V. Demystifying the Construct of the Benevolent Man in Steele and Cumberland

This chapter argues to what extent the paradigm of the benevolent man becomes a means of assuaging cultural anxiety in some of the Sentimental Comedies of the eighteenth century. I have selected Sir Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* (1722) and Richard Cumberland's *The West Indian* (1771) to argue this point. The figure of the benevolent man was a stereotype, if not so much in the plays of Steele, but more predominantly in the Sentimental plays of Cumberland. Although from Steele to Cumberland is a considerable leap in terms of time, yet the fundamental spirit of England, and its preoccupation with sentimental morals remained the same. We are, to use Langford's expression, in the midst of "polite" and "commercial" people for whom benevolence, humanity, economic and imperial expansion, political, social, and sexual power-play -- all lay embedded and interconnected in a complex discursive matrix. To see the construct of the benevolent man as mediating the multifarious anxieties of a historical phase and functioning as a cohesive force is to view this sentimental icon as misleadingly monologic or single-voiced. If the construct tells us how an oligarchic society sustained the processes of hegemonic control, it also encourages us to see that the mechanisms of control were riven with contradictions and ambivalence. The benevolent, generous, and altruistic men in these two Sentimental plays consistently admit of difference (class, economic, sexual); they attempt to nullify difference by reconstructing themselves, and in the process expose the cultural anxieties that continually threaten to deconstruct the ideology underscoring the fictive constructions.
In Cibber's Sentimental plays we have seen a certain fluidity, slipperiness and uncertainty in the formation of gender icons. This is evident in Cibber's ambivalence towards the virtuous women, his sentimental men and the ridiculous fop, who at times appropriate more sensibly than the 'sensible' figures, the manifold uncertainties and hypocrisies of Cibber's dramatic world and the ludicrousness of applying a moral verdict to it. In the hands of Steele and Cumberland, however, the process of configuring masculinity and femininity takes a more definitively political form. In the two plays, namely *The Conscious Lovers* and *The West Indian*, I have tried to locate two different areas of cultural anxiety, and study how the dramatists have attempted to assuage them. Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* had been widely applauded for projecting on the stage a male paradigm as the pivot of social control. It has been pointed out that Steele's benevolent male was the mediator of aristocratic and bourgeois values. Without disagreeing with this view, I would analyze the difficulties inherent in Bevil's social disposition. As a member of the old landed gentry, Bevil to me is more anxious than self-assured about consolidating his cultural authority in the face of the challenge of an ascending new bourgeois order. Cumberland's *The West Indian* takes us to a fully commercialized society that suffers from the fear of a schism within itself, an anxiety over the consequence of commercial expansion and fragmentation as the outcome of capitalist economy,¹ and feels the need to adumbrate a notion of Englishness. The eventual acceptance of the benevolent West-Indian Belcour as a worthy member of the English society is a way of reinforcing a sense of unity between the Englishmen in their homeland and the colonials abroad. The play's concern with the education and reformation of Belcour is intimately related to the management and control of wealth.
The Glorious Revolution marks a historical point that saw the rise of the middle-class and the growth of bourgeois economy. England's military and commercial exploits started from the last decade of the seventeenth century, and after 1689 they were extended beyond the European boundaries. William's military strategies led to the consolidation of Britain's boundaries; the Nine Years War (1688-97) and the War of the Spanish Succession (1702-13) brought Britain's commercial ambition to the fore. The next forty years saw the predominance of Great Britain as a colonial power. In the feudal period 'economy' meant husbandry without any financial suggestion (Thompson, *Models of Value* 42). But with the Financial Revolution of the 1690s, which led to the establishment of the Bank of England, the credit system, and the remaking of the currency, 'economy' came to be related with money and a system of exchange. Thompson notes: "[...] political economy consists of a language or discourse of and about money, about making money, accumulating money, improving money, but it is also about the form of money and its nature, how to direct or control money, how to make money work smoothly, efficiently and profitably" (*Models of Value* 43).

The most significant influence of commerce on English society was the subtle ways in which social values and the perception of the self began to change. The rise of the mercantile mores led to a representation of the human self, which depended on the operation of commerce and exchange. The growth of the culture of politeness in eighteenth century Britain inculcated the imperatives of the market. Langford discusses
how 'politeness' in its varied connotations became a political tool for an emergent middle-class for obtaining social recognition and respectability:

In a sense politeness was a logical consequence of commerce. [...] [A] society in which the most vigorous and growing element was a commercial middle class, involved both in production and consumption, required a more sophisticated means of regulating manners. Politeness conveyed upper-class gentility, enlightenment and sociability to a much wider elite whose only qualification was money, but who were glad to spend it on acquiring the status of gentleman. In theory politeness comprehended, even began with, morals; but in practice it was as much a question of material acquisitions and urbane manners. It both permitted and controlled a relatively open competition for power, influence, jobs, wives, and markets. (4-5)

In the face of burgeoning commercial and economic growth, an erosion of traditional values, faiths and morals was always feared. Despite its prosperous growth the eighteenth century suffered from the fear of nemesis as the consequence of commerce. In a competitive world every moment in the life of the nation was an ordeal. Although the Glorious Revolution of 1688 was hailed as a divine blessing, the age inherited certain features dangerous enough to wreck its illusion of stability – political conflict, religious intolerance, libertinism, and degeneration of manners and morals. Langford pertinently observes:

The competition and change so characteristic of the mid-eighteenth century might have been expected to make these contentions worse. They also put a still greater premium on regulating the consequent tensions, securing the highest possible
degree of consensus, and generally averting the chronic divisions which had threatened the stability of post-Revolution in England. To this extent the politics of the period [...], were the politics of politeness, the pursuit of harmony within a propertied society. (5)

The construction of the paradigm of the benevolent man remained central to this politics of politeness. Benevolence, deemed a cohesive force between men and women differentiated by status, class, and sex, emerged as an essential quality of the polite citizen. Pocock argues that notions of refinement and politeness became essential elements in the ideology of eighteenth century commerce (Virtue, Commerce115).

In a society divided on the basis of class-difference the emergence of the sentimental virtue of benevolence as an effective male attribute was highly significant, and a potent influence in the area was the Earl of Shaftesbury, who turned the discourses on virtue and morality from the traditional religious premise to a secular context, relating virtue to privilege and power. Beginning with a definition of virtue as a universal, ahistorical concept, as a reflection of the wisdom of the Almighty, Shaftesbury turns to the notion of civic virtue. His philosophy reveals an essentially aristocratic and patriarchal bias. Shaftesbury describes a ‘gentleman’ thus: By Gentlemen of Fashion, I understand those to whom a natural good Genius, or the Force of good Education, has given a Sense of what is naturally graceful and becoming” (Characteristicks, Treatise II, 135). Such men are indispensable parts of civil society, which is characterized by fellow feeling and soothing human actions: “A Man of thorow Good-Breeding, whatever else he be, is incapable of doing a rude or brutal Action” (Characteristicks, Treatise II, 129). It is interesting to note how such lofty notions of civility, equality, liberty are inculcated by
Shaftesbury within an essentially aristocratic and paternalistic discourse of power and privilege. I quote Robert Markley for his illuminating remark:

For Shaftesbury, civility, humanity, and common rights can be realized only in a harmonious, benevolent -- that is, hierarchical -- society. His concepts of "Liberty" and "freedom" depend on a strong aristocracy capable of checking the threats posed, on the one hand, by power-hungry monarchs, high Church clergymen, high Tory Jacobins, and Catholics; and, on the other, by the leveling tendencies of those descendants of seventeenth-century radicals for whom challenges to religious and political orthodoxies also mean challenges to hereditary privilege and the established structures of political and economic power. ("Sentimentality as Performance" 215)

Consequently, in the interest of maintaining the status quo, Shaftesbury opines that since 'virtue' or 'merit' is allowed to man only, if man cannot live compatibly with human society and civil life, then the character of virtue will be forfeited (An Inquiry 16, 20).

The reformulation of the authority of the new male paradigm as the centre of socio-cultural control is possible through the formation of a vibrant discourse. The stage undoubtedly is a vital site of discourse-formation. The cultural message decoded from Addison's Cato is the projection of a virtue that destroys all threats and opposition against the historical reality of war and the social reality of the bourgeois threat. The Prologue states the playwright's intention:

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 thro' every age; (Works 260)

There is clear indication that the tragedy of Cato should inspire emulation and promote virtue amidst the audience. The extension of this in the smaller domestic sphere is the conceptualization of a male identity, which should stand resplendent in the glory of his unmediated power and authority. Sir Richard Steele's *The Conscious Lovers* makes a conscious effort to construct such an authoritative figure.

In the latter half of the century the Shaftesburian philosophy of benevolence largely inspired Francis Hutcheson and Adam Smith who felt the dire cultural need to answer Hobbes and Mandeville. Envisaging moral faculties as the basis of cosmic harmony, Smith evolves a theory that sees a manifestation of this harmony in the practice of social passions: "Generosity, humanity, kindness, compassion, mutual friendship and esteem, all the social and benevolent affections [...]" (Theory 38). Smith, much in tune with the materialistic inclinations of his day, associates virtue with earthly prosperity: "Magnanimity, generosity, and justice, command so high a degree of admiration, that we desire to see them crowned with wealth, and power, and honours of every kind, the natural consequences of prudence, industry, and application; qualities with which those virtues are not inseparably connected" (Theory 167). He also regards virtues founded on humanity to be the characteristic of civilized nations (Theory, 204), and of the new 'economic' man upon whose prowess was based the wealth of the nation. With the decline of the classical notion of male prowess a new idea of masculine potency was attached to the economic man in the eighteenth century. He was now traversing the globe,
and fighting with warring natives for the progress of his precious civilization. Perhaps, one of the best glorifications of the economic man comes from Thorowgood in Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731):

 [...] how honest Merchants, as such, / may sometimes contribute to the Safety of their / Country, as they do at all times to its Happiness; / that if hereafter you should be tempted to any / Action that has the Appearance of Vice or Meanness / in it, upon reflecting on the Dignity of our / Profession, you may with honest Scorn reject whatever / is unworthy of it. / (1.1.2)

The exemplary 'economic' man is driven by interest and not passion, his self-interest being deemed conducive to the promotion of social order, and national prosperity.

