefit performance, Steele, or "Isaac Bickerstaff," as he signed the Tatler papers, in addition to paying tribute to Betterton, also compliments the actors on their performances, adding that "No one was guilty of the affectation to insert witticisms of his own." This practice of the actors, which is only mentioned here, was to receive further attention in later papers. Also in this paper may be seen a glimpse of another subject to which Steele in the future was to devote considerable attention - i.e., the poor taste of the audience, in respect to both the type of entertainment which met with their approval and their actual behavior at the theater. In regard to this, Steele, after commending the theater-goers for supporting Betterton's benefit, makes the following comment:

It is not now doubted but plays will revive, and take their usual place in the opinion of persons of wit and merit, notwithstanding their late apostacy in favour of dress and sound. This place is very much altered since Mr. Dryden frequented it; where you used to see songs, epigrams, and satires, in the hands of every man you met, you have now only a pack of cards; and instead of

the cavils about the turn of the expression, the elegance of the style, and the like, the learned now dispute only about the truth of the game.<sup>2</sup>

Steele, following the precedent set by the first number of The Tatler, continued to insert comments on the theater at irregular, but frequent, intervals. These early discussions were of a less general or theoretical nature than those to be found later in the paper. Many of the early numbers contained reports on "last night's performance" or announcements of plays that were to be presented within a few days; although even at this time Steele did not hesitate to insert his own "animadversions," as he chose to call his censorious remarks, if he discovered what he considered to be an exhibition of poor taste by either the author, the audience, or the actors.

The next mention of the theater appears in Tatler No. 3, dated April 16, 1709, in which Steele discusses the performance of The Country Wife, by Wycherley. After giving an account of several of the characters in the play and expressing his satisfaction with the performance of Mrs. Bignell, for whose benefit it was performed, he enters into a discussion of a subject which he returned to frequently in both The Tatler and The Spectator. This subject was the representation of vice on the stage. However, Wycherley escaped

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2. Ibid.



with a surprisingly mild reprimand, considering the views of the "censor" on the subject. Although he does criticize the author for allowing his disreputable characters to escape suitable punishment, he nevertheless defends his presentation of the character of Horner on the grounds of its being a "good representation of the age in which that comedy was written," admitting that had Wycherley presented Horner as being less addicted to vice, he would have disclosed "his want of knowing the manners of the Court he lived in."

Italian opera, which proved to be a favorite subject for satire with both Addison and Steele in The Spectator, received its first attention in The Tatler in the fourth paper, dated April 19, 1709. Bickerstaff here displays his lack of enthusiasm for the recently introduced Italian opera because of his belief that the stage should be "an entertainment of the reason and all our faculties," whereas opera was a "way of being pleased with the suspense of them for three hours together," and provided the audience with the "shallow satisfaction of the eyes and ears only." He offers as proof that "the understanding has no part in the pleasure" the fact that a great part of the performance under discussion was in Italian. Although Steele probably was reasonably serious in his objections to opera, he could not resist inserting a satirical remark about one of his contemporaries who was an advocate of the "rules," John Dennis; for he records at the

performance of the opera Pyrrhus and Demetrius "a great critick fell into fits in the gallery, at seeing, not only time and place, but languages and nations, confused in the most incorrigible manner."

Ravenscroft's London Cuckolds, which was called by Colley Cibber "the most rank play that ever succeeded,"<sup>3</sup> gave Steele ample opportunity for a discourse on the degeneration of the English stage. After remarking that the audience "were extremely well diverted with that heap of vice and absurdity," he places the blame for the existing condition of the theater not so much on the persons who wrote and presented the plays, as on the audience for approving of the plays and allowing themselves to be diverted by them. Were dramas as written by "Shakespeare and others" more acceptable to the taste of the town, contemporary writers would bend their efforts in that direction. He also sympathizes with the actors, "who must be men of good understanding, to be capable of being such," because they are required to represent "things of which their reason must be ashamed, and which they must disdain their audience for approving."<sup>4</sup>

Contemporary writers came in for their share of criticism, however, in Tatler No. 21, which, although appearing

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<sup>3</sup>. Cibber, An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, p. 219.

<sup>4</sup>. Tatler No. 8.

as a review of Volpone, is in reality a satirical comparison of contemporary writers of comedy with Ben Jonson and other writers "of the last age." Steele wonders that the writers of the present do not have such plays as Volpone suppressed, for any one who has seen this performance will "hardly like any other play during the season." Also the current form of entertainment requires much less effort on the part of both the spectator and writer. "It is no difficulty," Mr. Bickerstaff says, "to get hats and swords, and wigs and shoes, and every thing else, from the shops in town; and make a man show himself by his habit, without more ado, to be a counselor, a fop, a courtier, or a citizen, and not be obliged to make those characters talk in different dialects to be distinguished from each other." But "laborious Ben" chose the more difficult task of distinguishing characters through speech and action. Were this method of distinguishing characters applied to the works of the present writers, and those parts cut out which did not meet this requirement, "few plays would be long enough for the whole evening's entertainment."<sup>5</sup>

The first mention of tragedy appears in Tatler No. 14 and reveals Steele's tendency to stress in his criticisms of this form of drama the writer's ability to raise tears. He says of John Banks' The Earl of Essex that there is not "one

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5. Ibid., No. 21.

good line" in the play, yet it was never seen "without drawing tears from some part of the audience....Thus, in spite of the most dry discourses, and expressions almost ridiculous with respect to propriety, it is impossible for one unprejudiced to see it, untouched with pity."<sup>6</sup>

Other plays which received mention in the early numbers of The Tatler include: Epsom Wells, by Thomas Shadwell, which was called a "very just" comedy;<sup>7</sup> The Old Bachelor, by Congreve, "a comedy of deserved reputation";<sup>8</sup> Thomas D'Urfey's The Modern Prophets, which, although it had received advance notice in Tatler No. 1 and again was mentioned here in Number 11, is later reported to have "suffered discontinuance at this gay end of town, for no other reason but the piety of the purpose";<sup>9</sup> The Alchemist, which is called "an example of Ben Jonson's extensive genius, and penetration into the passions and follies of mankind";<sup>10</sup> The Busy Body, by Mrs. Centlivre;<sup>11</sup> Farquhar's A Trip to the Jubilee, about which Bickerstaff says, "The dialogue in itself has something too low to bear a criticism upon it," although he does praise Wilks for his performance in the play;<sup>12</sup> and

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6. Ibid., No. 14.  
 7. Ibid., No. 7.  
 8. Ibid., No. 9.  
 9. Ibid., No. 43.  
 10. Ibid., No. 14.  
 11. Ibid., Nos. 15 and 19.  
 12. Ibid., No. 19.

another play of Farquhar's, The Recruiting Officer, which is the first piece of dramatic news inserted in The Tatler by Joseph Addison.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to these discussions of individual plays, Bickerstaff occasionally inserted other news about the theater, such as his announcement of the final performance of the comic actor, Cave Underhill, who "ever avoided the general fault in players, of doing too much."<sup>14</sup> Steele had commented in Tatler No. 1 on the actors' practice of inserting witticisms of their own, and here he has more to say on the subject. Referring to Underhill, he says: "It must be confessed, he has not the merit of some ingenious persons now on the stage, of adding to his authors: for the actors were so dull in the last age, that many of them have gone out of the world, without having ever spoke one word of their own in the theatre."<sup>15</sup>

In this same paper is included a discourse on modern tragedy, in which Steele ridicules the stock situations, the ready-made plots, and the unrealistic dialogue being made use of in the current plays. Announcing his intention of writing a tragedy, he states that he has enough material available to write "a very sad one," and offers as proof the

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13. Ibid., No. 20.

14. Ibid., No. 22.

15. Ibid.

following items:

I have the farowell of a general, with a truncheon in his hand, dying for love, in six lines. I have the principles of a politician (who does all the mischief in the play), together with his declaration on the vanity of ambition in his last moments, expressed in a page and an half. I have all my oaths ready, and my similes want nothing but application. 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; and, from the beginning of the first scene, the frequenters of the house may know as well as the author when the battle is to be fought, the lady to yield, and the hero proceed to his wedding and coronation.<sup>16</sup>

At this point there came a break in Steele's reporting of dramatic news in The Tatler. No articles from Will's Coffee-house appeared between Numbers 22 and 35, with the exception of Number 30, in which he merely explains the absence of this phase of the news, stating that "The suspension of the playhouse has made me have nothing to send you from hence." In Number 35, however, he announces his plan after the theater has reopened in the winter "to publish observations from time to time on the performance of the actors," and in the present paper offers "to give an abstract of the laws of action, for the help of the less learned part of the audience, that they may rationally enjoy so refined and instructive a pleasure as a just representation of human life." This abstract which Steele presents is not an original piece of criticism, but a quotation of Hamlet's directions to the

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16. Ibid.

players. The promise of regular dramatic criticism during the coming season was not fulfilled, however, for in the meantime the form of the paper had changed from its original plan. The articles from the various coffee-houses had gradually lengthened until fewer could be printed in one paper,<sup>17</sup> and they were no longer confined strictly to the subjects originally announced for them. After Tatler No. 35, essays from Will's Coffee-house were not devoted to poetry exclusively. Although there did appear from time to time announcements of current performances, with criticisms of the play itself or the performance of the actors, for the most part, this reporting of current news gave way to Isaac Bickerstaff's "lucubrations" on subjects of a more general nature.

One of these subjects in which Steele showed a great deal of interest has been mentioned previously, the current practice of representing vice on the stage. Although Steele did not announce formally his purpose in writing The Tatler until the final number, in which he said that it was "to recommend truth, innocence, honour, and virtue, as the chief ornaments of life,"<sup>18</sup> his moral purpose was frequently evident in his criticism of the stage. Steele believed that the theater had an important effect on the lives of those who

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17. Gray, Theatrical Criticism in London to 1795, p. 38.

18. Tatler No. 271.

witnessed the performances. "A good play," he says, "acted before a well-bred audience, must raise very proper incitements to good behaviour, and be the most quick and most prevailing method of giving young people a turn of sense and breeding;"<sup>19</sup> "and yet the world will not understand, that the theatre has much the same effect on the manners of the age, as the Bank on the credit of the nation."<sup>20</sup> He further asserts that if the theater were used properly, it would be the "most agreeable and easy method of making a polite and moral gentry."<sup>21</sup> Because of this effect, he felt that those responsible for the presentation of plays should assume the responsibility of providing the proper type of entertainment for its audience. "It is not the business of a good play to make every man an hero," he says, "but it certainly gives him a livelier sense of virtue and merit, than he had when he entered the theatre." He regrets that this "rational pleasure" has been experienced so infrequently in recent years,<sup>22</sup> and states that the "wits of this island, for above fifty years past, instead of correcting the vices of the age, have done all they could to inflame them."<sup>23</sup> He felt that the youth particularly were being harmed by present practices.

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19. Ibid., No. 3.

20. Ibid., No. 12.

21. Ibid., No. 8.

22. Ibid., No. 99.

23. Ibid., No. 159.



in the theater. He states that "Young men, who are too un-  
 attentive to receive lectures, are irresistibly taken with  
 performances."<sup>24</sup> But the theater had failed in its duty to  
 provide youth with the representation of characters that were  
 worthy of imitation, and he makes the following accusation:

It is, among other things, from the impertinent figures  
 unskilful dramatists draw of the characters of men,  
 that youth are bewildered and prejudiced in their sense  
 of the world, of which they have no notions but what  
 they draw from books and such representations. Thus  
 talk to a very young man, let him be of never so good  
 sense, and he shall smile when you speak of sincerity  
 in a courtier, good sense in a soldier, or honesty in  
 a politician. The reason of this is, that you hardly  
 see one play, wherein each of these ways of life is not  
 drawn by hands that know nothing of any one of them.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to this disregard for the welfare of the  
 youth of the nation, he also comments on the ill effect of  
 the stage on the institution of marriage. Because of the  
 derogatory treatment that marriage had received at the hands  
 of the popular writers, "a kind husband hath been looked upon  
 as a clown, and a good wife as a domestic animal unfit for  
 the company or conversation of the 'beau monde.'"<sup>26</sup> Steele  
 sums up his attack on the dramatists with the observation,  
 "Of all the evils under the sun, that of making vice commend-  
 able is the greatest";<sup>27</sup> but he relieves them of some of the

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24. Ibid., No. 167.

25. Ibid., No. 191.

26. Ibid., No. 159.

27. Ibid., No. 191.

responsibility because the audiences had displayed their poor taste in allowing such representations of life. Observing that "in this age we behold things, for which we ought to have an abhorrence, not only received without disdain, but even valued as motives of emulation,"<sup>28</sup> and that the forms of entertainment which attract the largest audiences are those which display "immodest action, empty show, or impertinent activity,"<sup>29</sup> Steele warns the public of what they may expect as a result of such practices, i.e., the "destruction of simplicity of manners, openness of heart, and generosity of temper."<sup>30</sup>

Although Steele disapproved of what he considered to be the degeneracy of the stage in his time, he nevertheless retained a deep interest in and affection for the theater. In Tatler No. 182 he discusses the pleasures he derives from a visit to the theater. He names as some of these pleasures: "the musical airs which are played to us, ... the beauties of proper action, the force of eloquence, and the gaiety of well-placed lights and scenes." But the performance on the stage is not the only source of delight for him, for he admits that he also derives a good deal of his pleasure from the audience with whom he shares the experience, explaining, "It is being

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28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., No. 99.

30. Ibid., No. 191.

happy, and seeing others happy, for two hours; a duration of bliss not at all to be slighted by so short-lived a creature as man." It is this that he gives as his reason for referring to the theater so frequently in his papers. He says:

It may possibly be imagined by severe men, that I am too frequent in the mention of the 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 the men's gratification this way.<sup>31</sup>

In this same paper Steele pays tribute to actors, stating that since they are a source of so much pleasure, the profession should be held in higher esteem than it was at that time. In an effort to develop in the public a proper appreciation of the actors' art, Steele assigns to himself the task of evaluating the worth of contemporary performers, saying:

It is a very good office one man does another, when he tells him the manner of his being pleased; and I have often thought, that a comment upon the capacities of the players would very much improve the delight that way, and impart it to those who otherwise have no sense of it.<sup>32</sup>

And Steele kept his promise of offering comments at various times on the performances of the players. He had previously praised Nicolino Grimaldi, whom he called "an actor, who, by the grace and propriety of his action and gesture, does honour to the human figure," and says of him that he

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31. Ibid., No. 182.

32. Ibid.

"sets off the character he bears in an opera by his action, as much as he does the words of it by his voice."<sup>33</sup> He also had discussed Betterton's portrayal of Hamlet, and complimented him on his ability to act youth, although he was at the time of the performance more than seventy years old.<sup>34</sup> And later he paid final tribute to the actor on the day of his interment, stating, "I have hardly a notion, that any performer of antiquity could surpass the action of Mr. Betterton in any of the occasions in which he has appeared on our stage."<sup>35</sup> In addition to these, Richard Estcourt had also been praised in an early paper for his abilities in mimicry.<sup>36</sup>

But after Steele's formal announcement of his intention of offering criticisms of players, Wilks and Cibber were the two to whom he devoted most of his attention. In fact, in this same paper, Number 182, he calls these two players "perfect actors in their different kinds." Discussing their particular abilities, he states, "Wilks has a singular talent in representing the graces of nature: Cibber the deformity in the affectation of them." He mentions Wilks' success in the part of Sir Harry Wildair, but later displays some anxiety when he learns that he is to play in Othello "a part so very

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33. Ibid., No. 115.

34. Ibid., No. 71.

35. Ibid., No. 167.

36. Ibid., No. 51.

different from what he had ever before appeared in,"<sup>37</sup> and announces his intention of stealing to the play incognito "out of curiosity to observe how Wilks and Cibber touch those places, where Betterton and Sandford so very highly excelled."<sup>38</sup> He did not reveal his opinion of the performance, however, until a month later when he learned that Wilks was to act Hamlet, at which time Steele offered Wilks through a messenger the following advice:

I desired him to request of him, in my name, that he would wholly forget Mr. Betterton; for that he failed in no part of Othello, but where he had him in view. An actor's forming himself by the carriage of another is like the trick among the widows, who lament their husbands as their neighbours did theirs, and not according to their own sentiments of the deceased.<sup>39</sup>

Steele also admonished the audience for associating an actor with a part they formerly liked him in, thus interfering with their enjoyment of the present performance. For despite Wilks' ability as an actor, the audience "turn their thoughts upon Sir Harry Wildair," regardless of the part which he is playing.<sup>40</sup>

Comic actors also received comment on their abilities by Isaac Bickerstaff, although these remarks were usually of a less serious nature. In one of the early papers, Steele had remarked that Bullock was particularly suited for the part

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37. Ibid., No. 187.

