

Evans, J. "Sentimental Economies in *The School for Scandal*," *New Perspectives on the Eighteenth Century* 8 (2011): 51-63.

***Reprinted with permission. No further reproduction is authorized without written permission from Southeastern American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies.

New Perspectives on the Eighteenth Century

This version of the document is not the version of record. Figures and/or pictures may be missing from this format of the document.***

SENTIMENTAL ECONOMIES IN *THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL*

By

James E. Evans*

University of North Carolina Greensboro

Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, which premiered on 8 May 1777, demonstrates a central function of eighteenth-century literary texts, as described by Mary Poovey: "to mediate value—that is, to help people understand the new credit economy and the market model of value that it promoted."¹ The play performs this cultural work through a discourse in which "the languages of sensibility and economic theory, conventionally deemed to be separate and indeed antagonistic," turn out "to overlap and coincide."² In two of Sheridan's plots—the threat to the Teazles' marriage by Joseph Surface and the testing of Joseph and Charles Surface by their Uncle Oliver—he includes scenes in which several characters seem to express sensibility and in which patriarchal figures offer monetary rewards to characters who actually possess it. As these scenes reveal new bases of wealth—trade rather than the inherited property of gentlemen—better characters reap the benefits. Yet Sheridan remains ambivalent about luxury, compelling Lady Teazle to retrench while rewarding Charles in spite of his excesses. Framed by the activities of the Scandal School, these plots mirror the cultural work of the comedy itself, in which Sheridan, also manager of the Drury Lane Theatre in his first season, sought money for his representation of sensibility, artfully embedded in a satire of slander. In *The Wealth of Nations*, published the year before, Adam Smith speaks of money as "the great wheel of circulation, the great instrument of commerce," which "makes a part and a very valuable part of the capital . . . of the society to which it belongs."³ Smith's trope helps us appreciate how much the characters and performances of Sheridan's play depend on circulation, not only on the circulation of money (between nations, between generations, between spouses and brothers, between tradesmen and customers, between audiences and manager), but also on the circulation of scandal, cultural capital, and celebrity, especially the celebrity of the actress who first portrayed Lady Teazle.

Living in a fashionable square in the West End, Lady Teazle becomes an eager consumer, risks seduction by the supposed "Man of Sentiment," and faces commodification as an item of scandal in periodicals. Sir Peter, reviewing his

* James E. Evans is Professor of English at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. He is the author of *Comedy: An Annotated Bibliography of Theory and Criticism* and numerous articles on drama and fiction of the long eighteenth century, including a chapter in *Henry Fielding in Our Time* (2008).

wife's extravagance, contrasts her "humbler Style" as "the Daughter of a plain country Squire," with her new splendor.⁴ According to him, she "never knew Luxury beyond one silk Gown nor Dissipation above the annual Gala of a Race-Ball"; now she "plays her Part in all the extravagant Fopperies of the Fashion and the Town with as ready a Grace as if she had never seen a Bush nor a grass Plat out of Grosvenor-Square" (371). While the lady embraces her new role and insists that "I'm sure I'm not more extravagant than a woman of Fashion ought to be," her husband complains of her expenses as "unmeaning Luxury" (373).⁵ The Teazles' words bring them directly into the eighteenth-century discourse about luxury, which Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger identify as "the defining issue of the early modern period." Luxury "gradually lost its former associations with corruption and vice, and came to include production, trade and the civilising impact of superfluous commodities," but the opposition of vices to "modern comfort and convenience, enjoyment and sociability, taste, aesthetics and refinement" continued throughout the "luxury debates."⁶ Sheridan's characters occupy an amusing space within these debates, with one espousing the more traditional view and the other challenging it, in the name of fashion and taste. As Sir Peter and Lady Teazle recollect her participation in a rural economy—"My daily occupation to inspect the Dairy, superintend the Poultry, make extracts from the Family Receipt book" (374)—her purchases contribute to the consumer economy that appalls her husband.