The image of the economic man was, nevertheless, a vulnerable construct. He was a rather "effeminate being, still wrestling with his own passions and hysterias and with interior and exterior forces let loose by his fantasies and appetites, and symbolized by such archetypically female goddesses of disorder as Fortune, Luxury, and most recently Credit herself' (Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce* 114). Adam Smith writes in *The Wealth of Nations*:

The man who employs his capital in land has it more under his view and command, and his fortune is much less liable to accidents than that of the trader, who is obliged frequently to commit it, not only to the winds and the waves, but to the more uncertain elements of human folly and injustice, by giving great credits in distant countries to men with whose character and situation he can seldom be thoroughly acquainted. (338)
If luxury was deemed as subjecting the Englishman to a degeneration of his masculinity, the commonest example was the decline of Rome (Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce* 114). Suvir Kaul in his illuminating discussion of eighteenth century poetry celebrating the idea of 'nation,' shows how the metaphor of ruin pursued several poets of the age, and brings out the pervasive anxiety over the outcome of political and commercial expansion. A means of combating such a widespread fear of sudden reversal in the minds of the people was to uphold a concept of national virtue and an almost beatific picture of a glorious nation. The Prologue to Cumberland's *The Jew* can be cited as an apt example of such an idealized construction of a nation:

*Our Comic Bard, before whose roving eye*

*Kingdoms and States in magic vision lie,*

*Sweeps o'er the map, and with a partial smile*

*Fixes at length on his beloved Isle,*

*He views her deck'd in all her natural charms,*

*And wrapt in peace, amidst the din of arms.*

Another poem "Rule, Britannia!"(1740) bears testimony to the intense patriotic fervour with which the commercial supremacy of the English nation was celebrated:

*When Britain first, at Heaven's command,*

*Arose from out the azure main,*

*This was the charter of the land,*

*And guardian angels sung this strain --*

*"Rule, Britannia, rule the waves; Britons never will be slaves." (qtd. in Kaul 2)
Despite the celebratory tone of the poem, Kaul perceptively discusses the historical tensions embedded in the couplet, which acts as a refrain in the poem: “The refrain both represses or disavows that knowledge, while serving as a reminder that, in the political and moral economy of mid-eighteenth-century Britain, the obverse of national power is the condition of the slaves” (2). This knowledge threatens to destabilize the “slogan of commercial and imperial dominance” (3).

Against a persistent distrust towards economic growth, a fear of decline and fall, is posited the ideal concept of a mercantilist education that would ensure order, stability, and prosperity of the nation. For literary evidence I turn again to *The London Merchant*:

THOROWGOOD: Methinks I wou'd not have you only learn / the Method of Merchandize, and practise / it hereafter, merely as a Means of getting / Wealth.---'Twill be well worth your Pains to study / it as a Science.—See how it is founded in Reason, / and the Nature of Things.—How it has promoted / Humanity, as it has opened and yet keeps up an / Intercourse between Nations, far remote from one / another in Situation, Customs and Religion; promoting / Arts, Industry, Peace and Plenty; by mutual / Benefits diffusing mutual Love from Pole to / Pole./

TRUEMAN: Something of this I have consider'd, and / hope, by your Assistance, to extend my Thoughts / much farther.—I have observ'd those Countries, / where Trade is promoted and encouraged, do not / make Discoveries to destroy, but to improve Mankind, / ---by Love and Friendship, to tame the fierce, / and polish the most savage,---to teach them the / Advantages of honest Traffick,---by taking from / them, with their own Consent, their
useless Superfluities, / and giving them, in Return, what, from / their 
Ignorance in manual Arts, their Situation, or / some other Accident they 
stand in need of./

THOROWGOOD: 'Tis justly observ'd:—The populous / East, luxuriant, abounds 
with glittering Gems, / bright Pearls, aromatick Spices, and Health-
restoring / Drugs: The late found Western World glows / with unnumber'd 
Veins of Gold and Silver Ore.— / On every Climate, and on every 
Country, Heaven / has bestowed some good peculiar to it self.—It is / the 
industrious Merchant's Business to collect the / various Blessings of each 
Soil and Climate, and, / with the Product of the whole, to enrich his native 
/ Country. (3.1.28-9)

While economic individualism was seen as leading to the dissolution of humanity and social bondages, the quoted conversation glorifies the “method of merchandise” as a specialized branch of knowledge, which is aimed at promoting not only the peace and prosperity of one’s own nation, but also humanity and love through fervent intercourse between various countries. A sanitized picture of the trading nation suppresses the atrocities of plunder by legitimizing its right to tame and control the barbarians, and make them hand over their “useless superfluities.” And the best proof of the merchants’ patriotism is the way he collects the bounties of the whole world to adorn his native land with riches. The quoted exchange between two merchants evinces certain important ideas: faith in the superiority of the trading country to handle the wealth of the world; a need to assuage the reality of exploitation and ravage by upholding commerce as a means
of promoting universal love and benevolence; and finally the projection of the merchant as the most worthy son of the nation.

Running counter to the fragmentation of the capitalist economy was the culture of sensibility, a culture that especially focused on humanitarian reforms, and on the power of benevolence to strengthen the slackening social ties. As Terry Eagleton has rightly pointed out that "the ultimate binding force of the bourgeois social order" were "habits, pieties, sentiments and affections"(The Ideology 22). The vices and human suffering addressed by the humanitarian reformers of the late eighteenth century "could be laid at the door of that masculine world against which the culture [of sensibility] defined itself and which its advocates wished to enter and change"(Barker-Benfield 224). The victimization addressed by the humanitarian reformers came to include, apart from the various instances of cruelty, the economic exploitation of the poor and the slaves; and made the emphasis on male manners stronger. By the 1770s the connotation of 'sentimentality' changed notably: it did not merely mean the innate goodness of the human heart, but also an instinctive responsiveness to human suffering, and a gesture of benevolence towards the distressed. The sentimentalists' emphasis on male benevolence as a force of social cohesion was, however, problematic, as a spontaneous inclination to benevolent actions might render a man incapable for the business of the world. The best examples of such an extreme case is Mackenzie's Harley, and on a much lesser degree, Cumberland's famous West-Indian, who had to be taught the prudent management of wealth without making him sacrifice his generosity. Against a historical backdrop of change, unrest, and feared social disintegration, the construct of the benevolent man assumes a highly political function of reinforcing hegemonic control. The political
content of Steele’s drama is to communicate through Bevil Junior a notion of Englishness that stands indomitable before all opposition. On the level of social and sexual politics, Bevil signifies a notion of masculinity that holds the hierarchical social structure from disintegration, and asserts his natural superiority over his social and sexual subordinates. Cumberland’s dramatic world is much more variegated than Steele’s, and his benevolent men are unconventional figures. Their representations bring out the complex nature of the cultural politics reflected in the plays, which sing the glory of the English nation and try to adumbrate a concept of national virtue as a proof of British superiority.

II

In Steele it is not difficult to see a link between his political alliance with the Whig faction and his literary undertakings as a social reformer. In The Crisis he vindicates the glorious revolution as a providential favour: “We should have been chained down in this abject Condition in the Reign of the late King James, had not God Almighty in Mercy given us the late happy Revolution, by that glorious Instrument of his Providence the great and memorable King WILLIAM” (Steele, “The Crisis” 138). A dire need to reshape society for the optimum utilization of this newly acquired political stability was felt and Steele dreamt of an ideal Christian commonwealth. In “The Christian Hero” he enumerates the qualities of Christ and St. Paul, and then focuses on the attributes the ideal men of his day ought to embody:

We must from this Place descend from the bright Incentives of their Actions to consider Lower Life, and talk of Motives which are common to all Men, and
which are the Impulses of the ordinary World, as well as of Captains, Heroes, Worthies, Lawgivers, and Saints. Which when we have perform'd, if it shall appear, that those Motives are best us'd and improv'd, when join'd with Religion; we may rest assur'd, that it is a Stable, Sober, and Practical, as well as Generous, Exalted and Heroick, Position, that True Greatness of Mind is to be maintain'd only by Christian Principles. (Steele, "The Christian Hero" 49)

This is how Steele links up the spiritual and the secular and finally in locating all the Christian virtues in the very person of King William, he projects political revolution as a religious triumph and, by extension, a cultural revolution. The defeat of Jacobitism and Popish tyranny, and their eventual overthrow by the Williamite regime is presented as a religious victory – the overthrow of a phase of false religious adherence by the revival of the noble tenets of Christianity. "The Christian Hero" states:

All the Circumstances of the Illustrious Life of our Prince seem to have Conspir'd to make him the Check and Bridle of Tyranny, for his Mind has been strengthen'd and confirm'd by one continued Struggle, and Heav'n has Educated him by Adversity to a quick Sense of the Distresses and Miseries of Mankind, which he was born to Redress: In just Scorn of the trivial Glories and light Ostentations of Power, that Glorious Instrument of Providence, moves like that, in a steddy, calm and silent Course [...], which renders him, if not in a Political, yet in a Moral, a Philosophick, an Heroick, and a Christian Sense, an absolute Monarch [...].