38. Ibid., No. 188.

39. Ibid., No. 201.

40. Ibid.

he played in Shadwell's Epsom Wells, for "though he is a person of much wit and ingenuity, has a peculiar talent of looking like a fool."<sup>41</sup> Also Steele had made further comments on the practice of comic actors "adding to their parts," having accused Penkethman and Bullock of "helping out" Beaumont and Fletcher. "There is nothing," he says, "more ridiculous, than for an actor to insert words of his own in the part he is to act, so that it is impossible to see the poet for the player."<sup>42</sup> And after he had written his comparison of the talents of Cibber and Wilks in Number 182, he received a "letter" from William Bullock and William Penkethman, requesting that, since he was drawing parallels between the greatest actors of the age, he should devote his next discussion to them. Steele complied with a burlesque version of his own analysis of Wilks' and Cibber's talents:

Mr. William Bullock and Mr. William Penkethman are of the same age, profession, and sex. They both distinguish themselves in a very particular manner under the discipline of the crabtree, with this only difference, that Mr. Bullock has the more agreeable squall, and Mr. Penkethman the more graceful shrug. Penkethman devours a cold chick with great applause; Bullock's talent lies chiefly in asparagus. Penkethman is very dexterous at conveying himself under a table, Bullock is no less active at jumping over a stick. Mr. Penkethman has a <sup>43</sup> great deal of money, but Mr. Bullock is the taller man.

The divergence between Addison's and Steele's methods of

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41. Ibid., No. 7.

42. Ibid., No. 89.

43. Ibid., No. 188.

criticism perhaps is nowhere more evident than in their discussions of tragedy. The Spectator contained a number of papers by Addison devoted to this subject, and in most instances they were at least an attempt at a scholarly and impersonal treatment. Steele, however, ventured on the subject rarely in The Tatler, and when he did make some reference to this form of drama, he usually avoided a formal criticism of the work itself and gave the reader instead a more personal account of the emotions aroused in him by reading or attending a performance of a given play. Steele's tendency to judge the worth of a writer of tragedy by his ability to raise tears has been mentioned before. Shakespeare, of course, he considered the master of tragic art, saying that he "can afford us instances of all the places where our souls are accessible; and ever commands our tears."<sup>44</sup> He recommends to all who would "write in the buskin style" that they devote their time to a study of the master, and "they will soon be deterred from putting forth what is usually called tragedy."<sup>45</sup> He also mentions individual scenes from some of Shakespeare's plays, and discusses the emotions expressed in each, but apparently makes no distinction between his tragedies and the historical plays. As examples of the proper expression of grief he quotes from

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44. Ibid., No. 68.

45. Ibid., No. 47.

scenes in Macbeth and Julius Caesar;<sup>46</sup> he remarks that reading a scene from Richard III filled his mind "with a very agreeable horror";<sup>47</sup> the genius Shakespeare displayed in Hamlet's soliloquy on his mother's hasty marriage he "never could enough admire";<sup>48</sup> and after reading but one scene from Henry IV, he despairs of writing a tragedy himself, for he has been convinced "that he, who describes the concern of great men, must have a soul as noble, and as susceptible of high thoughts, as they whom he represents."<sup>49</sup> He also praises Shakespeare's ability to reveal a character by his speech, rather than relying on the "mechanic methods of show-greatness." Modern writers, he says, depend upon "the retinue of the hero to make him magnificent," when the man ought "to be expressed by his sentiments and affections, and not by his fortune or equipage." As an example of Shakespeare's ability in this respect, he refers to a scene from Julius Caesar:

In the tragedy of Caesar he introduces his hero in his nightgown. He had at that time all the power of Rome: deposed consuls, subordinate generals, and captive princes might have preceded him; but his genius was above such mechanic methods of show-greatness. Therefore, he rather presents that great soul with his intimate friends, without endeavouring to prepossess his audience with empty show and pomp.<sup>50</sup>

Steele also objected to the unrealistic dialogue found in

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46. Ibid., No. 68.  
 47. Ibid., No. 90.  
 48. Ibid., No. 106.  
 49. Ibid., No. 47.  
 50. Ibid., No. 53.



many of the modern tragedies, and expressed his approval that "the play of Alexander is to be...turned into ridicule for its bombast, and other false ornaments in the thoughts as well as the language," saying that he was glad "any one had taken upon him to depreciate such unnatural fustian as the Tragedy of Alexander."<sup>51</sup> He also comments on the excessive use of stock similes in tragedies, saying:

There is...nothing so forced and constrained, as what we frequently meet with in tragedies; to make a man under the weight of great sorrow, or full of meditation upon what he is soon to execute, cast about for a simile to what he himself is, or the thing which he is going to act.<sup>52</sup>

The practice in the English theater of allowing scenes containing acts of violence to be presented on the stage is also discussed by Steele. He says that the English people have been accused of delighting in bloodshed because "Stabbing and poisoning, which are performed behind the scenes in other nations, must be done openly among us, to gratify the audience." Steele continues:

When poor Sandford was upon the stage, I have seen him groaning upon a wheel, stuck with daggers, impaled alive, calling his executioners, with a dying voice, 'cruel dogs and villains!' and all this to please his judicious spectators, who were wonderfully delighted with seeing a man in torment so well acted. The truth of it is, the politeness of our English stage, in regard to decorum, is very extraordinary. We act murders, to show our intrepidity; and adulteries, to show our gallantry.<sup>53</sup>

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51. Ibid., No. 191.

52. Ibid., No. 43.

53. Ibid., No. 134.

But even here Steele is not so much interested in the theoretical question of decorum as he is in the moral aspect of the situation, for he concludes with the following statement:

The virtues of tenderness, compassion, and humanity, are those by which men are distinguished from brutes, as much as by reason itself; and it would be the greatest reproach to a nation, to distinguish itself from all others by any defect in these particular virtues.<sup>54</sup>

It has been stated previously that Steele only occasionally discussed individual plays after the theater closed for the summer in 1709, and devoted most of his dramatic criticism to subjects of a more general nature. And when he did mention the performance of a specific play, as a rule he only announced that the play was to be presented and recommended it to the public without entering into a lengthy discussion of its worth. The plays thus mentioned were: Epicoene, or the Silent Woman, "that admirable play of Ben Jonson's";<sup>55</sup> Colley Cibber's The Careless Husband, which he states "is acted to perfection";<sup>56</sup> Fletcher's The Chances, which Steele calls "a true picture of life," giving the actors credit, however, for making the play pleasing in spite of its many "indifferent passages," with the result that it "shows what a play might be, though it is not wholly what a play should be";<sup>57</sup> and Congreve's Old Bachelor, "in which comedy there

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54. Ibid.

55. Ibid., No. 130.

56. Ibid., No. 182.

57. Ibid., No. 191.

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." Steele had discussed before this fault in his contemporaries of failing to distinguish characters by speech, in relation to both comedy and tragedy. In his review of this comedy, he continues his attack on modern writers, saying:

It is very ordinary with writers to indulge a certain modesty of believing all 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, footmen 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 agreeable sounds; but they have no ideas affixed to them.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to his criticism of drama, Steele also made occasional references to the other forms of entertainment that then were competing with the regular theater. Mr. Powell's puppet-show was several times the object of some good-natured raillery. He accuses Powell of robbing Signior Nicolini "of the greater part of his female spectators," and despairs of ever keeping "that sex under any manner of government" after receiving the news that they now "run gadding after a puppet-show"; and he threatens to examine Powell's productions for his observance of "the rules," for which purpose he has provided himself with "the works of above twenty

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58. Ibid., No. 193.

French critics."<sup>59</sup> The puppet-show was not the only thing that was drawing the audience from the regular theater, however; for in Tatler No. 193 he attacks Christopher Rich, whose "restless ambition, and subtle machinations, did manifestly tend to the extirpation of the good old British actors, and the introduction of foreign pretenders; such as Harlequins, French dancers, and Roman singers." Steele also objected to vaudeville stunts, accusing tumblers of "vilifying" and "degrading" the human figure,<sup>60</sup> and gives as a reason for the popularity of this kind of entertainment the fact that "there are more who can see than can think. Every one is sensible of the danger of the fellow on the ladder, and see his activity in coming down safe, but very few are judges of the distress of an hero in a play, or of his manner of behaviour in those circumstances."<sup>61</sup> And when he witnessed "an artful person do several feats of activity with his throat and windpipe," including an imitation of "a ring of bells" and "all the different notes of a pack of hounds," he quotes the actor Richard Estcourt as saying that "he was surprised to see a virtuoso take satisfaction in any representation below that of human life."<sup>62</sup>

In the same paper which contained his criticism of Rich,

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59. Ibid., No. 115.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid., No. 99.

62. Ibid., No. 51.

Steele announced his intention of discontinuing for a while his discussions of the theater in The Tatler, giving the following explanation:

The stage and state affairs being so much canvassed by parties and factions, I shall for some time hereafter take leave of subjects which relate to either of them; and employ my cares in the consideration of matters which regard that part of mankind, who live without interesting themselves with the troubles and pleasures of either.<sup>63</sup>

Steele broke this resolution in regard to the theater only twice: the first time in Tatler No. 201, the paper in which he criticized Wilks' performance in Othello and offered him advice concerning his forthcoming portrayal of Hamlet; and in Tatler No. 248, in which he merely mentions without any critical analysis a comedy called The Ladies Cure.

Little has been said so far of Addison's contribution of dramatic news to The Tatler. He made his first appearance as a dramatic critic in this periodical in Number 20, mentioned previously on Page 8, in which he reports on the performance of The Recruiting Officer, by Farquhar. He has very little to say about the play itself, however, giving credit for its success to Richard Estcourt, of whom he says, "If I have skill to judge, that man is an excellent actor," and criticizing the behavior of the audience with the remark that they "are fitter for representations at May-fair, than a

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63. Ibid., No. 193.

theatre royal."<sup>64</sup>

The next mention of the theater by Addison is his inventory of the play-house in Number 42, which, although it is a ludicrous account, nevertheless gives a rather revealing picture of the performances in his day. The following are some of the items he lists as being for sale: "three bottles and a half of lightning;...one shower of snow in the whitest French paper;...a rainbow, a little faded;...modern plots, commonly known by the name of trapdoors, ladders of ropes, vizard masques, and tables with broad carpets over them;... the complexion of a murderer in a band-box, consisting of a large piece of burnt cork, and a coal-black peruke;...and a plume of feathers, never used but by Oedipus and the Earl of Essex."<sup>65</sup>

Addison revealed that he shared Steele's opinion of the lower forms of entertainment, the popularity of which he regarded as an indication of the deterioration of the taste of the English audience, when he witnessed the performance of a contortionist. He expresses his amazement at the "satisfaction of the audience during this strange entertainment," and records his reactions as follows:

Is it possible, thought I, that human nature can rejoice in its disgrace, and take pleasure in seeing its own figure turned to ridicule, and distorted into forms that

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64. Ibid., No. 20.

65. Ibid., No. 42.

raise horror and aversion? There is something disingenuous and immoral in the being able to bear such a sight....Methinks it is wonderful, that those who have nothing but the outward figure to distinguish them as men, should delight in seeing humanity abused, vilified, and disgraced.<sup>66</sup>

In the same paper Addison follows his attack on the performer who "vilified" humanity with a comparison of the ancients with the modern French writers. Stating that "there is nothing that more pleases me, in all that I read in books, or see among mankind, than such passages as represent human nature in its proper dignity," he reminds his reader that although man has something in him both "very great and very mean," and that an artist might represent him truthfully in either extreme, "the finest authors of antiquity have taken him on the more advantageous side." Continuing his commendation of the ancients, he says:

They...do all they can to widen the partition between the virtuous and the vicious, by making the difference betwixt them as great as between gods and brutes. In short, it is impossible to read a page in Plato, Tully, and a thousand other ancient moralists, without being a greater and a better man for it. On the contrary, I could never read any of our modish French authors, or our own country who are the imitators and admirers of that trifling nation, without being for some time out of humour with myself and at everything about me. Their business is, to depreciate human nature, and consider it under its worst appearances. In short, they endeavour to make no distinction between man and man, or between the species of men and that of brutes.<sup>67</sup>

A further comment is made on the taste of the English

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66. Ibid., No. 108.

67. Ibid.

audience in Tatler No. 111, to which both Addison and Steele contributed. After quoting Shakespeare's account in Hamlet of the legend of the cock's crowing all hours of the night at Christmas time, they state that "this admirable author, as well as the best and greatest men of all ages" inserted such passages of a religious nature in their plays which would not be tolerated by modern audiences, which they consider as an indication that past ages "had a much greater sense of virtue than the present."

In a later paper Addison sets down what he considers the "proper duties" of an audience. He says that when attending public diversions, every one should show his "attention, understanding, and virtue," and states that he can tell a great deal about a person by merely watching his reactions to a single sentence in a play, for it is as easy to distinguish a gentleman by his laugh as by his bow. He offers as a model the Athenian audiences, who would rise up in a body in protest against any line in a play which seemed to encourage vice and immorality. But he despairs of the English audience ever attaining such a perfection of taste, stating that he doubts that it is possible "to make a speech so impious as to raise such a laudable horror and indignation in a modern audience."<sup>68</sup>

In addition to these general criticisms, Addison also

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68. Ibid., No. 122.



made occasional references to a specific play, such as: his praise of Shakespeare's descriptive powers as illustrated in the scene on Dover Cliff in King Lear, of which he says, "The prospect from that place is drawn with such proper incidents, that whoever can read it without growing giddy must have a good head, or a very bad one";<sup>69</sup> or his delight in the artful use of silence to express passion in Otway's tragedy, Venice Preserv'd, adding that although he would not suggest that silences be written in as part of the stage directions, "it is certain, that in the extremity of most passions...there is nothing more graceful than to see the play stand still for a few moments, and the audience fixed in an agreeable suspense, during the silence of a skilful actor."<sup>70</sup>

A lighter note is added in his answer to Thomas Dogget's request that Isaac Bickerstaff attend a benefit performance of Congreve's comedy, Love for Love. In his reply he states that he is pleased with his choice of "so excellent a play" and tells Dogget that he has always considered him "as the best of comedians," and concludes his letter: "I shall therefore come in between the first and second act, and remain in the right-hand box over the pit until the end of the fourth; provided you take care that every thing be rightly prepared

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<sup>69</sup>: Ibid.: No: 117:

<sup>70</sup>: Ibid.: No: 133:

for my reception."<sup>71</sup>

Addison made no further comments on the theater in The Tatler after his discussion of Venice Preserv'd in Number 133; but in a later paper he did insert a few satirical remarks about the art of criticism, attacking especially pedantic critics who followed blindly the standards set up by the French writers. He says:

Of this shallow species [referring to pedants] there is not a more importunate, empty, and conceited animal than that which is generally known by the name of a Critic....The marks you may know him by are, an elevated eye, and dogmatical brow, a positive voice, and a contempt for every thing that comes out, whether he has read it or not....He knows his own strength so well, that he never dares praise any thing in which he has not a French author for his voucher.<sup>72</sup>

As an example of the absurdity of these criticisms, he records a conversation between a critic and a young lady, in which they discuss a play which they have recently witnessed. The critic, of course, can find nothing in the play worthy of his praise, although the young lady defends the performance:

'I must confess,' continued she... 'I laughed very heartily at the last new comedy which you found so much fault with.' 'But, Madam,' says he, 'you ought not to have laughed, and I defy any one to show me a single rule that you could laugh by.'<sup>73</sup>

This, then, is the extent of Addison's and Steele's dramatic criticism in The Tatler, comments on the theater having

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71. Ibid., No. 120.

72. Ibid., No. 165.

73. Ibid.

disappeared from the paper, with the two exceptions mentioned, after Number 193, in which Steele announced his intention of discontinuing that portion of the news for some time.

## II. THE SPECTATOR

On March 1, 1711, approximately two months after The Tatler had been discontinued, The Spectator made its first appearance. A statement of the purpose of the paper was made by Addison in the tenth number:

Since I have raised to myself so great an Audience, I shall spare no Pains to make their Instruction agreeable, and their Diversion useful. For which Reasons I shall endeavour to enliven Morality with Wit, and to temper Wit with Morality, that my Readers may, if possible, both Ways find their account in the Speculation of the Day. And to the End that their Virtue and Discretion may not be short transient intermitting Starts of Thought, I have resolved to refresh their Memories from Day to Day, till I have recovered them out of that desperate State of Vice and Folly, into which the Age is fallen.<sup>1</sup>

Although no formal announcement was made in The Spectator that Addison and Steele intended to include from time to time comments on the theater, it was soon apparent that this phase of the news was not to be neglected. The periodical contains

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1. Addison and Steele, The Spectator, Vols. I-III. Edited by Henry Morley, No. 10. All subsequent references to The Spectator will be to this edition.

a total of 50 papers devoted either completely or in part to a discussion of the theater. Of this number Addison and Steele are each credited with 24 papers, and of the two remaining essays, one was written by Eustace Budgell and the other has remained anonymous. Although the number of papers containing references to the theater is equally divided between the two principal writers, Addison actually exceeded Steele in the amount of dramatic criticism which he contributed to the paper; for many of Addison's comments on the theater are full-length essays on some phase of drama, such as his papers devoted to tragedy, whereas Steele often divides his papers into letters, thus allowing for the discussion of several topics in one paper.