When the Teazles quarrel, Sheridan establishes the basis for sentimental reconciliation and frames this possibility in monetary terms. Sir Peter observes his wife's "great good-humour" in Act 3, Scene 1, telling her how well it disposes him, and she agrees:

Lady Teazle. I want you to be in charming sweet Temper at this moment—do be good humour'd now—and let me have two hundred Pounds will you?

Sir Peter. Two hundred-Pounds—! what an't I to be in a good humour without paying for it—but speak to me thus—and efaith [sic] there's nothing I could refuse you. You shall have it—but seal me a bond for the repayment—

Lady Teazle. O no—there my Note of Hand will do as well—

Sir Peter. [kissing her hand] And you shall no longer reproach me with not giving you an independent settlement—I mean shortly to surprise you (391-92).

Since she offers her hand as security for his monetary gift, this gesture may suggest insincerity. Reminiscing about courtship lasts only moments, until Sir Peter's epithet for his wife, "unfeeling," signals the downturn in their sentimental economy. That all changes in Act 4, Scene 3, during which Lady Teazle hides behind a screen in Joseph's library. After Sir Peter's arrival, she hears him tell Joseph of his intention to complete a settlement: "Here my Friend are the Draughts

of two Deeds . . . by one—She will enjoy eight hundred a year independent while I live—and by the other the Bulk of my Fortune after my Death" (416). When Lady Teazle's presence is finally revealed, she does not confirm the hypocrite's lies, but declares: "I do not Expect you to credit me—but the Tenderness you express'd for me when I am sure you could not think I was a witness to it, has penetrated to my Heart and had I left the Place without the Shame of this discovery—my future Life should have Spoke the sincerity of my Gratitude" (422).

Sir Peter's rhetoric and his deeds (in the sense of acts as well as documents) convert Lady Teazle to gratitude and sincerity, hallmarks of sensibility, and confirm her emotional title to the settlements, which are assured in Act 5. Here Sheridan demonstrates, as John Mullan finds typical in sentimental literature, that he is "committed to the resources of a language of feeling for the purpose of representing necessary social bonds."⁷ In addition, the word "credit" has more than one connotation, both a matter of belief and valuation. As Lisa A. Freeman points out, Sheridan's plots are shaped by the assumption that character is "the base currency of, and an essential source of credit and value in, the social economy of eighteenth-century polite culture."⁸ To have credit, however, Lady Teazle must demonstrate good character through sensibility.

While Lady Teazle is hiding, Joseph admits that a woman is present in the room to keep husband and wife separate. He calls her "a little French Millener" (417), a suggestive identification in the context of Lady Teazle's view of luxury; a French milliner would be a shopkeeper necessary to a lady of fashion. According to Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, trade manuals conveyed a mixed message about this type of businesswoman, seen either as "a refined yet lucrative profession" or a person of likely "sexual promiscuity." For example, one contemporary author calls millinery "a most genteel Business for Young Maidens that are Proficient at their Needle, especially if they be naturally neat, and of a Courteous Behaviour"; another finds millinery shops "the vast Resort of young Beaus and Rakes," which "exposes young creatures to many Temptations, and insensibly debauches their Morals," thus leading so many to prostitution that "it ought to be the last shift a young Creature is driven to."⁹ The "little French Millener" functions so well as a stand-in for Lady Teazle because "British culture projected onto the female subject both its fondest wishes for the transforming power of consumerism and its deepest anxieties about the corrupting influences of goods."¹⁰ Her being French would only increase such negative expectations. For Gillian Russell, the irony is that Lady Teazle and the French milliner are "disturbingly similar" in that both "partake in the same transformatory and inventive social performance of fashion, rendering their class status and sexual morality problematic."¹¹