(60-1)

Steele thus sees the spiritual and the moral inextricably woven in the proper running of the nation. In the absence of this healthy combination people ought to "degenerate into
Atheism, Prophaneness, Debauchery, and all manner of Vice, and hasten with speed to their own Ruin [...]" (Steele, "The Englishman No. 57" 193). In keeping with this reformist zeal, Steele considers writing a noble vocation, and takes pride for being the "Author of an instructive Way of representing the Manners of Men, and describing Vices and Virtues in a Stile that might fall in with their ordinary Entertainments [...]" ("The Englishman" 188).

The concept of Steele's ideal Christian society is contingent upon the creation of a hero. The figure of William is the secularized version of the Christian hero who mediates the gap between the social, the political, the economic, and the moral. Steele thus articulates a new locus of order, resolving the inter-cultural tension within the framework of urban British life. But within the urban society there is an intra-cultural tension over negotiating the ideal on the one hand and the empirical social reality on the other. Our playwright attempts a reconciliation of the two by constructing a male paradigm for the stage. The influence of the Shaftesburian ideology underlies conspicuously the conceptualization of the paradigmatic Bevil Junior. However, what emerges from the cracks and fissures of an apparently monologic discourse is the consistent antagonism between the moral and the secular, the aristocratic and the commercial, which the construct of the exemplary hero tries to suppress. This is nowhere so clearly evident than in the delineation of Bevil Junior in The Conscious Lovers. It has already been recognized that Steele was greatly enthusiastic about setting up fresh gender paradigms. As J.H. Smith has said: "A prime force in the movement to replace the old ideals for hero and heroine with new ones was Richard Steele. Steele of course did not invent the man
and woman of sense or the devices by which rake and coquette were to be repressed, but he did much to get them established" (Smith, *The Gay Couple* 202).

*The Conscious Lovers* attracted memorable public attention because of effective prior advertisement. What was counted the most notable worth of Steele’s play is the conception of an ideal gentleman. As the *Freeholder’s Journal* tells us: “The Representation of a Gentleman (a Character that comprehends all Religious as well as Moral Virtues) is confessedly the laboured Design of the Poet in this Play […]” (*Freeholder’s Journal* 169). The Character of Bevil was highly applauded in *An Epistle to Sir Richard Steele*: “It is plain, Sir, you have taken the best Method to move the Audience to the suppression of Vice by presenting ’em with such a Worthy Noble Character as Bevil, a Man full of Mercy, Beneficence, Affability, Mildness, and Compassion” (*Victor* 172). Steele himself notes in the Preface to the play: “[...] I was very hardly persuaded to throw away Terence’s celebrated Funeral, and take only the bare Authority of the young Man’s Character, and how I have work’d it into an Englishman […]” (*Steele, The Plays* 300-1). I would try to show how in constructing the Englishman’s identity Steele makes an effective combination of the spiritual and the material, and the only means of reconciling these opposed elements was a material manifestation of the essentially religious virtues.

However, the difficulties underlying the configuration of the man upon Christian parameters in the secular world has been highlighted by both Frank Ellis and Paul E. Parnell. Ellis sees Bevil Junior as a comic version of the Christian hero and “in order to qualify as a comic hero he must have some weakness. His comic hamartia, of course, is his absurd ‘Religious Vow’ (II i 123) not to marry without his father’s consent” (52).
Parnell sees the sentimentalist's approach to life and others as marked by sheer opportunism and self-deception: "After all, if he patterns his life on Christ, what more can we ask? But if this emulation of Christ is only a self-deception for primarily egoistic reasons, then his attitude is presumptuous rather than admirable. And in that case, sentimentalism might be said to make a distinct step away from traditional Christianity"("Sentimental Mask" 534). And yet such deception becomes so very useful in shaping the figure of the sentimental man in the eighteenth century. The sentimental stance becomes, against the backdrop of social change, a highly political mechanism by which the concept of social control can be perpetuated in the face of growing economic threat to the existing order. In fact no emotional-moral fulfillment is unaccompanied by material concern or reward.

The presentation of the benevolent man, the man of feeling is again not without certain problems inherent in the ideology supporting it. With the emergence of a gendered concept of benevolence and virtue there occurred a softening or feminization of the male. As Shaftesbury writes in TreatiseV of Characteristicks:

Even the Fair Sex, [...], may with reason despise us [...], and laugh at us for aiming at their peculiar Softness. 'Tis no Compliment to them, to affect their Manners, and be effeminate. Our Sense, Language, and Style, as well as our Voice, and Person, shou'd have something of that Male-Feature, and natural Roughness, by which our Sex is distinguish'd. (186)

Against the imputation of effeminacy the eighteenth century moralists defended the feminization of masculinity and of socio-cultural authority by distinguishing their paragon from the members of the barbaric society. As Adam Smith observes: "Among
civilized nations, the virtues which are founded upon humanity, are more cultivated [...]” (Theory 204). Smith further states that ages of civility and politeness are characterized by a “general security and happiness” (Theory 204), and remarks that “When custom and fashion coincide with the natural principles of right and wrong, they heighten the delicacy of our sentiments, and increase our abhorrence for everything which approaches to evil” (Theory 200). Indeed, The Conscious Lovers repeatedly endorses rationality as Bevil’s supreme manly virtue, a quality that makes him oppose duelling as a thoughtless unmanly action born of passion. In Steele’s hero feeling and benevolence are not opposed to rationality. On the contrary these, stemming from rationality, become the motive force behind manly action. Benevolence becomes an antidote to the tensions of a competitive world by binding diverse antithetic elements together.

Robert Markley observes that The Conscious Lovers remains complacent with the representation of an exemplum, and refrains from interrogating the ideological bases of Bevil’s heroism (“Sentimentality as Performance” 228). It is true that Steele’s play has a strong didactic design which is meant for emulation, but within that design the presentation of Bevil points to the uneasy predicament of a new masculine model in a tension-ridden social ambience. Frank Ellis observes that The Conscious Lovers is only sentimental about father and son, about filial obedience.11 This indeed is a significant point about the play that indicates how a typical pattern of a romantic plot has been altered to serve a specific purpose. Usually in comedy parents/guardians are the enemies of love. They are hoodwinked, defied and the comic plot enjoys the license of sounding a threat to traditional social hierarchy. In Steele’s play love and filial obedience are accommodated within a curious design that reinforces that hierarchic power-relations in
society. His hero Bevil will not defy his father, and although his love and affections are all for the poor Indiana, he will grudgingly marry Lucinda to satisfy Sir John Bevil. The old servant Humphrey describes him as “the most unfashionable Lover in Great Britain”(1.2.238). Although Bevil is to set up a new fashion for masculine conduct, the inconvincing nature of his filial loyalty is hinted by Humphrey. To understand the cultural significance of this construct it is necessary to explain why the figure of the father acquires so great an importance in The Conscious Lovers. In another play of Sir Richard Steele -- The Lying Lover (1703) -- the sudden awakening of filial love and remorse play a vital role in bringing about the moral reformation of the wayward hero, who utters seeing his father swoon before his eyes:

He faints, he’s cold, he’s gone. (Running to him.)

He’s gone, and with his last Breath call’d me Parricide,

You’ve broke your Father’s Heart! Oh killing Sound!

I’m all Contagion, to pity me is Death. (5.3.195-98)

In fact Bevil’s predicament in The Conscious Lovers is not an easy one. In the play he is squeezed between two father-figures: Sir John Bevil, a member of the landed aristocracy, and Mr. Sealand, the powerful India Merchant. Bevil’s social and cultural disposition is dependent on his ability to mediate the two fathers representing the two antagonistic elements of British society. A member of the old aristocracy, Bevil stands before the threat of an emergent bourgeois power, struggling hard to vindicate his authority to rule. It would be useful to see how Mr. Sealand, the incarnation of the commercial threat to the old order, describes himself:
[...] we Merchants are a Species of Gentry, that have grown into the World this last Century, and are as honourable, and almost as useful, as you landed Folks, that have always thought your selves so much above us; For your trading, forsooth! is extended no farther, than a Load of Hay, or a fat Ox -- You are pleasant People, indeed; because you are generally bred up to be lazy, therefore, I warrant you, Industry is dishonourable. (4.2. 50-7)

Mr. Sealand not only claims ascendancy over the landed class but also demands inculcation within the elite group by describing the merchants as "a new species of gentry." While critiquing the usual picture of upper-class life, Sealand brings out certain vices associated with it—insularity, vain, unproductive hedonism, and pursuit of pleasure. To acquire acceptability Bevil has to be presented as a figure shorn of the typical aristocratic vices. This aristocratic male paragon is reconstructed in terms that bring out a strained accommodation of bourgeois values within a broad upper-class cultural ethos.

In Terences The Andrian Woman Pamphilus's financial state is shown fully dependent on his father's approval of his marriage. Glycerium, transformed into Indiana Danvers in Steele's play, does not appear on the stage and is reported pregnant when the play begins. Thus while Pamphilus's obedience to his father is comprehensible, the reason behind Bevil's unswerving loyalty to Sir John is a mystery that is not explained in the course of the drama. Even Indiana, whose future has become intertwined with Bevil, accepts his filial obligation as unquestionable. Steele's construct points to an ideological complexity: the desire to sustain a hierarchical power structure typical of the older order, and the unavoidable necessity of naturalizing the new order. Bevil's adjustments as the
member of a particular social class, the gentry albeit minor, reveal an interesting aspect of the discourse. From the aristocratic point, the construct tells a different tale – a story of struggle for self-sustenance and preservation against the inroads of new values. Steele's rhetoric in *The Guardian* shows how notions of hereditary and innate virtue interpenetrated to form a complex of ideas:

I think a Man of Merit, who is derived from an Illustrious Line, is very justly to be regarded more than a Man of equal Merit who has no Claim to Hereditary Honours. [...] 