The first mention of the theater in The Spectator was made by Addison in Number 5, which is devoted to a discussion of opera. In this paper he mentions some of the absurdities which he has witnessed in the performance of operas, the only design of which, he says, is "to gratify the Senses, and keep up an indolent Attention in the Audience." Commenting on some of the practices which he calls absurd and childish, he says:

How would the Wits of King Charles's time have laughed to have seen Nicolini exposed to a Tempest in Robes of Ermine, and sailing in an open Boat upon a Sea of Paste-board? What a Field of Raillery would they have been let into, had they been entertained with painted Dragons Spitting Wild-fire, enchanted Chariots drawn by Flanders Mares, and real Cascades in artificial Land-skips?<sup>2</sup>

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2. Ibid., No. 5.

He refers particularly to the opera Rinaldo, which he says is filled with thunder and lightning, illuminations, and fire-works, "which the Audience may look upon without catching Cold, and indeed without much Danger of being burnt," although he expresses the hope that the owner had insured the theater before he allowed the opera to be presented there. In this paper he also criticizes modern Italian writers, who express themselves in "a florid form of Words" and "tedious Circumlocutions," and says that he agrees with Boileau that "one Verse in Virgil is worth all the Clincant or Tinsel of Tasso," the opera Rinaldo having been based on the story of Rinaldo and Armida in Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered.<sup>3</sup>

Spectator No. 13 contains Addison's humorous account of Signior Nicolini's combat with the lion in the opera Hydaspos. He concludes this essay in a more serious manner, however, emphasizing that in his criticism of opera he does not mean to reflect in any way on Nicolini Grimaldo, whose ability as an actor he admires greatly. He regrets that his talents must be wasted in such a part because of the poor taste of the British audience, saying that Signior Nicolini "knows very well that the Lion has many more Admirers than himself." "Audiences have often been reproached by Writers for the Coarseness of their Taste," concludes Addison, "but our

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3. Ibid.

present Grievance does not seem to be the Want of a good Taste, but of Common Sense."<sup>4</sup>

In his next paper devoted to this subject, Number 18, Addison criticizes the use of the Italian language in operas and expresses his amazement that the British people are willing "to sit together like an Audience of Foreigners in their own Country," and witness such performances even though they cannot understand a word of the language which the actors are using. He adds the following comment:

I cannot forbear thinking how naturally an Historian, who writes Two or Three hundred Years hence, and does not know the Taste of his wise Forefathers, will make the following Reflection, 'In the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century, the Italian Tongue was so well understood in England, that Operas were acted on the publick Stage in that Language.'<sup>5</sup>

He accuses Italian opera of drawing the audiences away from performances in their native tongue, saying that English music has been "quite rooted out" because of the poor taste of the audience, who are "transported with any thing that is not English," and wonders that they could be "so stupidly fond of the Italian opera, as scarce to give a Third Days Hearing to that admirable Tragedy" of Edmund Smith, Phaedra and Hippolitus.

Despite these criticisms, however, Addison defended the introduction of the Italian recitativo in opera, although he reports that it had at first "startled" the English audience.

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4. Ibid., No. 13.

5. Ibid., No. 18.

"People were wonderfully surprized," he says, "to hear Generals singing the Word of Command, and Ladies delivering Messages in Musick. Our Countrymen could not forbear laughing when they heard a Lover chanting out a Billet-doux, and even the Superscription of a Letter set to a Tune." In his defense of the practice, Addison contends that the transition from air to recitative music is more natural than passing from a song to ordinary speaking, which was practiced before in English operas.<sup>6</sup>

Addison made his final attack on opera and the other forms of entertainment that were finding favor with the public in Spectator No. 31, in which he gives a satirical account of a "projector" who has written an opera that will save the visitors to London the trouble of traveling from place to place to view the various kinds of shows that are being presented there. This opera is to be called The Expedition of Alexander the Great, and will include the performances of the dancing monkeys, the puppet show, the lions, and all of the other "strange Sights" about the town. The projector admits, however, that the idea is not an original one, but that "he had taken the Hint of it from several Performances which he had seen upon our Stage." The use of foreign language in opera is again the object of ridicule, for the projector

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6. Ibid., No. 29.



announces his intention of having the whole opera acted in Greek, not only because Alexander was a Greek, but because he was sure it would be particularly pleasing to the ladies and indeed "could not but be acceptable to the whole Audience, because there are fewer of them who understand Greek than Italian."<sup>7</sup>

After leaving the subject of opera, Addison devoted himself for a while to a more serious discussion of tragedy. His preference for this form of drama is expressed in Spectator No. 39, in which he says:

As a perfect Tragedy is the Noblest Production of Human Nature, so it is capable of giving the Mind one of the most delightful and most improving Entertainments. A virtuous Man (says Seneca) struggling with Misfortunes, is such a Spectacle as Gods might look upon with Pleasure: and such a Pleasure it is which one meets with in the Representation of a well-written Tragedy. Diversions of this kind wear out of our Thoughts every thing that is mean and little. They cherish and cultivate that Humanity which is the Ornament of our Nature. They soften Insolence, soothe Affliction, and subdue the Mind to the Dispensations of Providence.<sup>8</sup>

Addison then proceeds to make a comparison between modern English tragedy and ancient tragedy. He feels that the moderns excel the Greeks and Romans in the "Intricacy and Disposition of the Fable," but fall short in the "Moral Part of the Performance." He observes that the English poets "have succeeded much better in the Style, than in the Sentiments of their Tragedies. Their Language is very often Noble and

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7. Ibid., No. 31.

8. Ibid., No. 39.

Sonorous, but the Sense either very trifling or very common," and he adds, "For my own part, I prefer a noble Sentiment that is depressed with homely Language, infinitely before a vulgar one that is blown up with all the Sound and Energy of Expression." He confesses that English tragedy often does not even have the proper use of language to recommend it, for "when our Thoughts are great and just, they are often obscured by the sounding Phrases, hard Metaphors, and forced Expressions in which they are cloathed." Shakespeare he accuses of being guilty of this fault, as well as the Restoration dramatist Nathaniel Lee, who he felt had a genius for tragedy but did not exercise the proper restraint. Of Lee he says, "His Thoughts are wonderfully suited to Tragedy, but frequently lost in such a Cloud of Words, that it is hard to see the Beauty of them." Otway, however, he believes has gone to the other extreme, saying of him that because he has "little Pomp, but great Force in his Expressions,...he has admirably succeeded in the tender and melting Part of his Tragedies," but "he sometimes falls into too great a Familiarity of Phrase in those Parts, which, by Aristotle's Rule, ought to have been raised and supported by the Dignity of Expression." He also criticizes Otway for making the greatest characters in his tragedy Venice Preserv'd rebels and traitors, saying that the hero of a tragedy should be presented as falling in the service of his country, rather than working for its ruin and

destruction.<sup>9</sup>

In this same paper he also supports the use of blank verse in English tragedies, because it is the more natural form, which he says is illustrated by the fact that people often fall into blank verse in common discourse without noticing it. It is for this reason that he is offended to see a play in rhyme, and particularly objects to a play having some scenes in rhyme and some in blank verse, "which are to be looked upon as two several Languages," although he does not object to a poet's ending his tragedy or every act of it with several couplets.<sup>10</sup>

Spectator No. 40 is also devoted to a discussion of tragedy. In this paper Addison criticizes the popular concept of poetic justice, saying that "The English Writers of Tragedy are possessed with a Notion, that when they represent a virtuous or innocent Person in Distress, they ought not to leave him till they have delivered him of his Troubles, or made him triumph over his Enemies." He objects to this interpretation of poetic justice because it has no foundation in nature, in reason, or in the practice of the ancients. "We find," Addison continues, "that Good and Evil happen alike to all Men on this side of the Grave; and as the principal Design of Tragedy is to raise Commiseration and Terror in the Minds of the

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9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

Audience, we shall defeat this great End, if we always make Virtue and Innocence happy and successful." He observes that the ancients had written some tragedies ending happily and others ending unhappily, but that Aristotle had recorded a preference for those with the unhappy catastrophe. Addison obviously preferred this type, and he lists a few of the English plays which he considered the best of this kind; although he would not be understood to say that a good tragedy could not be written with a happy ending, and gives a list of plays of this nature which he considered good. "I do not therefore dispute against this Way of writing Tragedies," he explains, "but against the Criticism that would establish this as the only Method; and by that Means would very much cramp the English Tragedy, and perhaps give a wrong Bent to the Genius of our writers."<sup>11</sup>

Addison returned to this subject more than a year later in Number 548, in which he reaffirms his preference for the tragedy which ends unhappily. "I cannot think," he says, "but that the Instruction and Moral are much finer, where a Man who is virtuous in the Main of his Character falls into Distress, and sinks under the Blows of Fortune at the End of a Tragedy, than when he is represented as Happy and Triumphant." In order that his reader may not misunderstand his views on

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11. Ibid., No. 40.

poetic justice, in the later paper he makes the following explanation of his discussion in Number 40:

I shall conclude with observing, that though the Spectator above-mentioned is so far against the Rule of Poetical Justice, as to affirm that good Men may meet with an unhappy Catastrophe in Tragedy, it does not say that ill Men may go off unpunished. The Reason for this Distinction is very plain, namely, because the best of Men are vicious enough to justify Providence for any Misfortunes and Afflictions which may befall Sic them, but there are many Men so criminal that they can have no Claim or Pretence to Happiness. The best of Men may deserve Punishment, but the worst of Men cannot deserve Happiness.<sup>12</sup>

Addison also objected to rant in tragedies, saying that both the poets and actors know that the "warm and passionate Parts of a Tragedy" meet with the greatest favor from the audience, and that they have resorted to this method in order to obtain applause, "by adding Vehemence to Words where there was no Passion, or inflaming a real Passion into Fustian.... This hath filled the Mouths of our Heroes with Bombast; and given them such Sentiments, as proceed rather from a Swelling than a Greatness of Mind." He mentions Dryden and Lee as having been guilty in this respect in several of their plays, and also accuses the actor George Powell of resorting frequently to bombast in order to gain favor with the audience. In the advertisement attached to this paper, in which he announces the performance of the Conquest of Mexico for Powell's benefit, he partially apologizes for his attack on the actor,

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12. Ibid., No. 540.

saying that "he is excellently formed for a Tragoedian, and, when he pleases, deserves the Admiration of the best Judges."<sup>13</sup>

Included also in this paper, Number 40, are Addison's comments on tragi-comedy and on double plot in tragedy. He calls tragi-comedy "one of the most monstrous Inventions that ever entered into a Poet's Thoughts," and says, "an Actor might as well think of weaving the Adventures of Aeneas and Hudibras into one Poem, as of writing such a motly Piece of Mirth and Sorrow." He observes that the same objections which are made to tragi-comedies may in part be applied to all tragedies that have a double plot in them, saying, "Though the Grief of the Audience, in such Performances, be not changed into another Passion, as in Tragi-Comedies; it is diverted upon another Object, which weakens their concern for the principal Action, and breaks the Tide of Sorrow, by throwing it into different Channels." He offers a solution to this situation, however, by suggesting that the writer of tragedy select a proper under-plot, "which may bear such a near Relation to the principal Design, as to contribute towards the Completion of it, and be concluded by the same Catastrophe."

In Spectator No. 42 Addison comments on the devices used by writers of tragedy to raise pity and terror in the audience. These writers, he says, accomplish their purpose "not by proper

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13. Ibid., No. 40.

Sentiments and Expressions, but by the Dresses and Decorations of the Stage." Commenting further on current practices in the theater, he says:

When the Author has a mind to terrify us, it thunders; When he would make us melancholy, the Stage is darkened. But among all our Tragick Artifices, I am the most offended at those which are made use of to inspire us with magnificent Ideas of the Persons who speak. The ordinary Method of making an Hero, is to clap a huge Plume of Feathers upon his Head, which rises so very high, that there is often a greater Length from his Chin to the Top of his Head, than to the Sole of his Foot. One would believe, that we thought a great Man and a tall Man the same thing.<sup>14</sup>

This practice of distinguishing characters by dress rather than by speech had been commented on previously by Steele in The Tatler when he offered as models to contemporary writers the comedies of Jonson and the tragedies of Shakespeare.<sup>15</sup>

Here Addison adds his comments on the subject, saying, "I would have our Conceptions raised by the Dignity of Thought and Sublimity of Expression, rather than by a Train of Robes or a Plume of Feathers."<sup>16</sup>

In Number 44 Addison continues his discourse on the devices used in tragedy to raise the proper sentiments in the audience. Among these devices he lists the use of thunder and lightning and the tolling of a bell, and says that "there is nothing which delights and terrifies our English Theatre

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14. Ibid., No. 42.

15. Cf. pp. 6 and 19.

16. Spectator No. 42.

so much as a Ghost, especially when he appears in a bloody Shirt." He adds, however, that he does not object to these artifices when "they are introduced with Skill, and accompanied by proportionable Sentiments and Expressions in the Writing," such as the sounding of the clock in Venice Preserv'd or the appearance of the ghost in Hamlet, which he considers a "Master-piece in its kind, and wrought up with all the Circumstances that can create either Attention or Horror." He also comments on the importance of the handkerchief in moving the audience to pity, saying that he would not wish to banish "this Instrument of Sorrow from the Stage," but that he would only have the "Actor's Tongue sympathize with his Eyes." He also adds to his list of devices which never fail to draw compassion from the audience the sight of a "disconsolate Mother, with a Child in her Hand."<sup>17</sup>

Another practice which he objects to is one which had also received the attention of Steele in The Tatler (No. 134), i.e., "that dreadful butchering of one another, which is so very frequent upon the English Stage." Addison suggests that the English theater follow the example of the ancients rather than the French who do not allow any murders or executions to be presented on the stage, which rule "leads them into absurdities almost as ridiculous as that which falls under

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17. Ibid., No. 44.



our present Censure." The ancients, Addison reminds his reader, did not banish all scenes of death from the stage, "but only such as had too much Horror in them, and which would have a better Effect upon the Audience when transacted behind the Scenes." He adds that although the ancient poets avoided if possible portraying the actual killing of persons on the stage, "their Bodies were often produced after their Death, which has always in it something melancholy or terrifying; so that the killing on the Stage does not seem to have been avoided only as an Indecency, but also as an Improbability."<sup>18</sup>

After having devoted two papers to the devices used by Writers of tragedy, Addison comments very briefly in the second paper on the same subject with regard to comedy. He says:

It would be an endless Task to consider Comedy in the same Light, and to mention the innumerable Shifts that small Wits put in practice to raise a Laugh. Bullock in a short Coat, and Norris in a long one, seldom fail of this Effect. In ordinary Comedies, a broad and a narrow brim'd Hat are different Characters. Sometimes the Wit of the Scene lies in a Shoulder-belt, and Sometimes in a Pair of Whiskers....But because Ridicule is not so delicate as Compassion, and because the Objects that make us laugh are infinitely more numerous than those that make us weep, there is a much greater Latitude for comick than tragick Artifices, and by Consequence a much greater Indulgence to be allowed them.<sup>19</sup>

After bringing his criticism of tragedy to a close in Spectator No. 44, Addison had very little to say about the

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18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

theater for some time. However, in the first paper in his series on wit he announced his purpose in The Spectator, particularly in regard to drama and other literature. He says:

As the great and only End of these my Speculations is to banish Vice and Ignorance out of the Territories of Great-Britain, I shall endeavour as much as possible to establish among us a Taste of polite Writing. It is with this View that I have endeavoured to set my Readers right in several Points relating to Operas and Tragedies; and shall from time to time impart my Notions of Comedy, as I think they may tend to its Refinement and Perfection.<sup>20</sup>

Addison did not keep this promise of imparting his "Notions of Comedy" until more than a year later, except for an incidental mentioning of Congreve's Love for Love, which he calls "one of the finest Comedies that ever appeared upon the English Stage,"<sup>21</sup> and the brief observation that "our English Comedy excels that of all other Nations in the Novelty and Variety of its Characters."<sup>22</sup> He did, however, enter into some discussions of general topics which might be applied to comedy, such as the proper use of ridicule or the practice of punning, which he discussed in Number 61, also from the series of papers on wit. He wonders that the present age makes so little use of the pun when it was found in the writings of "the most ancient Polite Authors." He accounts for this by

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20. Ibid., No. 58.

21. Ibid., No. 189.

22. Ibid., No. 371.

saying that "the first Race of Authors...were destitute of all Rules and Arts of Criticisms; and for that Reason, though they excel later Writers in Greatness of Genius, they fall short of them in Accuracy and Correctness. The Moderns cannot reach their Beauties, but can avoid their Imperfections." He fears that in a few years, however, the English writers will "degenerate into a Race of Punnsters." He sums up his opinion of this kind of wit by saying, "One may say of a Pun, as the Countryman describes his Nightingale, that it is...a Sound, and nothing but a Sound."<sup>23</sup>

In a later paper in which he discusses the subject of ridicule, he discloses that he and Steele shared the same opinion as to the moral purpose of drama, and criticizes his contemporaries for failing to make the proper use of their talents. He says:

If the Talent of Ridicule were employed to laugh Men out of Vice and Folly, it might be of some Use to the World; but instead of this, we find that it is generally made use of to laugh Men out of Virtue and good Sense, by attacking everything that is Solemn and Serious, Decent and Praise-worthy in Human Life.<sup>24</sup>

He observes that the authors of antiquity followed a rule which modern writers disregard, i.e., that of never choosing an improper subject for ridicule. "A Subject is improper for Ridicule," he explains, "if it is apt to stir up Horrour and

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23. Ibid., No. 61.

24. Ibid., No. 249.

Commiseration rather than Laughter....The Falshood of the Wife or Husband has given Occasion to noble Tragedies, but a Scipio or a Lelius would have look'd upon Incest or Murder to have been as proper Subjects for Comedy." Addison observes that in recent years, however, cuckoldry has been the basis for most of the English comedies. "The Truth of it is, the accomplished Gentleman upon the English Stage, is the Person that is familiar with other Men's Wives, and indifferent to his own; as the fine Woman is generally a Composition of Sprightliness and Falshood." He adds that if vice is to be represented on the stage at all, it "ought to be so marked and branded by the Poet, as not to appear either laudable or amiable in the Person who is tainted with them." He attributes what he considers to be the degeneration of the English stage to the corrupt taste of the "more vicious" part of the audience, and expresses his belief, as Steele had in The Tatler, that if the proper use were made of the stage, it could improve both the manners and morals of the public. With regard to this he says:

Were our English Stage but half so virtuous as that of the Greeks or Romans, we should quickly see the Influence of it in the Behavior of all the Politer Part of Mankind. It would not be fashionable to ridicule Religion, or its Professors; the Man of Pleasure would not be the complete Gentleman; Vanity would be out of Countenance, and every Quality which is Ornamental to Human Nature, would meet with that Esteem which is due to it....Were our Plays subject to proper Inspections and Limitations, we might not only pass away several of our vacant Hours in the highest enter-

tainments; but should always rise from them wiser and better than we sat down to them.<sup>25</sup>

Addison also gave several humorous accounts of the behavior of the audience at the performances of plays. In Number 361 he enters into a discourse upon catcalls after receiving a letter from one of his readers who related to him the noisy reception which Beaumont and Fletcher's The Humorous Lieutenant had received. Of this phenomenon Addison has the following to say: "The Cat-call exerts it self to most advantage in the British Theatre: It very much Improves the Sound of Nonsense, and often goes along with the Voices of the Actor who pronounces it, as the Violin or Harpsichord accompanies the Italian Recitativo." And his account of the self-appointed critic of drama, the trunk-maker, who "upon hearing anything that pleases him...takes up his Staff with both Hands, and lays it upon the next Piece of Timber that stands in his Way with exceeding Vehemence," reveals the audience's reaction to recent performances. For he records the following about the trunk-maker's behavior at the theater:

It has been remarked, that he has not yet exerted himself with Vigour this Season. He sometimes plies at the Opera; and upon Nicolini's first Appearance, was said to have demolished three Benches in the Fury of his Applause. He has broken half a dozen Oaken Planks upon Dogget, and seldom goes away from a Tragedy of Shakespear, without leaving the Wainscot extremely shattered.<sup>26</sup>

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25. Ibid., No. 446.

26. Ibid., No. 235.

In addition to these essays, Addison also occasionally included brief comments on the theater in papers devoted to other subjects. In Number 335 he gives an account of Sir Roger de Coverley's visit to the theater with him to see Ambrose Philip's tragedy, The Distressed Mother. He reports that both he and Sir Roger were "highly pleased" with the performance of "the excellent Piece," and also satirizes the popular concept of dramatic rules by recording Sir Roger's comment after seeing the play. "'But pray,' says he, 'you that are a Critick, is this Play according to your Dramatick Rules, as you call them? Should your People in Tragedy always talk to be understood? Why, there is not a single Sentence in this Play that I do not know the Meaning of.'"

In Number 377 he comments on the expression of love as found in the romances and tragedies of his time, especially calling attention to the phrase, "dying for Love," which he says is made use by "all the melting Tribe," adding:

Romances, which owe their very Being to the Passion, are full of these metaphorical Deaths. Heroes and Heroines, Knights, Squires, and Damsels, are all of them in a dying Condition. There is the same kind of Mortality in our Modern Tragedies, where every one gasps, faints, bleeds and dies.<sup>27</sup>

In Number 405 Addison expresses his regret that the English stage is about to lose Signior Nicolini, whom he calls "the greatest Performer in Dramatick Musick that is now living,

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27. Ibid., No. 377.

or that perhaps ever appeared upon a Stage."

Also, in his series on pleasures of the imagination he praises Shakespeare's ability in presenting the supernatural in his plays. He says that the English poets are the best in "the Fairy Way of Writing," and among them, Shakespeare excels all the others. Commenting on his "noble Extravagance of Fancy," he says:

There is something so wild and yet so solemn in the Speeches of his Ghosts, Fairies, Witches and the like Imaginary Persons, that we cannot forbear thinking them natural, tho' we have no rule by which to judge of them, and must confess, if there are such Beings in the World, it looks highly probable that they should talk and act as he has represented them.<sup>28</sup>

With Spectator No. 548, which has been discussed earlier with regard to his views on poetic justice, Addison's dramatic criticism came to a close in this portion of The Spectator on which he collaborated with Steele, the paper being discontinued on December 6, 1712, after 555 numbers. Addison, however, revived the paper in June, 1714, this time without Steele's help, and published 81 additional papers.<sup>29</sup> In this portion of The Spectator there is only one paper devoted to the subject of the theater. This is Number 592, in which he attacks contemporary critics who insist on a too strict observance of the rules of art because they lack the ability to interpret the rules and to understand that a proper disregard

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28. Ibid., No. 419.

29. Baugh, A Literary History of England, p. 875.

for them often discloses genius rather than ignorance. He offers Shakespeare as the outstanding example of a writer who had no need for formal rules, saying:

Our inimitable Shakespear is a Stumbling-Block to the whole Tribe of these rigid Criticks. Who would not rather read one of his Plays, where there is not a single Rule of the Stage observed, than any Production of a modern Critick, where there is not one of them violated? Shakespear was indeed born with all the Seeds of Poetry, and may be compared to the Stone of Pyrrhus's Ring, which, as Pliny tells us, had the Figure of Apollo and the Nine Muses in the Veins of it, produced by the spontaneous Hand of Nature, without any Help from Art.<sup>30</sup>

With this paper, then, Addison ended his theatrical criticism in The Spectator, and the paper itself came to an end after fourteen additional numbers.

The first paper in this periodical in which Steele makes mention of the theater, Number 14, contains comments on a subject to which he devoted a great deal of attention, i.e., the depravity of the audience's taste. In this paper he says:

I was reflecting this Morning upon the Spirit and Humour of the publick Diversions five and twenty Years ago, and those of the present Time; and lamented to my self, that though in those Days they neglected their Morality, they kept up their Good Sense; but that the 'beau Monde,' at present, is only grown more childish, not more innocent, than the former.<sup>31</sup>

In the same paper Steele includes a letter which makes a comparison between the "Two leading Diversions of the Town," the opera Rinaldo, which Addison had criticized in Number 5,

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30. Spectator No. 592.

31. Ibid., No. 14.



and the puppet-show presented by Powell. After witnessing both performances, he comes to the following conclusion: "As the Wit in both Pieces are equal, I must prefer the Performance of Mr. Powell, because it is in our own Language."<sup>32</sup>

Spectator No. 22 contains a letter from an actor who complains of the part he plays in Fletcher's comedy, The Pilgrim. "It certainly requires a Degree of Understanding to play justly," the player writes, "but such is our Condition, that we are to suspend our Reason to perform our Parts." This comment is reminiscent of Steele's discussion of The London Cuckolds in Tatler No. 8, in which he sympathizes with actors for being required to represent "things of which their reason must be ashamed." The actor requests "Mr. Spectator" to "animadvert frequently upon the false Taste the Town is in, with Relation to Plays as well as Operas." Steele complied with this request and "animadverted" quite frequently upon the subject, and remarks in this paper that "The Understanding is Dismissed from our Entertainments. Our Mirth is the Laughter of Fools, and our Admiration the Wonder of Idiots."<sup>33</sup>

The next two papers by Steele in which the theater is mentioned are written in the form of answers to earlier papers written by Addison. Number 36 contains a letter from an actor who signs himself "T.D." and is in answer to Number 31, in

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32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., No. 22.

which Addison had given an account of the "projector's" plan of including all the different forms of entertainment, such as dancing monkeys, lions, puppets, etc., in one performance.

"T.D." approves of this plan and adds:

We are resolved to take this Opportunity to part with every thing which does not contribute to the Representation of humane Life; and shall make a free Gift of all animated Utensils to your Projector. We hope, Sir, you will give proper Notice to the Town that we are endeavouring at these Regulations; and that we intend for the future to show no Monsters, but Men who are converted into such by their own Industry and Affectation.<sup>34</sup>

In Spectator No. 48, also written in letter form, Steele refers to Addison's comments in Number 42 on "the false Ornaments of Persons who represent Heroes in a Tragedy." He records the plight of a company of strolling players, "who are very far from offending in the impertinent Splendor of the Drama," and gives the following account of their performance:

They are so far from falling into these false Gallantries, that the Stage is here in its Original Situation of a Cart. Alexander the Great was acted by a Fellow in a Paper Cravat. The next Day, the Earl of Essex seemed to have no Distress but his Poverty: and my Lord Foppington the same Morning wanted any better means of shewing himself a Fop, than by wearing Stockings of different Colours. In a Word, tho' they have had a full Barn for many Days together, our Itinerants are still so wretchedly poor, that without you can prevail to send us the Furniture you forbid at the Play-house, the Heroes appear only like sturdy Beggars, and the Heroines Gipsies.<sup>35</sup>

Steele began his attack on the corruption of the stage

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34. Ibid., No. 36.

35. Ibid., No. 48.

in The Spectator in Number 51. In this paper he presents a letter from a young lady who objects to a line in one of Steele's own plays on the basis that it contains an image which ought not be presented to a "Chaste and Regular Audience." She says: "I was last Night at the Funeral, where a Confident Lover in the Play, speaking of his Mistress, cried out--'Oh that Harriot! to fold these Arms about the Waste of that Beauteous struggling, and at last yielding Fair!'" She asks for Steele's opinion on this particular line and suggests that he consider "as a Spectator, the conduct of the Stage at present with Relation to Chastity and Modesty." Although Steele's plays are noted for their purity in this respect, and he had himself boasted of the "innocence" of the play under discussion in the preface,<sup>36</sup> he admits his guilt in this instance, saying:

The Complaint of this Young Lady is so just, that the Offence is great enough to have displeas'd Persons who cannot pretend to that Delicacy and Modesty, of which she is Mistress. But there is a great deal to be said in Behalf of an Author: If the Audience would but consider the Difficulty of keeping up a sprightly Dialogue for five Acts together, they would allow a Writer, when he wants Wit, and can't please any otherwise, to help it out with a little Smuttiness. I will answer for the Poets, that no one ever writ Bawdy for any other Reason but Dearth of Invention. When the Author cannot strike out of himself any more of that which he has superior to those who make up the Bulk of his Audience, his natural Recourse is to that which he has in common with them: and a Description which gratifies a sensual Appetite will please, when the Author has nothing about him to

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36. Baugh, op. cit., p. 887.

delight a refined Imagination. It is to such a Poverty we must impute this and all other Sentences in Plays, which are of this Kind, and which are commonly termed Luscious Expressions.<sup>37</sup>

It is interesting to note that in later editions of The Funeral Steele cut the passage down to read, "Oh that Harriot! to embrace that Beauteous..."<sup>38</sup>

Steele further takes advantage of this opportunity to attack three writers whom he considers to be particularly guilty of the "luscious way" of writing. He says of the "polite Sir George Etherage," in reference to his play She Would If She Could, that he is the only writer whom he knows that has "professedly writ a Play upon the Basis of the Desire of Multiplying our Species." "It is remarkable," he points out, "that the Writers of least Learning are best skilled in the luscious Way," and adds that the "Poetesses of the Age have done Wonders in this kind..." naming as examples Mary Pix and Mrs. Aphra Behn. He further observes that immodesty has been so prevalent on the stage of late that "some Ladies wholly absent themselves from the Play-House; and others never miss the first Day of a Play, lest it should prove too luscious to admit their going with any countenance to it on the second."<sup>39</sup>

Steele renews his attack on Etherage in Number 65, this time expressing his objections to the characters of Dorimant

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37. Spectator No. 51.

38. Bateson, English Comic Drama, p. 10.

39. Spectator No. 51.

and Harriet in The Man of Mode. Of Dorimant he says: "I will take for granted, that a fine Gentleman should be honest in his Actions, and refined in his Language. Instead of this, our Hero in this piece is a direct Knave in his Designs, and a Clown in his Language." After attacking the character of Harriet in a similar manner, he sums up his opinion of the play, saying:

This whole celebrated Piece is a perfect Contradiction to good Manners, good Sense, and common Honesty... I think nothing but being lost to a sense of Innocence and Virtue can make any one see this Comedy, without observing more frequent Occasion to move Sorrow and Indignation, than Mirth and Laughter. At the same time I allow it to be Nature, but it is Nature in its utmost Corruption and Degeneracy.<sup>40</sup>

In a later paper he records that a lady of his acquaintance, after reading his criticism of The Man of Mode, reprimanded him for calling Dorimant a clown, whereas she considered him a "charming Creature." Although Steele was not sufficiently brave to oppose the lady at the time, her reproof nevertheless caused him to reflect upon "the false Impressions the generality (the Fair Sex more especially) have of what should be intended, when they say a 'Fine Gentleman,'" and to set down his own impression of the proper standard of behavior for a gentleman:

No Man ought to have the Esteem of the rest of the World, for any Actions which are disagreeable to those Maxims which prevail, as the Standards of Behavior, in

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40. Ibid., No. 65.

the Country wherein he lives....When a Gentleman speaks Coarsly, he has dressed himself Clean to no purpose: The Cloathing of our Minds certainly ought to be regarded before that of our Bodies.<sup>41</sup>

He accuses Beaumont and Fletcher in a like manner of advancing vice by their representation of the chaplain in their play, The Scornful Lady. "This very one Character of Sir Roger," Steele says, "as silly as it really is, has done more towards the Disparagement of Holy Orders, and consequently of Virtue it self, than all the Wit that Author or any other could make up for in the Conduct of the longest Life after it."<sup>42</sup>

Steele, of course, considered the taste of the audience itself responsible for these objectionable practices of the poets who write "to gratify a loose Age," having observed at the performance of The Lancashire-Witches, by Thomas Shadwell, that the parts which raised the loudest laughter in the audience were those that were "painful to right Sense, and an Outrage upon Modesty."<sup>43</sup> He is alarmed that the audiences favor such performances but take little notice of "the most exalted Parts of the best Tragedies in Shakespear," and makes the following comment on the taste of the audience: "You may generally observe, that the Appetites are sooner moved than the Passions: A sly Expression which alludes to Bawdry, puts

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41. Ibid., No. 75.

42. Ibid., No. 270.

43. Ibid., No. 141.

a whole Row into a pleasing Smirk; when a good Sentence that describes an inward Sentiment of the Soul, is received with the greatest Coldness and Indifference."<sup>44</sup>

In addition to criticizing the audiences for their lack of good taste, Steele also admonished them for their behavior at the playhouse, saying that a set of whisperers or a set of laughers often act as though "their whole Business is to draw off the Attention of the Spectators from the Entertainment, and to fix it upon themselves."<sup>45</sup> And in a letter from the actress Mrs. Tofts, a comparison is made between the behavior of the Italian and the English audiences. She remarks that Italian audiences do not indulge in hissing as do the English, and that they "have no boistrous Wits who dare disturb an Audience, and break the publick Peace meerly to shew they dare."<sup>46</sup>

In Spectator No. 141 Steele comments on the practice of including rope dancers, tumblers, and the like in performances in order to entertain those members of the audience "who have no Faculty above Eyesight." He makes no objection to this type of entertainment as such, but he does object to the appearance of these performers in the regular drama, or even the inclusion of such performances between the acts of a

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44. Ibid., No. 208.