After having thus ascribed due Honours to Birth and Parentage, I must however take Notice of those who arrogate to themselves more Honours than are due to them on this Account. The first are such who are not enough sensible that Vice and Ignorance taint the Blood, and that an unworthy Behaviour degrades, and disennobles a Man, in the Eye of the World, as much as Birth and Family aggrandize and exalt him.

The second are those who believe a *new* Man of an elevated Merit is not more to be honoured than an insignificant and worthless Man who is descended from a long Line of Patriots and Heroes. (qtd. in Markley, "Sentimentality as Performance" 218)

If, on the one hand, Steele advocates a recognition of innate worth in a man even though he may be deprived of the advantages of a noble birth; on the other, he emphatically articulates the superiority of the virtuous man coming from an illustrious family. The urge to endow the man of notable birth and parentage with innate or acquired virtues betrays the threat to paternalistic hierarchy. Steele's virtuous hero is situated in a complex
ideological matrix in which the traditional equation of power and domination has become problematized by a new factor — the notion of innate, acquired worth independent of heredity. The confident, composed hero of the *The Conscious Lovers* is a cultural artifact that mystifies the ideological threats to the old order. The sheer manipulative endeavours of Bevil Junior, seen by Parnell as hypocritical or hidden beneath the “sentimental mask,” is a tendency thrust historically upon him — a device to withstand the discursive pressures of his time. Quite understandably, Bevil’s representation in the play is riven with ambivalence and contradictions, which are either glossed over or mystified as ideal.

In an attempt to mediate the cultural tension within the urban British life, Steele’s Bevil makes a strained effort to negotiate the ideal and the empirical. The playwright was perhaps aware that his paradigm would be more readily acceptable if some long-accepted referential frame is invoked. By deploying romance-elements — the tale of a chivalrous hero rescuing and protecting the honour of an innocent virgin — he distances his dramatic world from the empirical world. This is a clear attempt to mystify contemporary tensions. In *The Tender Husband* (1705) Steele makes fun of the romance convention through the presentation of the Niece, whose head has been turned by romances. Dissatisfied with her “Barbarous Genealogy” (2.2.51) she tells her Aunt: “Since you will run on, then I must needs tell you I am not satisfy’d in the point of my Nativity. Many an Infant has been placed in a Cottage with Obscure Parents, till by chance some Ancient Servant of the Family has known it by its Marks” (2.2.53-6). But interestingly, in *The Conscious Lovers* the typical frame of romance is evoked to make Bevil an acceptable male paradigm. In fact while the absurdities of the romance conventions are laughed at in *The Tender Husband*, they are used to reinstate Bevil’s chivalry in *The Conscious Lovers*. Indiana,
who is created to be the object of Bevil's heroic actions, is a woman of obscure nativity, thrust into misfortunes by a series of adversities, and finally saved by Bevil. Narrating the adversities that befell Indiana, Bevil says, "Providence at the Instant interpos'd, and sent me, by Miracle, to relieve her (1.2.201-2). The heroic protector of a helpless woman, Bevil then displays his greatness through secret acts of benevolence towards his dependant, secures Indiana's liberty and brings her to England. A soon as he reaches England Bevil's father proposes his match with Lucinda and throws him into deep turmoil. Bevil's problem is, indeed, queer. A man, who quenches his passion with outward shows of benevolence but never makes a verbal avowal of his love out of sheer obedience to his father, is undoubtedly a unique lover. Bevil is thus unfashionably fashionable – a trend-setter.

In the play Bevil works with the sheer calculative instinct of a schemer and visualizes the end as one of his own making. As contrasted with the hassled lover Myrtle, Bevil's impeccable composure seems unbelievable. Dressed already as a bridegroom for Lucinda, and almost sure to lose his Indiana forever, Bevil, except for a few sentimental asides, seems not the least perturbed. The sentimental stance that Bevil assumes to inform the audience that beneath his outward calm there lies an "Aking Heart"(1.2.5) is a luxury, a delight in a mild distress that entails no risk of major upheavals in life. Tom, the servant remarks— "(Aside.) The Devil's in my Master! he has always more Wit than I have" (1.2.21-2). In fact, Bevil's “honest Dissimulation” (1.2.15) takes on diverse forms in the play. The supposed clash between his duty to his father and his love for Indiana -- the typical conflict between love and loyalty that had shaped the climax of several heroic tragedies -- is here resolved by the hero's manipulative abilities. This clash between love
and filial duty is no life-shattering crisis, at least, for Bevil Junior. He articulates non-
equivocally that his prime duty is to his father: “My tender Obligations to my Father have
laid so inviolable a Restraint upon my Conduct, that ‘till I have his Consent to speak, I
am determin’d, on that Subject, to be dumb for ever” (1.2.233-6). So far as we are
concerned with his love for Indiana, Bevil plays safe from the very beginning. He tells
Humphrey that because of his unstinted obligation to his father, “I never once directly
told her, that I loved” (1.2.230-31). He, thereby, makes his ‘chaste’ love appear like an
usual master-kept relationship. Even though we are goaded on to believe that Bevil’s
virtue is unquestionable, ambiguity underlies his attitude towards Indiana:

[...] But all this while poor Indiana is tortured with the Doubt of me! she has no
Support or Comfort, but in my Fidelity, yet sees me daily press’d to Marriage
with another! How painful, in such a Crisis, must be every Hour she thinks on
me? I’ll let her see, at least, my Conduct to her is not chang’d: I’ll take this
Opportunity to visit her; for tho’ the Religious Vow, I have made to my Father,
restrains me from ever marrying, without his Approbation, yet that confines me
not from seeing a virtuous Woman, that is the pure Delight of my Eyes, and the
guiltless Joy of my Heart: But the best Condition of Human Life is but a gentler
Misery. (2.1.118-27)

Steele’s construction of the ‘sentimental’ man is too ambiguous to lend him to a sustained
 glorification. Bevil’s words bring out that there is virtually no conflict between his
“religious vow” to his father and his “see[ing]” a virtuous woman. Consequently, he can
afford the luxury of basking in a gentle misery. Bevil’s attitude to Indiana is
characteristic of a man who consciously practices dissimulation.
Idealistically, love, as seen by Steele in the *Tatler*, is a form of sociability. In the *Tatler* (49) Steele regrets that love is hardly distinguished from the “brutal Desire call’d Lust” (I: 348). Projecting love as a force of cohesion in secular community, he reflects that the bond between two persons could be secured through “benevolence,” a feeling based on mutual respect or “esteem” that will curb the unsocial, lawless desires, and preserve the fabric of civil society. Steele writes: “Love [...] is a Child that complains and bewails its inability to help itself, and weeps for Assistance, without an immediate Reflection or Knowledge of the Food it wants: Lust, a watchful Thief which seizes its Prey, and lays Snares for its own Relief; and its principal Object being Innocence, it never robs, but it murders at the same Time” (I: 349). A new concept of society is necessary to accommodate this new notion of desire and agency. The prime catalyst to initiate such honourable love in Steele’s *Tatler* is Aspasia, “the angelic woman”: “In this accomplished Lady, Love is the constant Effect, because it is never the Design” (I: 349). In drama a similar construct is Indiana Danvers, who like Aspasia, should make a good citizen out of her lover. Steele writes that “to behold her [Aspasia] is an immediate Check to immoderate Behaviour, and to love her, is a liberal Education [...]. A Regard for Aspasia naturally produces Decency of Manners, and a good Conduct of Life, in her admirers.” Love thus becomes an emotion that elicits perfect civil conduct from men. Steele further expounds: “Love is the happy composition of all the Accomplishments that make a Fine Gentleman” (I: 349). The discourse of Steele’s journal indicates that men should love not to yield to passion but to acquire self-control. Both Aspasia and Indiana remain passive, their sole purpose being to initiate men towards self-command and perfect conduct. In *The Conscious Lovers* Indiana has no action to her credit. In terms of
dramatic action she is offered a rather cosmetic function and merely assists Bevil's well-calculated moves by proclaiming an unstinted faith in his nobleness. To secure Bevil's position against any kind of challenge to his authority, Steele presents physical, emotional, and financial insecurity as the domains of the female. Cibber's virtuous wives enjoy the agency of using their 'virtue' as their weapon. In *The Conscious Lovers* neither Lucinda nor Indiana is allowed any agency. Steele, thus, builds the heroic stature of Bevil Junior on the prop of female passivity. Through Indiana Steele emphasizes female self-effacement as a prerequisite for establishing male dominance:

I will not doubt the Truth of Bevil, I will not doubt it; [...] I know his Virtue, I know his filial Piety, and ought to trust his Management with a Father, to whom he has uncommon Obligations. What have I to be concern'd for? my Lesson is very short. If he takes me for ever, my purpose of Life is only to please him. If he leaves me (which Heaven avert) I know he'll do it nobly; and I shall have nothing to do but to learn to die, after worse than Death has happen'd to me. (2.2.70-8)

However, the Bevil-Indiana relationship, especially, Bevil's gestures of 'benevolence' and 'esteem' towards Indiana is impregnated with ambiguity. Bevil's virtuous love for Indiana is supposed to be an attack on the social system in which a woman is a mere commodity in an obnoxious procedure of "Bargain and Sale"(1.2.66), as Cimberton's examination of Lucinda bears proof. Myrtle says: "[...] he will examine the Limbs of his Mistress with the Caution of a Jockey, and pays no more Compliment to her personal Charms, than if she were a mere breeding Animal"(2.1.46-8). However, Bevil's own argument, rationalizing a gentleman's 'esteem' towards a virtuous woman, is warped by the use of a language that confirms Indiana's commodity-status, and throws
the ideology of chaste heterosexual love to interrogation and suspicion. In the play Bevil critiques the older mode of aristocratic action typified by duelling and even shows his veiled condescension towards marrying with “too much Love” in one’s head (1.2.53). He, instead, embraces a mode of action based, not on innate, spiritual worth, but worldly wisdom and cold mercantile equations. In fact, property and money play an important function in the delineation of Bevil’s personality. His modesty, generosity, filial obedience and social worth are all measured in terms of money. Bevil’s modesty and obedience to Sir John is not contested because, in spite of inheriting a huge estate from his mother, Bevil “has never in the least Action, the most distant Hint or Word, valued himself upon that great Estate of his Mother’s […]”(1.1.34-6). In the play the social worth of the hero is highlighted by the fact that an India merchant, who has bequeathed a vast Estate to his only daughter, has chosen Bevil as the prospective groom for his sole heiress. In Steele’s dramatic world moral worth and wealth go hand in hand. Naturally, in casting the hero the playwright creates two props — those of moral rectitude and financial prosperity. But the notion of spiritual merit is strongly overpowered by a kind of rationality that internalizes the values of the mercantile world. This is clearly brought out through the Bevil-Indiana relationship.