45. Ibid., No. 168.

46. Ibid., No. 443.

serious play, saying that "Corporeal and Intellectual Actors ought to be kept at a still wider Distance than to appear on the same Stage at all." In a later paper, however, Steele quotes a letter in which the writer defends the "Rope-dancers, Vaulters, Tumblers, Ladder-walkers, and Posture-makers," explaining that "Every Man that goes to a Play is not obliged to have either Wit or Understanding," and that such provisions should be made so that every one in the audience would enjoy some part of the performance. "In short, Sir," the writer continues, "I would have something done as well as said on the Stage."<sup>47</sup> This viewpoint is supported in a later letter by one who had been to see a performance of the opera Hydaspes. He writes "Mr. Spectator" that he had noticed that it was the custom in an audience to cry "Encore" when they were particularly pleased with a song and that the performer would repeat it. Following this example, he made the same request after Signior Nicolini had killed the lion, but the performers did not oblige him by a repetition of the action, and "the Lion was carried off, and went to Bed, without being killed any more that Night." The writer goes on to explain his views on the subject as follows:

Now, Sir, pray consider that I did not understand a Word of what Mr. Nicolini said to this cruel Creature; besides, I have no Ear for Musick; so that during the

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47. Ibid., No. 258.



long Dispute between 'em, the whole Entertainment I had was from my Eye; Why then have not I as much Right to have a graceful Action repeated as another has a pleasing Sound, since he only hears as I only see, and we neither of us know that there is any reasonable thing a doing?<sup>48</sup>

In addition to these comments, Steele also included in The Spectator discussions of individual plays, as he had done in The Tatler. In Number 141 he quotes a letter in which the writer criticizes Shadwell for his representation of the supernatural in The Lancashire-Witches. He says that Shadwell had been misled by "an unwary following of the inimitable Shakespear"; for although the presentation of witchcraft, such as in Macbeth, is proper in a tragedy "where the Business is dark, horrid, and bloody," it has no place in comedy. Steele in answer to this letter says that the writer failed to give Shadwell credit for his "most excellent Talent of Humour," while he gave too much attention to the witches, "who are too dull Devils to be attacked with so much Warmth."

In Number 290 he praises Ambrose Philips for his tragedy, The Distressed Mother, which was an adaptation of Racine's Andromaque. Steele wrote the prologue to this play, and the epilogue is believed to have been written by Addison, although when it was printed, credit was given to Eustace Budgell.<sup>49</sup> Both Addison and Steele showed a great deal of interest in

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48. Ibid., No. 314.

49. Nicoll, A History of Early Eighteenth Century Drama, p. 87.

the play, Addison remarking in Number 335 that he was "highly pleased" with the performance of the "excellent Piece," and in this paper, Number 290, Steele has the following to say about the excellencies of the tragedy:

Indeed the Truth is, that as to the Work it self, it is every where Nature. The Persons are of the highest Quality in Life, even that of Princes; but their Quality is not represented by the Poet with Direction that Guards and Waiters should follow them in every Scene, but their Grandeur appears in Greatness of Sentiments, 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....What is further very extraordinary in this Work, is, that the Persons are all of them laudable, and their Misfortunes arise rather from unguarded Virtue than Propensity to Vice.<sup>50</sup>

The two papers which are not attributed to either Addison or Steele were also devoted to a discussion of this play. In Number 338 a letter is quoted in which the writer objects to the incongruity of attaching a ludicrous epilogue to a serious tragedy, thus destroying the mood of "pleasing Melancholy" which the audience has experiences while witnessing the play. The writer makes particular reference to the epilogue to The Distressed Mother, which was called by Samuel Johnson "the most successful epilogue that was ever yet spoken in the English theatre."<sup>51</sup> Number 341, written by Budgell, is in answer to this attack and is also in letter form. This writer defends the epilogue to the play under discussion, saying that

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50. Spectator No. 290.

51. The Spectator, Edited by Henry Morley, II, 475.

it is not unnatural because it is gay. He reminds the first writer that although the prologue and epilogue were a part of ancient tragedy, this is not true of modern English tragedy, "but every one knows that on the British Stage they are distinct Performances by themselves, Pieces entirely detached from the Play, and no way essential to it."<sup>52</sup>

Other plays which Steele mentioned in The Spectator are Congreve's Love for Love, which Addison had praised in an earlier paper, and which Steele here says is a play "which no body would omit seeing, that had, or had not ever seen it before";<sup>53</sup> Thomas Otway's Venice Preserv'd, which Addison mentioned;<sup>54</sup> The Country Wake, which offers Steele opportunity to mention several things to which he particularly objected, including: the behavior of the audience, some of whom "set up for Actors and interrupt the Play on the Stage," and "the intollerable Folly and Confidence of Players putting in Words of their own";<sup>55</sup> and Colley Cibber's Ximena, or the Heroic Daughter, taken from The Cid of Corneille, the performance of which Steele finds very pleasing, although he suggests that Cibber may not have given due credit to his source, for he remarks that he went to the rehearsal of the play in order that he might "let the Town know what was his,

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52. Spectator No. 341.

53. Ibid., No. 358.

54. Ibid., No. 456.

55. Ibid., No. 502.

and what foreign." And after discussing the play and praising Mrs. Oldfield for her performance, he adds that an author "ought to own all that he had borrowed from others, and lay in a clear light all that he gives his Spectators for their Money, with an Account of the first Manufacturers."<sup>56</sup>

The only other references Steele made to the theater in The Spectator were his announcement of the death of the actor Richard Estcourt in Number 468 and his explanation in Number 370 as to why he makes frequent mention of the stage in his papers. He says:

It is, with me, a Matter of the highest Consideration what Parts are well or ill performed, what Passions or Sentiments are indulged or cultivated, and consequently what Manners and Customs are transfused from the Stage to the World, which reciprocally imitate each other.... It is not to be imagin'd what effect a well-regulated Stage would have upon Men's Manners. The Craft of an Usurer, the Absurdity of a rich Fool, the awkward Roughness of a fellow of half Courage, the ungraceful Mirth of a Creature of half Wit, might be for ever put out of Countenance by proper Parts for Dogget.<sup>57</sup>

And in Number 314 when someone asked Steele what he considered to be "the chief Qualification of a good Poet, especially of one who writes Plays," he gave the brief but revealing answer, "To be a very well-bred Man."

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56. Ibid., No. 546.

57. Ibid., No. 370.

### III. THE GUARDIAN

The portion of The Spectator on which Addison and Steele collaborated was discontinued on December 6, 1712, and was not revived by Addison until June 18, 1714. In the meantime The Guardian appeared on March 12, 1713, ran for 176 numbers, and came to an end on the first of October of the same year.

Only ten papers in The Guardian contain any discussion of the theater. Of this number, eight papers were written by Steele, one by Addison, and one by John Hughes. Although the amount of dramatic criticism included in The Guardian is small, Steele announced in the first number his intention of including this subject among others in the new paper. Writing this time under the name of Nestor Ironside, Esq., Steele makes the following statement of his purpose in writing the paper:

My design upon the whole is no less than to make the pulpit, the bar, and the stage, all act in concert in the care of piety, justice, and virtue; for I am past all the regards of this life, and have nothing to

manage with any person or party, but to deliver myself as becomes an old man with one foot in the grave, and one who thinks he is passing to eternity.<sup>1</sup>

Number 29 is the first paper in The Guardian in which the theater is discussed. This paper was written by Steele and is devoted to a discussion of laughter. He states that he has often intended to write a treatise upon the subject of laughter in which he would lay down rules "for the better regulation of it at the theatre." He would discuss the methods used by the comic actors, including Pinkethman, Norris, and Bullock, to raise laughter, so that the audience would be able "to distinguish whether the jest was the poet's or the actor's." He also records his observations concerning the subjects which please the various members of the audience, saying:

I find the reserved prude will relapse into a smile, at the extravagant freedoms of the coquet; the coquet in her turn laughs at the starchness and awkward affectation of the prude; the man of letters is tickled with the vanity and ignorance of the fop; and the fop confesses his ridicule at the unpoliteness of the pedant.<sup>2</sup>

Number 33, also by Steele, contains a discussion of Addison's tragedy Cato, in which he praises his friend particularly for his presentation of the principal character in the play. He says:

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1. Addison and Steele, The Guardian, Vols. 16-18 of The British Essayists, edited by James Ferguson, No. 1. All subsequent references to The Guardian will be to this edition.

2. Ibid., No. 29.

There is nothing uttered by Cato but what is worthy the best of men; and the sentiments which are given him are not only the most warm for the conduct of this 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.<sup>3</sup>

He goes on to commend the other characters in the play, but interrupts his discussion to say that "this play is so well recommended by others, that I will not for that and some private reasons, enlarge any farther."

In spite of these "private reasons," Steele returned to this subject in two later papers, Numbers 43 and 59. In Number 43 he gives Cato as an example of the proper use of the theater for the "improvement of the world." He says that the theater is admirably suited for the representation of vice and virtue in such a way as to make one agreeable and the other odious, and that "this admirable piece" has been particularly successful in awakening a love of virtue in those who saw its performance.

Steele continues his praise of Cato for its representation of virtue in Number 59, which is written in the form of a letter, and also compares this tragedy with those of the ancient poets, saying:

The tragedy of Cato exceeds, in my opinion, any of the dramatic pieces of the ancients....I...little imagined to have found such exquisite poetry, much less such exalted sentiments of virtue, in the dramatic performance

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3. Ibid., No. 33.

of a contemporary....Such virtuous and moral sentiments were never before put into the mouth of a British actor.<sup>4</sup>

He states that the British audience should be commended for their favorable reception of the play, and that they have now absolved themselves of the accusations made against them by a "late writer," referring to Spectator No. 502 by Steele. He continues: "Our poetry, I believe, and not our morals has been generally worse than that of the Romans; for it is plain, when we can equal the best dramatic performance of that polite age, a British audience may vie with the Roman theatre in the virtue of their applauses." Steele continues his profuse praise of this play by quoting another letter on the subject in this same paper, Number 59. This writer, who signs himself "A.B.," has the following to say about Addison's play: "It will be an honour to the times we live in, to have had such a work produced in them, and a pretty speculation for posterity to observe, that the tragedy of Cato was acted with general applause in 1713."

Othello is discussed in Guardian No. 37 by John Hughes. After stating that he is pleased that the tragedies of Shakespeare still find favor with the audience, he enters into a criticism of the play itself, praising Shakespeare for his representation of the passion of jealousy, but making the

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4. Ibid., No. 59.



following rather cautious comment on the play as a whole:

I have often considered this play as a noble, but irregular, production of a genius, who had the power of animating the theatre beyond any writer we have ever known. The touches of nature in it are strong and masterly; but the oecconomy of the fable, and in some particulars the probability, are too much neglected; if I would speak of it in the most severe terms, I should say as Waller does of the Maid's Tragedy, 'Great are its faults, but glorious is its flame.'<sup>5</sup>

The only mention which Addison makes of the theater in The Guardian is found in Number 67. In this paper he gives an account of his efforts to arrange for a benefit performance for his friend Thomas D'Urfey. He relates that the actors agreed to perform one of D'Urfey's comedies, The Plotting Sisters, which Addison calls a "very taking play," for the benefit of the author. He recommends the play to the public and expresses the hope that the performance will be well attended. Of D'Urfey he says: "He has made the world merry, and I hope they will make him easy, so long as he stays among us." Steele also recommends this performance to his readers, saying that he is certain that the play "will more than repay the good-nature of those who make an honest man a visit of two merry hours to make his following year unpainful."<sup>6</sup>

Other references to the theater found in The Guardian, all of which were by Steele, include: a brief discussion of the comedy called The Wife of Bath, in which he says that he

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5. Ibid., No. 37.

6. Ibid., No. 82.

has been informed that the author has drawn the humorous characters "with great propriety, and an exact observation of the manners";<sup>7</sup> a notice of the death of the Restoration actor William Peer, with a discussion of his ability;<sup>8</sup> a letter from a prompter, giving a satirical account of the scenery used by a traveling company;<sup>9</sup> and a discussion of the tendency of the English people to have very definite humours that distinguish one from another, which he gives as a reason that "our comedies are enriched with such a diversity of characters, as is not to be seen upon any other theatre in Europe."<sup>10</sup>

This essay, Number 144, is the last one in The Guardian which contains any mention of the theater, and the paper itself came to a close approximately a month later.

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7. Ibid., No. 50.  
 8. Ibid., No. 82.  
 9. Ibid., No. 95.  
 10. Ibid., No. 144.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Two questions naturally arise concerning Addison's and Steele's theatrical criticism in these periodicals. They are: (1) How influential were these comments on the theater at the time they were written? and (2) Did Addison and Steele adhere to the principles of drama set down in these papers in the plays which they wrote?

The first of these questions can hardly be answered within the scope of this paper. That they were popular cannot be questioned. As to their immediate influence, we have Colley Cibber's comment:

We knew too, the obligations the stage had to his Steele's writings; there being scarce a comedian of merit, in our whole company, whom his Tatlers had not made better, by his publick recommendation of them. And many days had our house been particularly fill'd, by the influence and credit of his pen.<sup>1</sup>

John gay, even as early as 1711, soon after The Tatler had been discontinued, spoke of the general good this paper

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1. Cibber, op. cit., p. 409.

had done:

It is incredible to conceive the effect his writings have made upon the Town; how many thousand follies they have either quite banished or given a very great check! how much countenance they have added to Virtue and Religion! how many people they have rendered happy, by showing them it was entirely their own fault if they were not so! and, lastly, how entirely they have convinced our young fops and gay fellows of the values and advantages of learning!<sup>2</sup>

A later writer makes the statement that "Steele and Addison between them did more to rehabilitate English manners after the Restoration excesses than any other two men--not excepting the clergy."<sup>3</sup> And one of the ways to accomplish this rehabilitation, thought Addison and Steele, was through the proper use of the theater; for as the latter expressed it, it would be the "most agreeable and easy method of making a polite and moral gentry."<sup>4</sup> Also, it will be remembered that Addison, in the first paper in his series on wit, announced that his aim was "to establish among us a taste of polite writing" in order to "banish vice and ignorance out of the territories of Great-Britain."<sup>5</sup> He must have felt that they had accomplished something in this direction, for Dr. Johnson records that Addison later said that "they [the Tatler and Spectator papers]<sup>7</sup> had a perceptible influence upon the conversation of that time, and taught the frolick and gay

2. Melville, Life and Letters of John Gay, pp. 13-14.

3. Baugh, op. cit., pp. 374-5.

4. Tatler No. 8.

5. Spectator No. 58.

to unite merriment with decency."<sup>6</sup>

Macaulay apparently agreed with Addison's evaluation of their work, for he calls him a "great satirist, who alone knew how to use ridicule without abusing it; who, without inflicting a wound, effected a great social reform, and who reconciled wit and virtue, after a long and disastrous separation, during which wit had been led astray by profligacy, and virtue by fanaticism."<sup>7</sup>

In spite of this, however, it would not be logical to assume that Addison and Steele alone brought about the change that was taking place in the theater at that time. As one writer points out, "The unrestrained licence of the Restoration drama and Restoration manners did not spring merely from a revolt of the senses: they were also the deliberate expression of the conviction, then general, that to be witty and amusing it is necessary to be immoral."<sup>8</sup> Certainly the essays of these two men could not have dispelled so firm a conviction and ultimately have changed the audience's taste for the licentiousness of the Restoration plays to the sentimentalism of the period which followed. Rather it is more

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6. Arnold, The Six Chief Lives from Johnson's "Lives of the Poets," p. 275.

7. Thurber, Select Essays of Addison together with Macaulay's Essay on Addison's Life and Writings, p. 301.

8. Shawcross, "Addison as a Social Reformer," The Contemporary Review, CLIII (May, 1938), 586.

believable that Addison and Steele merely recognized perhaps a little earlier than some of their contemporaries the symptoms of the change that was to occur. For as one writer says: "The sentimental view of man was so common that inevitably it appeared on the stage. The passion to reform, to set the human heart in harmony with those principles of virtue that are Nature, produced moral plays as readily as it did moral periodical essays."<sup>9</sup> Another writer explains that this movement toward sentimentalism was a "reaction against formulated laws due to the wishes of a changing public, for the wealthy merchant class and practical men of affairs among the nobility were displacing the leisure group that had patronized drama during Stuart times."<sup>10</sup> Steele's place in this movement probably is summed up best by the following observation, which doubtless would apply also to Addison:

...Quotations from the Spectator have a double significance. They show, on the one hand, how Steele was in a measure, leading public opinion. On the other hand, since the paper was so enormously popular, he must have been, when he was not leading, at least giving expression to ideas already half formulated in the minds of his readers.<sup>11</sup>

The second question concerning whether or not Addison and Steele were faithful to their ideals when they wrote their own plays can be given a more definite answer by a

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9. Baugh, op. cit., p. 884.

10. Stevens, Types of English Drama, p. 894.

11. Krutch, Comedy and Conscience after the Restoration, pp. 235-6.

study of the plays themselves.

Three of Steele's four plays were written before he entered into collaboration with Addison on The Tatler. The first play, The Funeral; or Grief à la Mode, was acted at Drury Lane around October, 1701. It met with moderate success and continued popular for some time after, being revived occasionally between 1703 and 1734 and even as late as 1799, which is the last known date of presentation.<sup>12</sup>

In the prologue Steele criticizes the various forms of entertainment which had recently invaded the play-house at the expense of legitimate drama, which subject was to prove a popular one with him later in his Tatler and Spectator papers. In this prologue he says:

Nature's deserted, and dramatic art,  
To dazzle now the eye, has left the heart;  
Gay lights and dresses, long extended scenes,  
Demons and angels moving in machines,  
All that can now, or please, or fright the fair,  
May be performed without a writer's care,  
And is the skill of carpenter, not player.  
Old Shakespeare's days could not thus far advance;  
But what's his buskin to our ladder dance?<sup>13</sup>

The plot of The Funeral, which, as the subtitle would indicate, is partly a satire on the current fashionable expression of grief, was entirely original. This design of

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12. Aitken, The Best Plays of the Old Dramatists - Richard Steele, p. 2.

13. Steele, The Funeral, from The Best Plays of the Old Dramatists - Richard Steele, edited by G. A. Aitken, pp. 8-9. All subsequent quotations from Steele's plays will be from this edition.

exposing the absurdities of feigned grief, plus an attack on some of the intricacies of legal proceedings, are set down by Steele in his préface to the play:

...It were buffoonery rather than satire to explode all funeral honours; but then it is certainly necessary to make 'em such that the mourners should be in earnest, and the lamented worthy of our sorrow. But this purpose is so far from being served, that it is utterly destroyed by the manner of proceeding among us,...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....

The daily villanies we see committed will also be esteemed things proper to be prosecuted by satire, nor could our ensuing Legislative do their country a more seasonable office than to look into the distresses of an unhappy people, who groan perhaps in as much misery under entangled as they could do under broken laws.<sup>14</sup>

These two subjects are attacked in the play itself primarily through the characters of Mr. Sable, the undertaker, and Puzzle, the lawyer. In the first scene of the play Sable is shown instructing his hired mourners in their art:

...Well, come you that are to be mourners in this house, put on your sad looks, and walk by me that I may sort you. Ha, you! a little more upon the dismal;...this fellow has a good mortal look--place him near the corpse...Look yonder, that hale, well-looking puppy! You ungrateful scoundrel, did not I pity you, take you out of a great man's service, and show you the pleasure of receiving wages? Did not I give you ten, then fifteen, now twenty shillings a week, to be sorrowful? and the more I give you, I think, the gladder you are.<sup>15</sup>

And Puzzle, the lawyer, in the same scene, tells his nephew

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14. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 15.



how he had used the supposedly late Lord Brumpton:

...The lord of this house was one of your men of honour and sense who lose the latter in the former, and are apt to take all men to be like themselves. Now this gentleman entirely trusted me, and I made the only use a man of business can of a trust--I cheated him.<sup>16</sup>

The behavior of the audience at the theater also comes in for its share of satire in the first scene, when the supposedly widowed Lady Brumpton tells her maid Tattleaid of her first visit to the theater after her period of mourning is over. Steele here criticizes the practice, particularly of the "fair sex," of attending the performance of a play merely to be seen. For Lady Brumpton, after telling of her intended entrance into the theater, adds, "And when one has done one's part, observe the actors do their's [Sic], but with my mind fixed not on those I look at, but those that look at me..."<sup>17</sup>

The moral of the play is summed up in the last speech of Lord Brumpton (Act V, Scene 4), who has become estranged from his son through the machinations of his second wife:

Now, gentlemen, let the miseries which I have but miraculously escaped, admonish you to have always inclinations proper for the stage of life you're in. Don't follow love when nature seeks but ease; otherwise you'll fall into a lethargy of your dishonour, when warm pursuits of glory are over with you; for fame and rest are utter opposites.

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16. Ibid., p. 22.

17. Ibid., p. 19.

You who the path of honour make your guide,  
 Must let your passion with your blood subside;  
 And no untimed ambition, love, or rage  
 Employ the moments of declining age;  
 Else boys will in your presence lose their fear,  
 And laugh at the grey-head they should revere.<sup>18</sup>

With the exception of this statement of the moral of the play, and the inclusion occasionally of such lines as

Short is the date in which ill acts prevail,  
 But honesty's a rock can never fail,<sup>19</sup>

Steele did not overburden his first play with didacticism.

However, two things are noteworthy and are indicative of the trend his later writings were to take. He showed the respect he felt for true women by the characters of Lady Sharlot and Lady Harriot, as contrasted to Lady Brumpton, and he represented virtue and vice to the advantage of the former.<sup>20</sup> As one writer points out:

...His play was consequently very different from the first plays of Congreve, Vanbrugh, Farquhar or Cibber in that it was almost free from indecency or innuendo. No earlier comedy dealing with contemporary London had been so blameless against the charge of lewdness. The atmosphere is entirely changed. Virtue is recognized and acclaimed. Not only are we asked to sympathize with the virtuous, they pay us back with moral counsel.<sup>21</sup>

In his next play, The Lying Lover; or the Ladies' Friendship, which was produced in December, 1703, Steele went even further in his moral purpose, declaring in the dedication to

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18. Ibid., p. 94.

19. Ibid., p. 26.

20. Aitken, op. cit., Introduction, pp. xi-xiv.

21. Thorndike, English Comedy, p. 345.

The Duke of Ormond that "the design of it is to banish out of conversation all entertainment which does not proceed from simplicity of mind, good-nature, friendship, and honour."<sup>22</sup> He reiterates this purpose in the preface after criticizing the stage for its laxity in the past:

Though it ought to be the care of all Governments that public representations should have nothing in them but what is agreeable to the manners, laws, religion, and policy of the place or nation in which they are exhibited; yet is it the general complaint of the more learned and virtuous amongst us, that the English stage has extremely offended in this kind. I thought, therefore, it would be an honest ambition to attempt a Comedy which might be no improper entertainment in a Christian commonwealth.<sup>23</sup>

The play was based on Corneille's Le Menteur, which plot Steele followed rather closely during the first four acts, some of the speeches being direct translations from his source. In this part of the play he presents his not-too-perfect hero Bookwit, the "lying lover," in a manner that is much akin to that of the Restoration comedies. Steele himself apparently recognized this kinship, for in the preface he describes his hero, as he appears in the first four acts, as using the "advantages of a learned education, a ready fancy, and a liberal fortune, without the circumspection and good sense which should always attend the pleasures of a gentleman...Thus he makes false love, gets drunk, and kills his man."<sup>24</sup> Bookwit's attempts to con-

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22. The Lying Lover, p. 99.

23. Ibid., p. 101.

24. Ibid.

ceal this "learned education" are satirized in the first scene in a conversation with his friend Latine. After many questions as to his appearance, Bookwit still is not satisfied, and adds, "I fancy people see I understand Greek." But his good friend reassures him that "You look...very ignorant."<sup>25</sup> Nor is Penelope as admirable as one would expect Steele to present one of his heroines, for she is not above coquetry, jealousy, or making the statement, "Give me a man that has agreeable faults rather than offensive virtues."<sup>26</sup>

The play up to this point differs from those which Steele himself criticized only in the notable absence of indecency. But in the last act he departs from his source to present his moral lesson. Bookwit, who believes he has killed Lovemore in a duel, resorts to many solemn speeches of self-reproach; there is a tearful reconciliation of father and son; true friendship is displayed in Latine's attempt to assume the guilt of his friend, and Bookwit's refusal of this offer; and Penelope is cured of her coquettish ways by her grief over the supposed death of Lovemore. After many pious speeches, misunderstandings are straightened out, and, as one writer comments, "all ends in tears, blank verse and marital felicity."<sup>27</sup> And Bookwit, no longer the "lying lover," ends the

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25. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

27. Thorndike, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

play with a statement of the theme:

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.<sup>28</sup>

This all too obvious moralizing in the fifth act probably was responsible for the failure of the play, which ran only six nights, for in Steele's own words, it was "damned for its piety."<sup>29</sup> The play, however, introduced a new element into comedy which Steele was to make use of to an even greater extent in his last play, The Conscious Lovers, and which was to be so prevalent in the comedies of other dramatists who followed him in sentimental comedy--that is, the introduction of an appeal to compassion. The Lying Lover has been called "the first instance of Sentimental Comedy proper." "Instead of contenting himself with making vice and folly ridiculous, the author applies himself to provoking a response from the emotion of pity."<sup>30</sup> Steele condones this innovation by stating in the preface of the play that the "anguish" and "sorrow" presented in the last act, although they may be "an injury to the rules of comedy," are "a justice to those of morality,"<sup>31</sup> and explains the matter further in the epilogue:

Our too advent'rous author scared to-night  
 Above the little praise, mirth to excite,

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28. The Lying Lover, p. 186.

29. Thorndike, op. cit., p. 344.

30. Ibid., p. 345.

31. The Lying Lover, p. 102.

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, 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.<sup>32</sup>

Steele apparently took warning from the fate of The Lying Lover, for in his next play, The Tender Husband; or the Accomplished Fools, which was acted in April, 1705, the sermonizing is less obvious. He dedicated the play to Addison, and in this dedication makes the statement that he had been "very careful to avoid everything that might look ill-natured, immoral, or prejudicial to what the better part of mankind hold sacred and honourable."<sup>33</sup> Despite this intention, Steele again followed the Restoration tradition in his plot, presenting a husband who tests his wife's fidelity by employing his mistress, disguised as a man, to make love to her. It would seem that Steele here abandoned his scruples concerning the representation of marital infidelity on the stage; nevertheless, he did not go as far with this theme as his predecessors, who usually allowed the lady to deceive her unsuspecting and faithful husband, whereas Steele presented Clerimont, the husband, as neither unsuspecting nor faithful, and the wife, at the end of the play, repents and is forgiven.

The artificiality of this situation is relieved by another

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32. Ibid., p. 187.

33. The Tender Husband, p. 193.

plot involving the romance of Captain Clerimont, the younger brother of the "tender husband," and Biddy Tipkin, who has been promised in marriage to her rustic cousin Humphry. This plot affords Steele an opportunity to satirize the practice of prearranged marriages in a conversation in Act I, Scene 2, between Sir Harry Buggin, Humphry's father, and Mr. Tipkin. After they have settled the matter to their satisfaction, Sir Harry suggests that the couple might meet, but Mr. Tipkin replies, "I don't think it prudent till the very instant of marriage, lest they should not like one another." Sir Harry cannot see the importance of this, however, and boasts that "I never suffered him [his son] to have anything he liked in his life."<sup>34</sup>

Not until the final speech of the play, however, does Steele state the moral as represented by Mrs. Clerimont, the erring wife, and Humphry Buggin, the dominated son:

You've seen th' extremes of the domestic life,  
 A son too much confined--too free a wife;  
 By generous bonds you either should restrain,  
 And only on their inclinations gain,  
 Wives to obey must love, childred revere,  
 While only slaves are governed by their fear.<sup>35</sup>

In the epilogue to the play Steele attacks the Italian opera, which was to receive considerable attention from both him and Addison in the Tatler and Spectator essays:

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34. Ibid., p. 209.

35. Ibid., p. 262.

Britons, who constant war, with factious rage,  
 For liberty against each other wage,  
 From foreign insult save this English stage.  
 No more th' Italian squalling tribe admit,  
 In tongues unknown; 'tis popery in wit.  
 The songs (theirselves confess) from Rome they bring,  
 And 'tis high mass, for ought you know, they sing.

Admire (if you will dote on foreign wit)  
 Not what Italians sing, but Romans writ.

Let those derision meet, who would advance  
 Manners or speech, from Italy or France.  
 Let them learn you, who would your favour find,  
 And English be the language of mankind.<sup>36</sup>

It is believed that Addison collaborated with Steele on this play, for according to Spectator No. 555, "many applauded strokes were from Addison's hand," and it is known that he wrote the prologue.

Despite the absence of the kind of sermonizing which apparently caused the failure of The Lying Lover, this play met with no greater success than that of its predecessor, running only five nights.<sup>37</sup> After this time Steele ceased to write for the stage for many years, the three periodicals previously discussed being written between this date and the appearance of his last complete play in 1722.

The Conscious Lovers, which appeared on November 7, 1722, is considered Steele's best comedy and met with greater success than his earlier plays. It ran for eighteen nights, with eight additional performances during the season and was revived

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36. Ibid., pp. 263-4.

37. Aitken, op. cit., Introduction, p. xxviii.



frequently during the remainder of the century, being acted as late as 1818.<sup>38</sup> "The chief design of this was to be an innocent performance," Steele states in his preface,<sup>39</sup> and Leonard Welsted, a protégé of Steele, reiterates this purpose in his prologue to the play:

But the bold sage--the poet of to-night--  
 By new and desperate rules resolved to write;  
 Fain would he give more just applauses rise,  
 And please by wit that scorns the aids of vice;  
 The praise he seeks from worthier motives springs,  
 Such praise as praise to those that give it brings.  
 Your aid most humbly sought, then, Britons lend,  
 And liberal mirth like liberal men defend.  
 No more let ribaldry, with licence writ,  
 Usurp the name of eloquence or wit;  
 No more let lawless farce uncensured go,  
 The lewd dull gleanings of a Smithfield show.  
 'Tis yours with breeding to refine the age,  
 To chasten wit, and moralise the stage.<sup>40</sup>

Steele attacks two evils specifically in the play, i.e., the marriage of convenience and the then accepted practice of duelling, for Steele says in his preface that "the whole was writ for the sake of the scene of the Fourth Act, wherein Mr. Bevil evades the quarrel with his friend."<sup>41</sup> In this scene referred to in the preface, Bevil, who has been challenged to a duel by his friend Myrtle as a result of jealousy, expresses his aversion to this method of settling an argument. "You know," he tells Myrtle, "I have often dared to disapprove

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38. Aitken, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

39. The Conscious Lovers, p. 269.

40. Ibid., pp. 272-3.

41. Ibid., pp. 269-70.

of the decisions a tyrant custom has introduced, to the breach of all laws, both divine and human." After a good deal of conversation, during the course of which Bevil almost accepts the challenge but recovers himself in time to persuade Myrtle that his jealousy is unfounded, the two friends are reconciled, and Myrtle ends the scene with a tirade against duelling:

Dear Bevil, your friendly conduct has convinced me that there is nothing manly but what is conducted by reason, and agreeable to the practice of virtue and justice. And yet how many have been sacrificed to that idol, the unreasonable opinion of men! Nay, they are so ridiculous in it, that they often use their swords against each other with dissembled anger and real fear.

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.<sup>42</sup>

It will be remembered that Steele wrote against this same practice in The Lying Lover and also attacked the practice later in his Tatler and Spectator papers.

Another subject which was popular in his essays, and which he criticized in the epilogue to The Tender Husband, he finds opportunity to comment on here in a conversation between Bevil and Indiana, i.e., the subject of Italian opera. After discussing the operas Crispo and Grisolda, Indiana remarks:

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42. Ibid., p. 335.

...Though in the main, all the pleasure the best opera gives us is but mere sensation. Methinks it's a pity the mind can't have a little more share in the entertainment. The music's certainly fine, but in my thoughts, there's none of your composers come up to old Shakespeare and Otway.<sup>43</sup>

The plot of The Conscious Lovers was borrowed rather loosely from Terence's Andria, as Steele acknowledged in his preface. The hero, Bevil, falls in love with an unknown girl named Indiana, whom he will not marry without his father's consent, nor will his own sense of decency allow him to betray the girl. His father, however, is arranging a marriage between him and Mr. Sealand's daughter Lucinda. The play ends rather artificially with the discovery that Indiana is also the daughter of Mr. Sealand by a previous marriage, which enables Bevil to marry her with his father's blessing.

Here, indeed, is the hero that Steele had been recommending in his essays, for not only do Bevil's good qualities shine through his many pious speeches, but they are attested to by the speeches of others in the play. His father says of him, "...his carriage is so easy to all with whom he converses, that he is never assuming, never prefers himself to others, nor ever is guilty of that rough sincerity which a man is not called to, and certainly disoblige most of his acquaintance."<sup>44</sup> And Indiana declares, "I know his virtue, I know

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43. Ibid., p. 308.

44. Ibid., p. 277.

his filial piety...; his actions are the result of thinking, and he has sense enough to make even virtue fashionable."<sup>45</sup>

The servant Humphry praises father and son both in their presence and alone. To Sir John Bevil he says, "You have ever acted like a good and generous father, and he like an obedient and grateful son,"<sup>46</sup> and after Bevil, Senior, has left him he declares their only fault to be "their fear of giving each other pain."<sup>47</sup>

As in his other plays, Steele sums up the moral of the comedy in the last speech, spoken by Bevil, Senior:

Now, ladies and gentlemen, you have set the world a fair example: your happiness is owing to your constancy and merit; and the several difficulties you have struggled with evidently show--

Whate'er the generous mind itself denies,  
The secret care of Providence supplies.<sup>48</sup>

Again in this play, as in the fifth act of The Lying Lover, the appeal is to compassion, and tears are substituted for laughter. Steele sees fit to defend this as he had done also in the earlier play, and in the preface to The Conscious Lovers he writes:

But this incident [the evasion of the duel], and the case of the father and daughter, are esteemed by some people no subjects of comedy; but I cannot be of their mind, for anything that has its foundation in happiness and success must be allowed to be the object

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45. Ibid., p. 304.