Steele, perhaps, unwittingly shows through his presentation of Indiana the rising consumerism of the female world, and the position of man in this heterosexual economy as the provider. As the name suggests, Indiana signifies the wealth of the Indies, which she will eventually add to Bevil’s fortune. But she herself brings out the manner in which the mercantile system of trade and consumerism is translated into gender relationship. Here, the figure of ‘virtue in distress’ is not only an object upon whom Bevil showers
valuable material articles; she is also found to have inculcated the values of the commercial world, and acquired the ability to read in the gifted items a proof of Bevil's benevolence, his "Sincerity and Honour" (2.2.24). Against the repeated warnings of her Aunt, Indiana protests:

Well, be not so eager. -- If he is an ill Man, let us look into his Stratagems. Here is another of them. (Shewing a Letter.) Here's two hundred and fifty Pound in Bank Notes, with these Words, 'To pay for the Set of Dressing-plate, which will be brought home To-morrow.' Why dear Aunt, now here's another Piece of Skill for you, which I own I cannot comprehend -- and it is with a bleeding Heart I hear you say any thing to the Disadvantage of Mr. Bevil. (2.2.15-22)

Here material objects stand as tokens of Bevil's bounty, honour, and virtue. We also witness a curious commodification of male virtues.

The long conversation between Bevil and Indiana in Act II sc.iii is far from the impassioned speech between two young lovers, barred from union by circumstances. It shows how irresistibly the materialistic values impinge upon the ideology of love. This conversation is, however, an attempt to dramatize Steele's theory of benevolence and esteem as the basis of heterosexual relation, and hence a new form of sociability:

INDIANA: [...] Esteem is the Result of Reason, and to deserve it from good Sense, the Height of Human Glory [...].

BEVIL JUNIOR: You certainly distinguish right, Madam; Love often kindles from external Merit only—

INDIANA: But Esteem arises from a higher Source, the Merit of the Soul—

BEVIL: True -- And great Souls only can deserve it. (Bowling respectfully.)
Bevil regards Indiana as 'the most deserving Object' of his esteem, and Indiana's self-identification with the patient Griselda, clearly posits her as the passive receiver of Bevil's favours. As Indiana says: "[...] I cannot but think it the distinguishing part of a Gentleman, to make his Superiority of Fortune as easy to his Inferiors, as he can."(2.3.98-100). Politeness and generosity to inferiors become a distinct feature of the gentleman and he should also extend them to woman, who is his social and sexual inferior. While attempting to test Bevil's integrity as Indiana expresses a feigned suspicion towards the gentleman's benevolent impulses, Bevil promptly vindicates male benevolence in terms of investment and return. Spending money upon a woman of notable merit is to him the expression of "a better Taste in Expence" (2.3.117-18). What to Indiana is "disinterested" friendship is to Bevil the natural greatness becoming of a gentleman: "[...] your Hero, Madam, is no more, than what every Gentleman ought to be, [...] -- Why, Madam, a greater Expence, than all this, Men lay out upon an unnecessary Stable of Horses"(2.3.128-34). The message decoded exposes the reductive evaluation of both woman and male virtue in a commercial set-up. Horses, dogs, cards, dice, bottle companions, prostitutes and virtuous women are all objects upon which men spend a lot. The only difference is that spending in the service of a virtuous woman "exalts and raises him, that has a Taste for it" (2.3. 148), and also promises the best return for his investment because "his Delight is incapable of Satiety, Disgust, or Penitence" (2.3.149-50). The entire argument betrays the ambiguity underscoring the sentimental delineation of Bevil. His world is one of queer values where virtue, benevolence and pleasure are all delectable commodities that can be purchased with a little "superfluous"(2.3.158) cash. In
Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* the narrator gives a crown to a chambermaid as a sign of benevolence. Sterne thus articulates the ideological values of the narrative: "the woman's goodness, beauty, and piety merit a reward that literally puts a price on her virtue" (Markley, "Sentimentality as Performance" 210). I have tried to show that not only feminine virtues but also masculine virtues are subjected to the mercantile values.

The demystification of the ideological underpinnings of Steele's masculine paradigm shows the impossibility of reconciling the Christian virtues (as enumerated in *The Christian Hero*) with an aggressive world of economic competition. When expressed in terms of gender relationship, the sentimental ideology legitimizes new strategies of domination and control as a means of dealing with the impending threats of a new order. While in Cibber's Sentimental plays we see a consistent effort on the part of the virtuous wives to resist self-effacement by transforming 'passivity' into agency, in Steele's play women are reduced to commodities. The intense scrutiny Lucinda is made to undergo under Cimberton's keen eyes establishes the object-status of women in the sexual economy of the play. Lucinda is also an object, which is to be sold to the highest bidder. As Lucinda utters from extreme humiliation: "Monster! there's no bearing it. The hideous Sot! -- there's no enduring it, to be thus survey'd like a Steed at Sale" (3.293-4). And Cimberton's words substantiate the object-status of women in society: "[...] the Woman in the Bargain" is very much like the "Mansion-House in the Sale of the Estate" (3.300-301). While Cimberton is dismissed, Bevil is glorified although he also regards Indiana as an "Object on which to indulge and please himself, with pouring Favours" (5.3.112-13). This is what the politics of politeness achieved. It is noteworthy that Mr. Sealand, who has previously charged Bevil as the keeper of "an artful Creature" (4.2.78), applauds
his nobleness after discovering that Indiana is his long-lost daughter: “How laudable is Love, when born of Virtue!” (5.3.208-9). And Bevil’s ultimate apotheosis establishes him as “a Lover to her [Indiana’s] Beauty, and a Parent to her Virtue” (5.3.241-2).

III

Teaching his society the benefits of benevolence was a major concern for the prolific writer Sir Richard Cumberland. His Sentimental Comedies are replete with benevolent men—Belcour, the West Indian in *The West Indian*, Sheva, the Jew in *The Jew*, or Mortimer, the generous uncle in *The Fashionable Lovers*. In *The Observer* Cumberland portrayed Major Manlove as the very incarnation of the spirit of benevolence: “to all men he maintains a natural sincerity, with a countenance so expressive of the benevolence glowing in his heart, that he is beloved as swoon as known, and known as soon as seen” (12). Cumberland posits benevolence as an essentially social sentiment: the invaluable attribute of a man whose soul is “formed for society” (13). While Steele’s play betrays the gap between appearance and reality, the outward and the inward in delineating Bevil, Cumberland’s Major Manlove is a man whose face is truly the index of his mind. In *The Observer* Cumberland states his intention behind writing essays for his journal:

[…] it has been my constant aim throughout the progress of these papers to recommend and instil a principle of universal benevolence; I have to the best of my power endeavoured to support the Christian character by occasional remarks upon the evidences and benefits of Revealed Religion; and as the sale and
circulation of these volumes have exceeded my most sanguine hopes, I am encouraged to believe that my endeavours are accepted, [...] (26)

Cumberland’s English society had grown largely amorphous and fluid, and hence was in dire need of a cohesive factor. The pages of The Observer can be our best guide to how ‘benevolence’ as a national virtue was deemed a factor harmonizing the diverse elements in society:

I wish I could contribute to render men mild and merciful towards each other, tolerating every peaceable member who mixes in our community without annoying its established church: I wish I could inspire an ardent attachment to our beloved country, qualified however with the gentlest manners, and a beaming charity towards the world at large: I wish I could persuade contemporaries to live together as friends and fellow-travellers, emulating each other without acrimony, and cheering even rivals in the same pursuit [...] which takes a generous interest in the success of every art and science, that embellish or exalt the age and nation we belong to: [...] (26)

Cumberland’s dramatic world is, consequently, much more diverse than Steele’s. In Steele we had an indication of the ongoing tension between two classes in urban English society. Cumberland’s plays make room for the varied elements constituting a rather amorphous, and predominantly commercial society—there are the Jew, the Scot, the Irish, and the West Indian. All are virtually good-natured, and serve the interest of the English lovers in particular, and the society in general. Cumberland writes in his Memoirs:
I fancied there was an opening for some originality, and an opportunity for showing at least my good will to mankind, if I introduced the characters of persons who had been usually exhibited on the stage as the butts for ridicule and abuse, and endeavored [sic] to present them in such lights as might tend to reconcile the world to them, and them to the world. (qtd. in Bernbaum 238)

Cumberland’s world is the society to which he belongs, and his expressed endeavour, therefore, is to induce a spirit of tolerance towards all to realize peace, harmony, and economic prosperity.