46. Ibid., pp. 276-7.

47. Ibid., p. 279.

48. Ibid., p. 359.

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 delight, which is the case of this young lady. I must, therefore, contend that the tears which were shed on that occasion flowed from reason and good sense, and that men ought not to be laughed at for weeping till we are come to a more clear notion of what is to be imputed to the hardness of the head and the softness of the heart.<sup>49</sup>

"I hope," Steele states also in his preface, "that it may have some effect upon the Goths and Vandals that frequent the theatres, or a more polite audience supply their absence."<sup>50</sup> Although, in the words of Hazlitt, The Conscious Lovers is one of "those do-me-good, lack-a-daisical, whining, make-believe comedies" which are "enough to set one to sleep, and where the author tries in vain to be merry and wise in the same breath,"<sup>51</sup> the fact that it was more successful than his earlier plays would seem to indicate that this "more polite audience" which Steele desired must have found its way into the theater during this twenty-year period.

Defoe, who was not at all times an admirer of Steele, defends him in the instance of this play. In Mist's Weekly Journal he presents a mock trial in which Apollo, after having Shakespeare read The Conscious Lovers in court, makes his award in Steele's favor, to the dismay of the "Criticks," for "discountenancing Immorality on the Stage, thro' the whole

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49. Ibid., p. 270.

50. Ibid.

51. Bateson, op. cit., p. 45.

Current of his Writings."<sup>52</sup>

This indeed was the proper note for Steele to end his career as a dramatist on, two other plays which he had started, The Gentlemen and The School of Action, being left in fragmentary form. For in The Conscious Lovers, Steele had not only written a comedy in which the dialogue, characters, and plot were above reproach, but he also had succeeded in making his audience like it. Although Steele was enough of a wit himself to recognize the satire, I am sure he was not displeased that Henry Fielding had his Parson Adams in Joseph Andrews say that he had "never heard of any plays fit for a Christian to read, but Cato and The Conscious Lovers" and that "in the latter there are some things almost solemn enough for a sermon."<sup>53</sup>

"It is one of the most unaccountable things in our age," wrote Jeremy Collier, "that the lewdness of our theatre should be so much complained of and so little redressed."<sup>54</sup> Steele, however, certainly made an honest effort to "redress" the faults that he found in the theater in his day, and it is sufficiently evident that in his own plays he was true to his principles as laid down in the periodical essays. He

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52. Moore, "Gildon's Attack on Steele and Defoe in the Battle of the Authors," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXVI (June, 1951), 535.

53. Fielding, Adventures of Joseph Andrews, Book III, Chapter XI, pp. 305-6.

54. Shawcross, loc. cit., p. 590.

was meticulous in avoiding anything that might be interpreted as immodest, as is illustrated by his eagerness to change a line in one of his plays if there were any question about its being proper; in each of his comedies there can be found several morals which he doubtless thought would "raise very proper incitements to good behaviour"<sup>55</sup> among the members of his audience; he saw to it that by the end of each play virtue had been rewarded and vice punished; and although he could not personally remove Italian opera and tumblers and acrobats from the stage, he continued his attack on these forms of entertainment in the prefaces and epilogues to his plays, and sometimes within the plays themselves through the speeches of his characters.

"The comedies of Steele," wrote Hazlitt, "were the first that were written expressly with a view not to imitate the manners but to reform the morals of the age."<sup>56</sup> And another writer sums up Steele's contribution to the reformation of the stage as follows:

At least from the time of the performance of The Lying Lover to that of The Conscious Lovers, Steele kept up a constant propaganda in favor of the reformed stage by writing plays which illustrated what he demanded and by publishing in his periodicals little articles in which he praised or blamed current dramatic works in accordance with his principles, and unobtrusively laid down and defended the theoretical basis of sentimental comedy....Though he did not initiate either the moral movement or the idea of sentimentality,

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55. Tatler No. 3.

56. Kronenberger, Kings and Desperate Men, p. 109.

yet his contemporaries as well as subsequent generations were accustomed to look at him as the center of influence... According to Gay, he was the first to show that 'anything witty could be said in praise of the marriage state,' or that 'devotion or virtue were anywhere necessary--to the character of a fine gentleman.'<sup>57</sup>

Addison's attempts at dramatic writing were more diversified than Steele's, for he wrote an opera, then a tragedy, and finally a comedy.

His opera Rosamond opened on April 2, 1706, some five years before his criticism of Italian opera appeared in The Spectator. It will be remembered that in these essays Addison was quite profuse in his condemnation of an audience being willing to sit through a performance of an opera when they could not understand a word spoken by the players. Needless to say, Addison's opera was written in English.

Mr. Tickell, in a verse written "to the author of Rosamond," also attacks Italian opera and praises Addison's improvement of it:

The opera first Italian masters taught,  
 Enriched with songs, but innocent of thought.  
 Britannia's learned theatre disdains  
 Melodious trifles, and enervate strains;  
 And blushes on her injured stage to see  
 Nonsense well-tuned, and sweet stupidity.  
 No charms are wanting to thy artful song,  
 Soft as Corelli, but as Virgil strong.  
 From words so sweet new grace the notes receive,  
 And music borrows help she used to give.  
 Thy style hath matched what ancient Romans knew,  
 Thy flowing numbers far excel the new;  
 Their cadence in such each sound conveyed,

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57. Krutch, op. cit., pp. 235-6.



That height of thought may seem superfluous aid;  
 Yet in such charms the noble thoughts abound,  
 That needless seem the sweets of easy sound.<sup>58</sup>

The "noble thoughts" which Tickell refers to here probably are the words in praise of marriage which Addison has King Henry utter in the closing song of the opera. Henry, who has deserted his queen for the younger Rosamond, and certainly has not shown any affection or regard for his wife, is reconciled to parting with his new love only after learning that Queen Elinor has sent her off to a convent, and suddenly acclaims the joys of the married state:

Who to forbidden joys would rove,  
 That knows the sweets of virtuous love?  
 Hymen, thou source of chaste delights,  
 Cheerful days, and blissful nights,  
 Thou dost untainted joys dispense,  
 And pleasure join with innocence:  
 Thy raptures last, and are sincere  
 From future grief and present fear.<sup>59</sup>

Tickell also reports in the verses referred to previously that Addison used Virgil as his source in Rosamond, which calls to mind that in his criticism of Rinaldo in Spectator No. 5 Addison made the statement that "one verse in Virgil is worth all the clinquant or tinsel of Tasso," the opera Rinaldo having been based on Tasso's Jerusalem Delivered.

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58. Addison, Rosamond, from The Works of the Right Honorable Joseph Addison, collected and edited by Henry G. Bohn, p. 55. All subsequent quotations from Addison's plays will be from this edition.

59. Ibid., p. 81.

Addison's first attempt at dramatic writing ended in failure, the opera being withdrawn after two or three presentations, because, as Dr. Johnson reports, when it was exhibited on the stage it was "either hissed or neglected,"<sup>60</sup> although Macaulay reports that it succeeded in print.<sup>61</sup> The reason generally given for its failure on the stage is "its abominable Musick" written by Thomas Clayton which "mounted the Stage, on purpose to frighten all England."<sup>62</sup>

Addison's tragedy Cato, however, fared better, enjoying greater success probably than any other play of the period. It tells the story of the downfall of the last of the great democratic leaders in Rome against the advancing tyranny and dictatorship of the Caesars. Although the setting was Utica during the first century, B. C., a play exciting sympathy for old Roman liberty was sure of attention; and the situation that England found itself in at the time did much toward making the play a success. Dr. Johnson said that "the Whigs applauded every line in which liberty was mentioned, as a satire on the Tories; and the Tories echoed every clap, to shew that the satire was unfelt."<sup>63</sup> The timeliness of the play, then, together with Addison's fame, insured its popularity at the time it appeared.

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60. Arnold, op. cit., p. 271.

61. Thurber, op. cit., p. 252.

62. Nicoll, op. cit., p. 228.

63. Arnold, op. cit., p. 279.

Addison had started writing on Cato as early as 1703, but he had put it aside until some of his friends, among them Steele, attempted to persuade him to complete it. As Dr. Johnson reports:

To resume his work he seemed perversely and unaccountably unwilling; and by a request, which perhaps he wished to be denied, desired Mr. Hughes to add a fifth act. Hughes supposed him serious; and, undertaking the supplement, brought in a few days some scenes for his examination; but he had in the mean time gone to work himself, and produced half an act, which he afterwards completed, but with brevity irregularly disproportionate to the foregoing parts; like a task performed with reluctance, and hurried to its conclusion.<sup>64</sup>

Cato, which was praised by Voltaire as the first regular English tragedy,<sup>65</sup> was performed in London in 1713 and published that same year without a dedication, because, as Tickell reports, "The author received a message, that the queen would be pleased to have it dedicated to her; but as he had designed that compliment elsewhere, he found himself obliged by his duty on the one side, and his honour on the other, to send it into the world without any dedication."<sup>66</sup>

In Pope's prologue to the play he criticizes other forms of drama that had been occupying the stage in recent years, among them Italian opera and French plays:

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64. Ibid., p. 278.

65. Tatlock and Martin, Representative English Plays, p. 543.

66. Bohn, The Works of the Right Honorable Joseph Addison, I, ix.

Our scene precariously subsists too long  
 On French translation, and Italian song:  
 Dare to have sense yourselves; assert the stage,  
 Be justly warmed with your own native rage,  
 Such plays alone should please a British ear,  
 As Cato's self had not disdained to hear.<sup>67</sup>

And Thomas Tickell, in one of the letters to the author which was attached to the play when it was published, directs critical remarks also toward other tragedies:

Too long hath love engrossed Britannia's stage,  
 And sunk to softness all our tragic rage;  
 By that alone did empires fall or rise  
 And fate depended on a fair one's eyes:  
 The sweet infection, mixt with dangerous art,  
 Debased our manhood, while it soothed the heart.  
 You scorn to raise a grief thyself must blame,  
 Nor from our weakness steal a vulgar fame:  
 A patriot's fall may justly melt the mind,<sup>68</sup>  
 And tears flow nobly, shed for all mankind.

Addison's attempt to improve the age in which he lived is praised in another of these letters, this one by Eusden:

'Tis nobly done thus to enrich the stage,  
 And raise the thoughts of a degenerate age;  
 To show how endless joys from freedom spring,  
 How life in bondage is a worthless thing.  
 The inborn greatness of your soul we view,  
 You tread the paths frequented by the few,  
 With so much strength you write, and so much ease,  
 Virtue, and sense! how durst you hope to please?

The chastest virgin needs no blushes fear,  
 The learn'd themselves not uninstructed hear.  
 The libertine, in pleasures used to roll,  
 And idly sport with an immortal soul,  
 Here comes, and by the virtuous heathen taught,  
 Turns pale, and trembles at the dreadful thought.<sup>69</sup>

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67. Cato, p. 171.

68. Ibid., p. 166.

69. Ibid., pp. 164-5.

The duty of the poet in this direction is attested to by Ambrose Philips in a letter:

The mind to virtue is by verse subdued;  
And the true poet is a public good.<sup>70</sup>

and by Pope in the prologue:

To wake the soul by tender strokes of art,  
To raise the genius and to mend the heart,  
To make mankind in conscious virtue bold,  
Live o'er each scene, and be what they behold;--  
For this the tragic muse first trod the stage,  
Commanding tears to stream through every age.<sup>71</sup>

The epilogue which was presented with the play was written by Dr. Garth in a comic vein, "according to the execrable taste fashionable after the Restoration."<sup>72</sup> It has been reported that Lady Mary Wortley Montague wrote an epilogue to the play with a more serious tone, but Addison apparently preferred Garth's offering, although the epilogue has been severely criticized as being out of keeping with the loftiness of the play.<sup>73</sup> It will be remembered that Eustace Budgell had defended the practice of attaching a gay epilogue to a serious drama in Spectator No. 341, in reference to the epilogue, probably written by Addison, for Ambrose Philips' The Distressed Mother.<sup>74</sup>

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70. Ibid., p. 170.

71. Ibid.

72. Courthope, Addison, p. 119.

73. Halsband, "Addison's Cato and Lady Mary Wortley Montague," Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXV (December, 1950), 1128.

74. Cf. pp. 61-62.

Since Addison did not complete Cato until 1713, this would make the final work on the play come after his comments on tragedy in The Spectator. The play follows so closely the ideals set down in these essays, that one wonders if he may not have used Cato as his model in these papers. The very subject he chose, i.e.,

A brave man struggling in the storms of fate,  
And greatly falling with a falling state!<sup>75</sup>

is one that had been recommended by him in his essays, for according to Spectator No. 39, the hero of a tragedy should be presented as falling in the service of his country.

In another paper, Spectator No. 30, he had expressed his preference for blank verse, although he said that it was permissible to end every act with several couplets. It is not surprising then to find that Cato is written in blank verse with each of the five acts ending in three couplets.

It will be remembered also that Addison had objected in these essays to the double plot in tragedy on the grounds that it diverted the audience from the main catastrophe; however, he approved of an underplot which would bear a near relation to the principal one. Such an underplot apparently he was attempting in the love affairs of Lucia and Portius and of Juga and Marcia. Lady Mary Wortley Montague, in a private criticism of the play, objects to the love plots

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75. Cato. p. 171.

because, as she sees it, they are "organically unrelated" to the "play's main action, the death of Cato."<sup>76</sup> Pope made the statement that the love scenes were added later to the original play, in compliance with the popular demand for a love theme in all drama; but this would hardly seem possible, for, as Dr. Johnson asks, if these scenes were eliminated "what would be left" to occupy the first four acts which had been written earlier?<sup>77</sup> Addison has been criticized more severely for the handling of this part of his play perhaps than for any other. As one writer comments on this:

...The language of emotion in poetry of course is not always necessarily that of emotion in real life; Romeo speaks not as a lover would, but as a romantic lover would if he could. But no lover would wish to speak as Addison's do.<sup>78</sup>

This comment certainly is just if one considers Marcia's responses to Juba in Act I, Scene 5. Juba remarks that at the sight of her he could forget Caesar, to which she answers:

I should be grieved, young prince, to think  
                   my presence  
 Unbent your thoughts, and slackened 'em to arms,  
 While, warm with slaughter, our victorious foe  
 Threatens aloud, and calls you to the field.

Ignoring this, Juba dares to wish that her thoughts might follow him to battle, and gets this impersonal assurance:

My prayers and wishes always shall attend  
 The friends of Rome, the glorious cause of virtue,  
 And men approved of by the gods and Cato.

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76. Halsband, loc. cit., p. 1125.

77. Arnold, op. cit., p. 280.

78. Tatlock, op. cit., p. 544.

And Juba is finally sent from her presence and off to battle with this reproof:

My father never, at a time like this,  
Would lay out his great soul in words, and waste  
Such precious moments.<sup>79</sup>

In the next scene, when Lucia chides Marcia for her severity to Juba, she too is rebuked by the daughter of Cato with:

How, Lucia! wouldst thou have me sink away  
In pleasing dreams, and lose myself in love,  
When every moment Cato's life's at stake?<sup>80</sup>

Just as Marcia is so obviously Cato's daughter, so is Portius Cato's son. Sempronius, who has previously referred to Portius as "that cold youth,"<sup>81</sup> recognizes this temperamental kinship, for in the second scene he comments, "How he apes his sire! Ambitiously sententious!" And Lucia in a conversation with Marcia (Act I, Scene 6) contrasts as lovers Portius and his brother Marcus:

O Portius, thou hast stolen away my soul!  
With what a graceful tenderness he loves!  
And breathes the softest, the sincerest vows!  
Complacency, and truth, and manly sweetness  
Dwell ever on his tongue, and smooth his thoughts.  
Marcus is over-warm, his fond complaints  
Have so much earnestness and passion in them,  
I hear him with a secret kind of horror,  
And tremble at his vehemence of temper.<sup>82</sup>

This contrast in the characters of the two brothers affords Addison ample opportunity to commend the classical ideal

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79. Cato, pp. 183-4.

80. Ibid., p. 184.

81. Ibid., p. 175.

82. Ibid., p. 185.



of restraint, in this case, regarding the passion of love. In the opening scene of the play Marcus is telling Portius of his love for Lucia, but his brother reminds him that this is no time for such thoughts when their country's liberty is in danger:

Now, Marcus, now, thy virtue's on the proof:  
Put forth thy utmost strength, work every nerve,  
And call up all thy father in thy soul:  
To quell the tyrant Love, and guard thy heart  
On this weak side, where most our nature fails,  
Would be a conquest worthy Cato's son.