A glimpse at contemporary history tells us that the span from 1688 to 1832 was a phase, on the one hand, of Whig mercantile supremacy, and on the other, of incessant war with neighbouring nations and struggle for commercial predominance. The “din of arms” (Prologue, *The Jew*), the cries of war is recognized in the prologues to Cumberland’s plays, and against a reality of struggle and unrest the playwright projects a fictive society of harmony. The Prologue to *The Walloons* (1813) shows Cumberland as an artist consciously using the stage for moral instruction:

*Nor, Britons, you our moral scenes despise,*

*Still from the Stage does true instruction rise.*

*Let no mean thought your ardent souls engage,*

*Nor party rancour, nor religious rage;*

*But all alike with generous warmth embrace,*

*Whose kindred virtues speak their British race:*

Tolerance and benevolence are, according to Cumberland, the supreme virtues to be cultivated by every fashionable young man of the English society in order to be a suitable
member of "the enlightened age and his glorious nation" (The Observer 29). He upholds the British nation as one of perfect happiness and enviable prosperity: "I conscientiously believe the public happiness of this peaceful era is not to be paralleled in our annals. A providential combination of events has conspired to restore our national dignity, and establish our internal tranquillity in a manner which no human foresight could have pointed out, [...]" (The Observer 30).

It is necessary to recognize that Cumberland's complacence with the peace, happiness, and prosperity of his nation did not involve an overlooking of the hard realities. His imaginative world of harmony is posited in the face of dissention, strife, racial and cultural discrimination, religious bigotry, and above all the predominance of mercenary values over humane considerations. I think to say that the playwright was trying merely to promote a spirit of universal benevolence for the well-being of his fellow-creatures, would be to gloss over the cultural anxiety hidden in some of his plays. The writer of The West Indian was attempting to construct the virtues of a predominantly commercial English society, and posit benevolence to temper the hardness of a madly competitive economic system. He exhorts his countrymen to prove themselves worthy of their nation: "Let us, who profit by the blessing, give proof that we are deserving of it, by being cordially affectioned towards one another, just and generous to our fellow creatures, grateful and obedient to our God" (The Observer 30).

Although my main focus is The West Indian, I would begin with a less detailed analysis of The Jew (1794) because there are certain common concerns addressed in the two plays. Both the plays have at its centre the figure of a cultural 'other;' in both the love theme leads to concatenation of events that endorse the innate goodness of this alien
figure; in both benevolence struggles for supremacy against a hard mercantile world, and most significantly, in both the acceptance of the cultural or religious 'other' as part of the British society is seen as conducive to its economic prosperity. In *The Jew* Cumberland declares his moral intention in the Prologue:

“Here, here,” he cries, “on Albion’s fostering breast,

“The Arts are shelter’d, and the Muses rest,

“Here I will build my stage, by moral rule

“And scenic measure here erect my school;

“A school for prejudice: -- Oh! that my stroke

“Could strip that creeper from the British Oak!

“Twin’d round his generous shaft, the tangled weed

“Sheds on the undergrowth it’s baneful seed.”

The image of the Oak conveys the strength and solidarity of Britain. Cumberland’s endeavour is to kill the creeper of prejudice entangling the generous branches of the substantial Oak, and prevent it from vitiating the harmony of the English society by strewing its “baneful seed” amidst the people. The play, however, does not erase the distinction between the Christian and the Jew. Sheva, the rich Jew, is the broker of the London merchant Sir Stephen Bertram, and is introduced in the play as “the/ merest [sic] muck-worm in the city of London”(1.4). However, this “moving mine of wealth”(1.5) can be useful for the Christian society. As Charles Ratcliffe tells Frederic: “Misers are not unuseful members of the/ community; they act like dams to rivers, hold up/ the stream that else wou’d run to waste, and make/ deep water where there wou’d be shallows”(1.5). Pity for the much despised Jew becomes a means of emphasizing the
natural humanity of the Englishmen. Such a spirit of benevolence demands the service of the socially marginalized. Sheva is consequently presented as the benevolent Jew, a type markedly different from the Shylock figure. In the play Sheva not only protests against social injustices meted out to the Jews by the Christian community, but also against the literary convention of projecting them as popular butt of ridicule: “If your play-writers want a butt or a buffoon, or a knave to make sport of, out comes a Jew to be baited and buffeted through five long acts for the amusement of all good Christians—Cruel sport, merciless amusement! [...] How can you expect us to shew kindness, when we receive none?” (1.7).

Sheva is presented as the very embodiment of benevolent impulse, whose heart droops to acknowledge that the world is full of misery, and he has “but two weak eyes to find tears for them all” (1.8). Cumberland makes his Jew work as a deus ex machina, relieving not only the suffering of the poor, but also uniting the lovers and saving the son of his Christian benefactor from utter penury. He loves his money dearly, but his benevolent impulses are too strong to be subdued, and the suffering of his fellow Christians moves him deeply. Sheva tells Ratcliffe that he is annoyed with his own vulnerability: “[...] I am angry with myself for being such a baby, a child, a chicken. Your people do not love me, what business have I to love your people? [...]” (2.21).

Sheva’s benevolence leads him to think of himself as the selfless servant of the Christians: “[...] I did tell you, Mr. Ratcliffe, I wou’d shew you my heart. Sir, it is a heart to do you all possible good whilst I live, and to pay you the debt of gratitude when I die: I believe it is the only one I owe to the pure benevolence of my fellow-creatures” (2.22). The Jew also assures him that he does not consider the Christians
ungrateful, but they had been hard towards Sheva because he had not let them know their benefactor. Once Sheva learns that Charles Ratcliffe, the preserver of his life from the ire of a riotous London mob, is the son of his benefactor in Cadiz, he rushes forth to shower Charles with the riches he has accumulated in his life. Although the Jew criticizes Sir Bertram’s austerity, he also points out that “[...] I do know many many noble British merchants/ that abound in pity, therefore I do not/ abuse your tribe/”(3.42)—a statement underscoring pity/benevolence to be the characteristic virtue of the Christians.12

Interestingly, Sheva’s benevolence to the Christian community makes his identity as a Jewish usurer questionable. On finding out that Sheva has given Frederic a sum of three hundred pounds knowing full well that Frederic is in no position to repay the sum, Jabal tells Dorcas: “[...] I have/ found out besides that he is no Hebrew, no more a/ Jew than Julius Caesar; for to my certain knowledge/ he gives away his money by handfuls to the consumers/ of hogs-flesh/”(1.26-7). Cumberland is not erasing the traditionally hostile opposition between the Jew and the Christian. In fact, when Charles remarks that Sheva has enough virtues to be called a Christian and Sir Bertram enough vices to be regarded as a Jew, Cumberland is merely pointing out that any body with compassion, benevolence and generosity is worthy to be regarded as a Christian or as a suitable member of a Christian nation.

With the expansion of British colonial power to different parts of the world a need to delineate a concept of national virtue as forging a tie between the colonials and the Englishmen in their homeland was a necessity. In 1770 an anonymous author laid down a four-fold division of the British society comprising “the Nobs,” “the Citizens and their Ladies,” the “Mechanics and Middling Degrees,” and “the Refuse” (qtd. in Day 90-1).
The weakening of the traditional social structure and the uncertainty about gentlemanly identity became more aggravated in the later years of the eighteenth century as the more wealthy members of the middle-class bought large estates, and assumed the status of the gentleman. Day observes: "This was particularly pronounced with the 'nabobs', the name given to men who, having made their fortune on the slave plantations of the West Indies, were able to buy their way into Parliament" (97). Although the colony was technically an extension of the British nation, and the colonials bore the same national identity, imaginatively this unity was not perceived. The nabobs were thought to be contaminated by the virus of the east, and like the subhuman colonized subjects they were dehumanized. A slave of pleasure, they are looked upon as effete beings, who have not only lost their morality but also Christianity. Social response towards the West Indian was characterized, therefore, by contempt, derision, and also anxiety about those who had become the 'other'. There is a paradox involved because the sense of the 'otherness' of the colonials prompted an urge to include them within the fold of Britishness, and this explains the manic necessity of proving the superiority of the European identity. The reformation of Belcour bears proof that Britain was quite insistent on retaining the purity of the Englishman.

In *The West Indian* the Prologue rather candidly confesses the reason behind casting the West Indian as a benevolent figure:

> Critics, hark forward! noble game and new;
> A fine West Indian started full in view:
> Hot as the soil, the clime, which gave him birth,
> You'll run him on a burning scent to earth;
Yet don’t devour him in his hiding place,
Bag him, he’ll serve you for another chase;
For sure that country has no feeble claim,
Which swells your commerce, and supports your fame.

The prologue to this play makes one wary of the fact that the construct of the sentimental man here, at least, is not a simple, innocent attempt at revealing to the world that the colonials from the West Indies, considered by the British as wild, violent, and ill-bred, could also be noble-hearted. In fact, the “humble sketch” of Belcour manifesting “Some emanations of a noble mind;/ Some little touches”(Prologue), is part of a shrewd design of pacifying the West Indian planters who had been ridiculed, since they contributed immensely to the commercial growth of Britain.13 Mr. Stockwell, the ideal English merchant in the play voices a plea for tolerance towards the West Indian: “You will not be over strict, / Madam, in weighing Mr. Belcour’s conduct to the/ minutest scruple; his manners, passions and opinions/ are not as yet assimilated to this climate; he comes/ amongst you a new character, an inhabitant of a new/ world and both hospitality as well as pity recommend/ him to our indulgence”(5.3.90). I would argue that Cumberland’s The West Indian tries not so much to glorify Belcour’s fundamental goodness but to project a unified and sanitized image of the English commercial class.