He sets before Marcus the example of Juba, who loves their sister Marcia, but

The sense of honour and desire of fame  
Drive the big passion back into his heart.<sup>83</sup>

And again in the third act Portius approaches the same subject with his brother:

When love's well-timed 'tis not a fault to love;  
The strong, the brave, the virtuous, and the wise  
Sink in the soft captivity together.  
I would not urge thee to dismiss thy passion,  
(I know 'twere vain,) but to suppress its force,  
Till better times may make it look more graceful.<sup>84</sup>

Love is not the only passion that needs to be subjected to such restraints, however, for in the second act Cato reproves Sempronius for his eagerness to go into battle:

Let not a torrent of impetuous zeal  
Transport thee thus beyond the bounds of reason:  
True fortitude is seen in great exploits,  
That justice warrants, and that wisdom guides,  
All else is towering phrensy and distraction.

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83. Ibid., pp. 174-5.

84. Ibid., p. 201.

Then he makes an appeal for moderation after Lucius has recommended peaceful settlement of their differences with Caesar:

Let us appear nor rash nor diffident:  
Immoderate valour swells into a fault,  
And fear, admitted into public councils,  
Betrays like treason. Let us shun 'em both.<sup>85</sup>

Honor and virtue also come in for their share of praise, for Juba declares:

Better to die ten thousand thousand deaths,  
Than wound my honour.<sup>86</sup>

And when he is speaking of his love for Marcia, he says:

'Tis not a set of features, or complexion,  
The tincture of a skin, that I admire.  
Beauty soon grows familiar to the lover,  
Fades in his eye, and palls upon the sense.  
The virtuous Marcia towers above her sex:  
True, she is fair, (oh how divinely fair!)  
But still the lovely maid improves her charms  
With inward greatness, unaffected wisdom,  
And sanctity of manners.<sup>87</sup>

In the character of Cato Addison apparently intended to display all of the virtues and to present "a perfect image of what man should be."<sup>88</sup> Sempronius praises him in Act I,

Scene 2:

Not all the pomp and majesty of Rome  
Can raise her senate more than Cato's presence.  
His virtues render our assembly awful,  
They strike with something like religious fear,  
And make ev'n Caesar tremble at the head  
Of armies flushed with conquest;...<sup>89</sup>

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85. *Ibid.*, pp. 188-9.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

87. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

Juba adds his praises too:

...turn up thy eyes to Cato!  
 There may'st thou see to what a godlike height  
 The Roman virtues lift up mortal man.  
 While good, and just, and anxious for his friends,  
 He's still severely bent against himself;  
 Renouncing sleep, and rest, and food, and ease,  
 He strives with thirst and hunger, toil and heat:  
 And when his fortune sets before him all  
 The pomps and pleasures that his soul can wish,  
 His rigid virtue will accept of none.<sup>90</sup>

And Juba's sincere admiration for Cato probably is best illustrated in his simple statement:

...I'd rather have that man  
 Approve my deeds, than worlds for my admirers.<sup>91</sup>

Lucia, however, is not so profuse in her praise of the "great man," but rather stands in awe of him:

Alas! I tremble when I think on Cato,  
 In every view, in every thought I tremble!  
 Cato is stern, and awful as a god,  
 He knows not how to wink at human frailty,  
 Or pardon weakness that he never felt.

But Marcia immediately comes to his defense:

Though stern and awful to the foes of Rome,  
 He is all goodness, Lucia, always mild,  
 Compassionate, and gentle to his friends.  
 Fill'd with domestic tenderness, the best,  
 The kindest father! I have ever found him  
 Easy, and good, and bounteous to my wishes.<sup>92</sup>

Cato's devotion to his family could very easily be questioned on the basis of his unimpassioned acceptance of the death of his son Marcus were it not realized that Addison

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90. Ibid., p. 180.

91. Ibid., p. 198.

92. Ibid., p. 223.

was here again illustrating Cato's willingness to subjugate personal feelings to the welfare of his nation. For on viewing the body of his son he says:

Welcome, my son! here lay him down, my friends,  
 Full in my sight, that I may view at leisure  
 The bloody corse, and count those glorious wounds.  
 --How beautiful is death, when earned by virtue!  
 Who would not be that youth? what pity is it  
 That we can die but once to serve our country!  
 --Why sits this sadness on your brows, my friends?  
 I should have blushed if Cato's house had stood  
 Secure, and flourished in a civil war.  
 --Portius, behold thy brother, and remember  
 Thy life is not thy own, when Rome demands it.<sup>93</sup>

Addison adheres strictly in Cato to his ideas of poetic justice, as expressed in Spectator No. 40. He had admitted that the ancients wrote tragedies which ended happily, but Aristotle had recorded a preference for the unhappy ending, justifying this preference by his own statement that the "best of men may deserve punishment, but the worst of men cannot deserve happiness." In Cato the guilty and innocent do not meet alike with destruction, but the play ends in as complete satisfaction as is possible. The traitors, Sempronius and Syphax, and their followers meet their deserved harsh end; Cato's son, Marcus, meets death heroically and in so doing effects a happy ending to the love affair of Portius and Lucia; and Cato's death seems the only natural outcome of the situation, although Addison allows Cato a moment of misgiving,

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93. Ibid., p. 216.

probably in deference to the religious view of suicide. Cato's death occasions a statement of the theme of the play, spoken by Lucius:

From hence, let fierce contending nations know  
 What dire effects from civil discord flow.  
 'Tis this that shakes our country with alarms,  
 And gives up Rome a prey to Roman arms,  
 Produces fraud, and cruelty, and strife,  
 And robs the guilty world of Cato's life.<sup>94</sup>

Addison avoids "that dreadful butchering of one another, which is so frequent upon the English stage," in Steele's words,<sup>95</sup> by having Marcus' body brought on stage after he is dead, and by having Cato, still alive, brought back after he has fallen on his sword. Dennis ridicules this as overly cautious, saying:

'That he [Cato] should leave this hall upon the pretence of sleep, give himself the mortal wound in his bedchamber, and then be brought back into that hall to expire, purely to shew his good-breeding, and save his friends the trouble of coming up to his bedchamber; all this appears to me to be improbable, incredible, impossible.'<sup>96</sup>

His strict adherence to the unity of place also came in for criticism by the same writer:

Dennis has pointed out with considerable humour the consequences of his conscientious adherence to the unity of place, whereby every species of action in the play--love-making, conspiracy, debating, and fighting--is made to take place in the 'large hall in the governor's palace of Utica.'<sup>97</sup>

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94. Ibid., p. 226.

95. Tatler No. 134.

96. Arnold, op. cit., p. 312.

97. Courthope, op. cit., pp. 116-17.

Despite the many criticisms that were heaped on the tragedy, Cato was performed in London twenty times and published in eight editions in 1713, and according to Tickell, its fame "spread through Europe, and it has not only been translated, but acted in most of the languages of Christendom."<sup>98</sup>

In his Spectator papers Addison did not go into as thorough a discussion of comedy as he did of tragedy, nor did he discuss comedy as often or as fully as Steele. When he did mention the subject, however, he showed that he agreed with his friend as to the moral purpose of comedy. Ridicule, according to Addison in Spectator No. 249, should be used to laugh men out of vice and folly. And in No. 446 he mentioned several subjects which he considered to be improper ones for comedy, including incest, murder, cuckoldry, and the subjection of religion or religious persons to ridicule or scorn. He also agreed with Steele, in the same paper, that vice, if it were presented on the stage at all, should not be presented as "laudable or amiable," his reason being that an audience should arise from any dramatic production wiser and better than they had been when they entered the theater.

These ideals he attempted to display in his comedy, The Drummer; or The Haunted House, which was published anonymously

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<sup>98</sup>. Bohn, op. cit., I. ix.

in 1716. There is some uncertainty about the authorship of the play because it was first presented with the name of the author unknown, and it was not included in Tickell's edition of Addison's works.<sup>99</sup> However, Steele, in a letter to Congreve, seems certain that the play was the work of his friend, for he writes:

...I will put all my credit among men of wit for the truth of my averment, when I presume to say, that no one but Mr. Addison was in any other way the writer of the Drummer; at the same time I will allow, that he sent for me,...and told me that 'a gentleman then in the room had written a play that he was sure I would like, but it was to be a secret, and he knew I would take as much pains, since he recommended it, as I would for him.'<sup>100</sup>

And in this same letter Steele adds:

...Let me, then, confine myself a while to the following play, which I at first recommended to the stage, and carried to the press: no one who reads the preface which I published with it, will imagine I could be induced to say so much as I then did, had I not known the man I best loved had had a part in it, or had I believed that any other concerned had much more to do than as an amanuensis.

But, indeed, had I not known at the time of the transaction, concerning the acting on the stage and sale of the copy, I should, I think, have seen Mr. Addison in every page of it; for he was above all men in that talent we call humour.<sup>101</sup>

Also, further proof is offered by Theobald, who reported that Addison himself had told him that he had taken the character of Vellum, the steward, from Fletcher's Scornful Lady.<sup>102</sup>

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99. Courthope, op. cit., p. 142.

100. Bohn, op. cit., V, 153.

101. Ibid., V, 151.

102. Courthope, op. cit., p. 143.

Steele expresses his admiration for the play in his preface because of its "want of those studied similes and repartees, which we, who have writ before him, have thrown into our plays, to indulge and gain upon a false taste that has prevailed for many years in the British theatre."<sup>103</sup>

The Drummer is somewhat reminiscent of Steele's earlier play, The Tender Husband, insofar as both involve the trial of a wife's fidelity by a husband who is thought to be dead. In Addison's play, however, the wife is a much more admirable person than Mrs. Clerimont and is genuinely grieved by the loss of her husband, in spite of Vellum's remark that her grief lasted longer than any widow's he had ever known--"at least three days," and that she "could not forbear weeping when she saw company."<sup>104</sup> And Sir George Truman does not set out intentionally to deceive his wife, but only takes advantage of the circumstances to satisfy his doubts concerning her devotion after he returns home and learns that she has thought herself a widow for the past fourteen months.

Addison's intention to write a comedy devoid of the usual indecencies is probably expressed best in his epilogue, which was an attack on the taste of the age:

No court-intrigue, nor city cuckoldom,  
 No song, no dance, no music--but a drum--  
 No smutty thought in doubtful phrase express'd;

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103. The Drummer, p. 156.

104. Ibid., p. 172.



And, gentlemen, if so, pray where's the jest?  
 When we would raise your mirth, you hardly know  
 Whether, in strictness, you should laugh or no,  
 But turn upon the ladies in the pit,  
 And if they redden, you are sure 'tis wit.

He draws a widow, who of blameless carriage,  
 True to her jointure, hates a second marriage;

Too long has marriage, in this tasteless age,  
 With ill-bred raillery supplied the stage;

For should th' examples of his play prevail,  
 No man need blush, though true to marriage-vows,  
 Nor be a jest, though he should love his spouse.<sup>105</sup>

"This tasteless age," however, received The Drummer coldly when it was presented anonymously at Drury Lane in 1716, and was criticized for its reception of the play by Steele in the preface which he attached to it in 1722. He writes:

The Drummer made no great figure on the stage, though exquisitely well acted; but when I observe this, I say a much harder thing of the stage than of the comedy. When I say the stage in this place, I am understood to mean in general the present taste of theatrical representations, where nothing that is not violent, and, as I may say, grossly delightful, can come on without hazard of being condemned, or slighted.<sup>106</sup>

A later critic explains this reception by saying that "A play by a well-known author, if it had decidedly sentimental features, might succeed, but a drama by an unknown writer, presenting a wife faithful to a husband she supposes dead and a highly moralising hero, was almost bound to fail."<sup>107</sup> Addison, then, although true to his ideal of presenting a

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105. Ibid., p. 213.

106. Ibid., p. 152.

107. Nicoll, op. cit., p. 199.

"moral" performance, failed to present a successful one.

Addison, then, as well as Steele, followed the principles for drama as set down in his essays. He wrote an opera in English in which he praised marriage; he wrote a tragedy in blank verse with the kind of hero he considered proper and with virtuous characters who expounded the classical desire for moderation, poetic justice being administered according to the rules which he outlined in his essays; he wrote a comedy devoid of indecencies; and finally, as Steele did, he continued his attack on Italian opera in the prologues and letters attached to his plays.

Macaulay, although often obviously prejudiced in his discussion of Addison, gives a good summation of his contribution to the stage:

...It is true that...that age of outrageous profaneness and licentiousness which followed the Restoration had passed away. Jeremy Collier had shamed the theatres into something which, compared with the excesses of Etherege and Wycherley, might be called decency. Yet there still lingered in the public mind a pernicious notion that there was some connection between genius and profligacy, between the domestic virtues and the sullen formality of Puritans. That error it is the glory of Addison to have dispelled. He taught the nation that the faith and the morality of Hale and Tillotson might be found in company with wit more sparkling than the wit of Congreve, and with humor richer than the humor of Vanbrugh. So effectually, indeed, did he retort on vice the mockery which had recently been directed against virtue, that, since his time, the open violation of decency has always been considered among us as the mark of a fool.<sup>108</sup>

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108. Thurber, op. cit., p. 267.

And Macaulay's comment that Addison's humor is "that of a gentleman, in whom the quickest sense of the ridiculous is constantly tempered by good nature and good breeding"<sup>109</sup> calls to mind Steele's answer in the *Spectator* to the query as to the chief qualification of a playwright, i.e., "To be a very well-bred Man."<sup>110</sup>

It was inevitable, though regrettable, that comparisons of Addison and Steele would be made, and Steele, more often than Addison, was made to suffer by these comparisons. Lord Macaulay especially seemed desirous of belittling Steele's work in order to give even more praise to Addison's. This tendency has found its way even into recent writings, as is illustrated by the following comment by John Mason Brown:

Steele belongs to his age as surely as the best of Addison is ageless. Although he has his fine moments, Steele is a prig. His is the pulpit manner, the more out of place because it is employed in the coffee-house. His moralizing is as tiresome as his own drinking must have been. The breakfast food he supplies in his essays he takes pains to serve either in a prayerbook or a tear bottle....

Addison was a moralist but not in Steele's manner. Morality was the fashion of the day. The moralists of the age of Queen Anne represented a reaction from the license of the preceding age....

The contemplation of goodness makes Addison gay rather than lugubrious. He preaches by smiling rather than by pointing. He never raises his voice....He remains unruffled: the champion of reason as sweet as it is rare; the epitome of the urbane.<sup>111</sup>

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109. *Ibid.*, p. 266.

110. *Spectator* No. 314.

111. Brown, "Invitation to Learning," *Saturday Review of Literature*, XXVIII (March 31, 1945), 25.

Allusions to Steele's personal habits, such as Mr. Brown's reference to his drinking, seem to work their way almost automatically into such criticisms of his work. De-foe criticized Steele for "setting up as a Censor without reforming his own morals,"<sup>112</sup> and Malcolm Elwin goes even further in his criticism. After referring to Steele as the person "who sterilized the comic stage with a surfeit of sentiment,"<sup>113</sup> he accuses him of insincerity in his writings, saying that although he "professed an admiration for Collier, ...one cannot help feeling that he wrote most of his work for the stage with his tongue in his cheek, and it is ironical that a man with a reputation as a rake in his regular existence should desire to prove himself a 'Churchman' in his connection with the Church's pet aversion, the play-house."<sup>114</sup>

Neither Steele's nor Addison's sincerity of purpose can be proved or disproved here, but it does not seem likely that either of these writers would have been so consistent and so frequent in their demands for improvement of the stage had they not been genuinely interested in the matter; nor would they have written plays in which they inculcated these principles, even though they must have realized that they were

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112. Moore, loc. cit., pp. 535-6.

113. Elwin, The Playgoer's Handbook to Restoration Drama, p. 191.

114. Ibid., p. 202.

courting the disfavor of a large part of the audience, had they not felt that they were performing a much-needed service for the theater.

Nor can the relative merit of Addison's and Steele's theatrical criticism definitely be determined. That Steele exceeded Addison in quantity is obvious, for in The Tatler, The Spectator, and The Guardian Steele is credited with 75 of the papers containing references to the theater as compared to Addison's 32 papers. But these figures in themselves are misleading, for, as previously pointed out, Addison frequently devoted an entire essay to the discussion of one subject, whereas Steele more often divided his papers into several sections, usually in the form of letters, thus allowing for the discussion of more than one topic in an essay.

The two writers seemed to agree on most of the subjects which they discussed in their essays, the main divergence being in their approach. Addison's discussions were very often theoretical ones containing his criticisms of the written drama; whereas Steele preferred to consider the actual performance of a play. He admits this preference in his preface to The Conscious Lovers, in which he writes:

...It must be remembered, a play is to be seen, and is made to be represented with the advantage of action, nor can appear but with half the spirit without it. For the greatest effect of a play in reading is to

excite the reader to go to see it; and when he does so, it is then a play has the effect of example and precept.<sup>115</sup>

Both men, however, agreed that the ultimate purpose of the theater was to make a "polite and moral gentry,"<sup>116</sup> and in order to help the theater in its task, they not only contributed "polite and moral" plays to be presented on its stage, but they also proceeded to write "polite and moral" essays for the improvement of that form of entertainment which they "extremely liked."<sup>117</sup>

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115. The Conscious Lovers, p. 269.

116. Tatler No. 8.

117. Ibid., No. 182.

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