Belcour, a man newly alighting from a wild country, is projected as a sentimental prodigal, a libertine who has not acquired the virtue of self-command. Although he is known to London society as a West Indian, he is actually the son of the honest London-merchant Mr. Stockwell. Belcour’s reformation in the play thus does not merely validate his fundamentally good heart, but also posits him as a worthy successor of Stockwell.
The union of the father and the son leads to the joining of Mr. Stockwell’s assets and the Belcour estate. Throughout the play the reins of control remain in the hands of Stockwell, who adopts the strategy of waiting for the ripe moment, when Belcour can be safely inculcated within the fold of the English commercial group. Stockwell, “a merchant of […] [great] eminence, / and a member of the British parliament” (1.1. 3) had never revealed his son’s true identity or claimed his rights over Belcour “in obedience to the dying injunctions/ of a beloved wife” (1.1.3). His silence has proved highly beneficial for both himself and his son, for Old Belcour who brought his son as a foundling, bequeathed his entire estate to the boy. Although now no longer bound to secrecy, Stockwell decides to test his son’s nature before revealing to him his true identity: “[…] before I publickly reveal myself, I could/ wish to make some experiment of my son’s disposition;/ this can be only done by letting his spirit take its course/ without restraint; by these means, I think I shall discover/ much more of his real character under the title of/ his merchant, that I should under that of his father /” (1.1.4).

In London society Belcour makes “a singular spectacle” (1.2.5), and his ‘otherness’ is confirmed from the beginning of the play: he is a “creolian” (1.3.5), an “outlandish spark” (1.4.6), a hot-headed, wild man from the torrid zone. Nevertheless, as Stockwell’s servant testifies, his immense wealth makes him a notable figure in London: “No matter for that, he’s very rich, and that’s sufficient. / They say he has rum and sugar enough belonging/ to him, to make all the water in the Thames into/ punch” (1.3.5). If this is one way of vindicating Belcour’s worth, the other is evident in Stockwell’s assurance of his moral virtue: “All the reports I ever received, give / me favourable impressions of his character; wild, perhaps,/ as the manner of his country is, but, I trust, not frantic/ or
unprincipled”(1.4.6). To endorse Belcour's worth as a suitable member of the English commercial class Cumberland presents an opposition, on the one hand, between the innocent pleasure-seeking of the West Indian, and the London underworld of treachery and dishonesty; and, on the other, between Belcour's spontaneous benevolence and the unfeeling competitiveness of mercantile operation in London. In fact, the play problematizes the savage/civilized dichotomy. On reaching London Belcour narrates his inconveniences to Stockwell: “[...] Your town's as full of defiles as the, Island of Corsica; and, I believe, they are as obstinately/ defended: so much hurry, bustle, and confusion, on/ your quaye; [...]” (1.5.7). Belcour, who is accustomed to meting out rough treatments to the slaves, had shown his impatience with “the whole tribe/ of custom­house extortioners, boat-men, tide-waiters,/ and water-bailiffs”(1.5.7) as a result of which there was a severe scuffle and Belcour was under attack. It is ironical that the Londoners impress him to be as wild as the inhabitants of Corsica. On being roughly treated, they retaliate with similar roughness unlike the acquiescent, suffering slaves. However, the West Indian, who sees himself as a fellow subject of the British nation, applauds the free spirit of the Englishmen, the dark underbelly of which is the exploitation and persecution of the weak and the poor.

A deep anxiety over the consequences of such exploitation is evident from Belcour’s victimization in the hands of the Fulmers — the imposters who have settled in London hoping that in a land of plenty, it would be easier for them to trick gullible people out of their money. The English city proves to be a hard, acquisitive world of appetite, treachery, dishonesty and deception, and Belcour remains a tactless victim of its devious ways. To the Fulmers he is “a West-Indian, / fresh landed, and full of cash; a gull to our
heart’s content;/ a hot-brain’d headlong spark, that would run into our/ trap, like a wheat- 
ear under a turf?/ (3.2.45). Belcour’s bafflement with the city and its dwellers is brought out in his description of London: “[…] I think the town and the town’s-folk / are exactly suited; ’tis a great, rich, overgrown, noisy,/ tumultuous place: the whole morning is a bustle to get/ money, and the whole afternoon is a hurry to spend it” (3.7.55). The figure of the baffled colonial bears the deflected anxiety of the English merchant traversing savage tracts in unknown lands. Belcour’s words convey the subtle hint that the merchant himself might be a lost, confused entity in a state of profusion and plenty, in an economic system of his own making. The reformation of the “wild” West Indian brings to the fore the underlying apprehension that the savage lies not outside but within, and threatens every moment the stability of the nation.

Hence, the construct of the ‘economic’ man demands adequate control of ‘passions’ and the proper direction of ‘interests.’ The education of the West Indian is intimately linked with the issue of prudent management of wealth. The exchange between Belcour and Stockwell bring this out. Belcour, a thoughtless hedonist at heart, shows his excitement on reaching the city of London, and he is mentally prepared to spend his money on his promiscuity and pleasure:

BELCOUR. Well, Mr. Stockwell, for the first time in my life, / here am I in England; at the fountain head of pleasure,/ in the land of beauty, of arts, and elegancies. My happy/ stars have given me a good estate, and the conspiring/ winds have blown me hither to spend it./
STOCKWELL. To use it, not to waste it, I should hope; to treat it, Mr. Belcour, not as a vassal, over whom you have a wanton and despotic power, but as a subject, which you are bound to govern with a temperate and restrained authority.

BELCOUR. True, Sir, most truly said; mine's a commission, not a right: I am the offspring of distress, and every child of sorrow is my brother; while I have hands to hold, therefore, I will hold them open to mankind: but, Sir, my passions are my masters; they take me where they will; and oftentimes they leave to reason and to virtue nothing but my wishes and my sighs. (1.5.8)

The quoted exchange brings to surface several vital ideas underscoring the identity of the English 'economic' man. Stockwell's mild warning against Belcour's enthusiasm shows that in order to be a worthy successor of a prudent English merchant, Belcour must be taught the proper management of money. It is noteworthy that the London merchant makes a subtle distinction between slaves, the ignoble, subhuman creatures who can be treated with despotic power, and the human subjects, presumably, of the European world who are to be controlled with restrained authority. Money may be obtained through inhuman atrocities, but when it flows to the European world, it becomes sanitized. Hence, its comparison with the respectable subjects whose governance demands prudence and temperate control. A queer ambiguity also characterizes Belcour's famous expression of his benevolent inclinations. Here, Belcour might consider himself the brother of every distressed human being, yet his benevolent actions seem circumscribed to the members of the English Christian community. The benevolent hero's relationship with his slaves in
the plantations is totally kept in the background, and the few hints offered in the play indicate no improvement of the English attitude towards the 'savages'. Moreover, Belcour's rather naïve admission "my passions are my masters" is an attempt to soften the unfavourable image of the British colonial by projecting him as a juvenile figure, who is in dire need of a censorious mentor. Cumberland's plea for tolerance towards his colonial brothers does not hush up the prevalent attitude of condescension towards them from within the English community. Hence, the play posits Stockwell as Belcour's guide and mentor.

The mercilessness of Lady Rusport towards the Dudleys provide Belcour an opportunity to show his benevolence and creates the impression that the West Indian has the virtue to qualify him as the son of a worthy Christian. As Charlotte Rusport tells her step-mother: "[...] I take charity to be a main clause in the great statute/ of christianity" (1.6.10); and O'Flaherty later condemns Lady Rusport: "[...] By my soul there isn't in the whole/creation so savage an animal as a human creature without/ pity /" (2.11.40). Belcour is of a much better mettle for on learning the plight of Captain Dudley he instantly offers him two hundred pounds, and on seeing his surprise questions: "What is your surprize? Is it an uncommon thing for a/ gentleman to speak truth; or is it incredible that one fellow/ creature should assist another? /" (2.7.29). However, the West Indian's justification of his benevolence remains ambiguous. This is reflected in the soliloquy he utters on hearing the distresses of Captain Dudley:

I've lost the girl it seems; that's clear: she was the first/ object of my pursuit; but the case of this poor officer/ touches me; and, after all, there may be as much true delight/ in rescuing a fellow creature from distress, as there/ would be in plunging
one into it [...]. Ay, ay, this is the very thing; 'twas devilish/lucky I happen'd to have these bills about me. There,/ there, fare you well; I'm glad to be rid of you; you stood / a chance of being worse applied, I can tell you. (2.6.27)

His sudden display of generosity seems to be prompted by his indecisiveness about how to make use of his money. When he decided to help Captain Dudley financially, Belcour appears to be overburdened with wealth, and glad for an opportunity to be rid of some of the excessive load. Moreover, Belcour is also conscious of his weakness, and knows that had he not spent his money on Captain Dudley, it would have been "worse applied."

Belcour's benevolence might be held as a redeeming factor, but it is not enough to ensure his identity as Stockwell's son. A man of reckless passion, he is an easy prey to temptations. Belcour admits his effemines before Stockwell, describing himself as the slave of every capricious whore: "A woman: one that can turn, and overturn me and my/ tottering resolutions every way she will. Oh, Sir, if this/ is folly in me, you must rail at Nature: you must chide/ the sun, that was vertical at my birth [...]"(3.1.43). Belcour's honest confession of his folly and his indulgent attitude towards his weakness provokes Stockwell's reproach:

STOCKWELL. Mere rhapsody; mere childish rhapsody; the libertine's/ familiar plea —Nature made us, 'tis true, but we are the/ responsible creators of our own faults and follies.

BELCOUR. Sir! /

STOCKWELL. Slave of every face you meet, some hussey has inveigled/ you, some handsome profligate, (the town is full of them;)/ and, when once fairly bankrupt in constitution, as well as/ fortune, nature no
Accustomed to having his own way in a land of slaves, Belcour considers every beautiful woman in the city a wench, a commodity he can enjoy in lieu of money. The sight of Louisa Dudley makes his warm blood boil, and leads him easily to the trap laid by Mrs. Fulmer. While Fulmer enquires if he was "apt to fall in love thus at first sight," Belcour answers, "Oh, yes; 'tis the only way I ever can fall in love" (2.5.24). Realizing that he is a hasty, impulsive man, Fulmer begins to capitalize on his weakness: "You are a hasty lover it seems; have you spirit to be a generous one?" (2.5.24). Belcour innocently believes in the misinformation that Louisa is the mistress of Young Dudley, and even gives Fulmer the diamonds of Charlotte Rusport for purchasing the wench: "[...] when beauty is the purchase, I shan't think much of the price/" (3.3.47). The most desired quality in a merchant is his trustworthiness, a quality exemplified by Stockwell. Belcour's overwhelming recklessness makes him fail to live up to the standard. However, his fundamental honesty is reiterated in the course of the play.

The West Indian exhibits a queer dualism: a readiness to yield to promiscuity, and remorse for his wrong deeds. The former is attributed to the peculiar climatic condition of the place where he was brought up, and the latter is held as latent signs of his British and Christian identity. Belcour's benevolence is, therefore, unusual, his "warmth of heart peculiar to his climate" (3.7.57). The self-disparaging tone in which Belcour describes himself to Charlotte testifies to the 'inferiority' of the colonial: "[...] I am an idle, dissipated, unthinking fellow, not worth your notice; in short, I am a West Indian; and you must try me according to the charter of my colony, not by a jury of English/
spinsters [...]"(3.7.56-7). Thus, cultural anxiety over the West Indian, who has imaginatively become an ‘other,’ is assuaged by repeated glorification of his benevolence. As Charlotte says on learning about Belcour’s generosity towards Dudley: “O blessed be the torrid zone for ever, whose rapid vegetation/ quickens nature into such benignity!”(3.7.58). Stockwell plays an important role in emphasizing that popular opinion of the West Indian should be tempered:

I flatter myself you will not find him totally undeserving/ your good opinion; an education, not of the strictest kind, / and strong animal spirits, are apt sometimes to betray him/ into youthful irregularities; but an high principle of honour, / and an uncommon benevolence, in the eye of candor, / will, I hope, atone for any faults, by which these good / qualities are not impaired /(3.5.53).

To complete the rehabilitation of Belcour Cumberland makes use of the threadbare conventions of the rake-reform formula. The lecherous man is now overshadowed by a new identity: a man of innate goodness. Captain Dudley asserts that he holds too good an opinion about Belcour to believe “he cou’d be guilty of a design’d affront/ to an innocent girl [...]”(5.3.90). As Belcour repents his unintentional wrongs, the play posits him as a “reformed,” “rational” admirer of Louisa. Her suspicion that Belcour’s reformation cannot be long-lasting is immediately quietened by the West Indian’s impassioned assurance: “I know I am not worthy of your regard; I know I’m tainted with a thousand faults, sick of a thousand follies, / but there’s a healing virtue in your eyes that/ makes recovery certain; I cannot be a villain in your/ arms”(5.5.92). Belcour is thus saved from the grasp of capricious passion and finds recourse in the safe arms of virtue. He admits that now it is Louisa’s virtue rather than her beauty that has
enslaved him. Time is ripe to endow the nameless West Indian with his real identity, and Stockwell reveals it: "[...] Yes, Belcour, I have/ watch'd you with a patient, but enquiring eye, and I / have discover'd thro' the veil of some irregularities, a/ heart beaming with benevolence, an animated nature,/ fallible indeed, but not incorrigible; and your election/ of this excellent young lady makes me glory in acknowledging/ you to be my son"(5.8.101-2). Belcour accepts his fallibility and is placed under double protection. He gains two relentless monitors in Stockwell and Louisa: "I thank you, and in my turn glory in the father I /have gained: sensibly imprest with gratitude for such /extraordinary dispensations, I beseech you, amiable/ Louisa, for the time to come, whenever you perceive/ me deviating into error or offence, bring only to my/ mind the Providence of this night, and I will turn to/ reason and obey"(5.8.102). Through its presentation of the new sentimental hero Cumberland's play makes a facile attempt of assuaging cultural anxiety over the disposition of the colonials, and subtly establishes the superiority of the English Christian man. The triumph of the benevolent man over the wild Jamaican libertine is virtually the triumph of the English merchant Stockwell.

Notes

1 The growth of capitalist economy led to social fragmentation. The ties that bound the old feudal hierarchical system gradually dissolved and men found themselves adrift in a mercenary, heartless, commercial world. M. Kishlansky in *Monarchy Transformed: Britain, 1603-1714* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997) pointed out that the growth of capitalist economy led to economic divisions in society (25).

2 It would be anachronistic to take the word 'class' in the Marxist sense. D. Cannadine in *Class in Britain* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998) observes that the predominant metaphor for the structure of the English
society was still feudal, and the belief in the Great Chain of Being pervaded human consciousness (26). Cannadine further noted that the contemporaries of Fielding liked to adhere to the medieval ‘three estates’ theory, but supplanted the Knights, Priests, and labourers by the upper, middle and the lower orders (29). Roy Porter felt such neat tripartite divisions of the English society untenable, because each group was extremely diverse. According to his English Society in the Eighteenth Century (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), the variety within the groups led to a constant struggle over class differentiation (49). He asserts that the “Marxist schema could hardly apply to a nation in which smallholders, yeomen, self-employing tradesmen and craftsmen still comprised much of the workforce” (53).


4 See Gary Day, Class (London: Routledge, 2001) 65-71. I quote from Pocock, Virtue, Commerce, and History (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985): “If speculative man was not to be the slave of his passions, he had to moderate these by converting them into opinion, experience and interest, and into a system of social ties which these things reinforced; and the reification followed by exchange of the objects on which his passions focussed was an excellent means of socialising them. When the polite man of commercial and cultivated society looked back into his past, what he necessarily saw there was the passions not yet socialised, to which he gave such names as ‘barbarism’ and ‘savagery’ [...]” (115).


6 I quote from Suvir Kaul’s Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire (New Delhi: OUP, 2001): “In Ruins and Empire, Laurence Goldstein comments that in eighteenth-century literature ‘ruins were a means of mortifying in the public those worldly desires that caused the great empires, like Persepolis and Egypt, to decline and fall.’ This ‘ruin sentiment’ was ubiquitous in literature and in art and was thought to be ‘capable of universal application and for that reason a determinant of policy and conduct in a time of expanding empire’”(101).

7 I quote from Kaul, who studies in eighteenth century poetry evidences of ambivalence towards the possibilities of mercantile and commercial expansion: “While there is certainly a great deal of evidence to suggest the excitement and ferment of a burgeoning commodity culture, or the sense of a nation coming to
commercial or naval power, what is also clear is that even the most bellicose and hortatory of literary texts arrives at its conclusions only after registering symptomatically or negotiating overtly a variety of misgivings about the shape of the new worlds in the making, at home and abroad. In a period of unprecedented expansion, [...], poets and propagandists took on the task of crafting suitable narratives, and a new ethical and historical vocabulary, with which to express adequately the hopes, and assuage the anxieties, particular to the making of a Great Britain"(85-6).

8 In addition to the quoted portion from Lillo's *The London Merchant*, I am also tempted to quote from Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (London: David Campbell, 1991): "The habits, besides, of order, economy, and attention, to which mercantile business naturally forms a merchant, render him much fitter to execute, with profit and success, any project of improvement"(362). He further states: "[...] commerce and manufacturers gradually introduced order and good government, and with them, the liberty and security of individuals, among the inhabitants of the country, who had before lived almost in a continual state of war with their neighbours and of servile dependency upon their superiors"(362).


11 Frank Ellis writes in *Sentimental Comedy* (Cambridge: Camb. UP, 1991): "Sixty years ago Ashley Thorndike affirmed that 'The Conscious Lovers is sentimental comedy par excellence' and his judgment is commonly accepted today. But no one yet has been able to say exactly what *The Conscious Lovers* is sentimental about. Now it is possible to say. *The Conscious Lovers* is primarily sentimental about parents" (52).


13 Ernest Bernbaum observes in *Drama Of Sensibility* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1958): "The colonials from the West Indies were looked uon in London as ill-bred, violent, and grossly ostentatious. As
such they had been lampooned in Foote’s Sir Peter Pepperpot in *The Patron* (1764). When Cumberland’s play was announced, it was assumed that he too would cast ridicule upon them; and some West Indians went to the theatre ‘to chastise the author.’ [...] They found, however, in Cumberland’s Belcour a young gentleman who did honor to their land, whose passionate temperament was excused on the ground of the tropical climate [...]. He was a sentimental prodigal, with all the instinctive goodness of heart proper to such a character, and the additional charm of delightful vivacity. It was not, as Arthur Murphy complained, an accurate delineation of the manners of a West Indian planter; but it was a variation of the sentimental hero that took the town by storm.”(239-40); another significant observation by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (London: David Campbell, 1991) is worth our notice. Smith writes: “The pride of man makes him love to domineer, and nothing mortifies him so much as to be obliged to condescend to persuade his inferiors. Wherever the law allows it, and the nature of the work can afford it, therefore, he will generally prefer the service of slaves to that of freeman. The planting of sugar and tobacco can afford the expense of slave-cultivation. [...] The profits of a sugar-plantation in any of our West Indian colonies are generally much greater than those of any other cultivation that is known either in Europe or America [...]”(345).

14 Here I would like to quote a passage from Bernard Mandeville’s *The Fable of the Bees*, CD-ROM, Scandocs Database, Doc. No. 670 (Calcutta: National Library, n.d.). It mercilessly deflates the sentimentalist’s glorified notion of human benevolence: “[...] it is impossible to judge of a Man’s Performance, unless we are thoroughly acquainted with the Principle and Motive from which he acts. Pity, tho’ it is the most gentle and the least mischievous of all our Passions, is yet as much a Frailty of our Nature, as Anger, Pride, or Fear. [...] It must be own’d, that of all our Weaknesses it is the most amiable, and bears the greatest Resemblance to Virtue [...]” (scan p. 59)