Sheridan has another story to tell about this woman of fashion and the actress for whom he wrote the role, Frances Abington. The "little French Millener" may have begun as an inside joke. Drury Lane's leading comic actress, Abington

had in her youth been an assistant to a French milliner, as well as a cook maid and a flower girl. She had later been associated with the millinery trade because of the Abington Cap, in vogue during her Dublin career. In London, "the public found Mrs. Abington delicious . . . Everything she did or said was remarked, especially by women when clothes were concerned. What she dictated, duchesses and dairy maids adopted." A contemporary observer reports that she spent "a good part of the day in running about London, to give advice on the dresses and new fashions. She is consulted like a Physician and fee'd in the handsomest manner."¹² Sheridan must have delighted in casting the fashionable actress and fashion consultant, who had once assisted a milliner, as a lady of fashion alleged to be a woman in the same business. As a professional woman, the actress, like the milliner, faced public suspicion about her virtue. According to Felicity Nussbaum, "the boundary between theatre and life, public and private, was remarkably supple, especially in regard to women's sexuality. The very vagueness of the demarcation between public and intimate knowledge often heightened the actresses' marketability as the audience held both together in their imagination."¹³ Joseph R. Roach finds Abington one of the century's notable possessors of "It," his generic term for "properties shared by abnormally interesting people," which always involves "that strange magnetism which attracts both sexes."¹⁴ For example, Sir Joshua Reynolds painted her in one of her most famous parts, the ingénue Miss Prue in William Congreve's *Love for Love*; for Roach, the sexually suggestive portrait "trades on the well-known circumstances" of Abington's life.¹⁵ Like gossip about her private life, the painting only enhanced her celebrity. Russell judges her role as Lady Teazle to be Abington's "apotheosis," in which "the theatricality of the fine lady and the actress's celebrity seemed to meet."¹⁶

In preparing the public for *The School for Scandal*, Sheridan traded on these qualities. Even while writing the new part, he featured Abington prominently in his "most daring innovation" in the Drury Lane season; he revived three Congreve comedies in November and December of 1776 as reminders to audiences that wit could be integral to comedy, though he reduced the plays' sexual elements through judicious cutting.¹⁷ Sheridan returned to the stage *The Old Bachelor* (which was last performed in 1758) and *Love for Love* (not staged since 1771 at Drury Lane), and repeated *The Way of the World* from the previous season.¹⁸ While circulating this cultural capital, he assigned Abington a leading part in each play, among which was Miss Prue. In the Epilogue to *The School for Scandal* Abington had to declare "Lady Teazle's occupation's o'er!" and, in character, lament her return to the country, where she will "Save money—when I just knew how to waste it! / Leave London—just as I began to taste it!" (442-43). Abington, of course, remained there to profit from added celebrity in this role, her character a sentimental convert from luxury, just as Sheridan benefited financially from her performances. He constructed a season by using the fashionable actress to make his play the new

theatrical fashion.

The Surface family represents a different, masculinist version of the relationship between sensibility and economy. The elder brother Joseph has a reputation for virtue, while the town scoffs at Charles's prodigality. Their benefactor Sir Oliver, absent in India for sixteen years, returns with a plan to test them. While the Surfaces are an ancient family—Charles speaks of portraits going "up to the Conquest" (404)—Sheridan identifies Sir Oliver as "the little honest nabob" (408), a term that marks his wealth as other than inherited property. For all the "old Plate" and "Family Race cups" sold by Charles (402), the uncle's Indian enterprises fund the twelve thousand pounds sent to his nephews as "Bullion!—Rupees!—Pagodas!" (425). The "devilish rich Uncle in the East Indies," from whom Charles claims "the greatest Expectations" (401), wants to bestow riches wisely as he facilitates the family's transition from one paradigm of wealth to another.

In the early 1770s, according to Daniel O'Quinn, the East India Company came under intense parliamentary scrutiny following recognition that "decisions of some Company officials were made with their private interests in mind to the detriment of that of the Company or the nation, a subject of intense concern in the metropole." O'Quinn makes a crucial point: "That concern was concretized by the figure of the 'nabob,' a term applied to recently returned Company officials whose massive private fortunes were seen to be destabilizing the fabric of metropolitan life."¹⁹ In his analysis of Samuel Foote's comedy *The Nabob* (1772), he argues that Sir Matthew Mite "encapsulated the anxieties of an entire nation" by serving as "a composite portrait of various East India Company agents who had returned to London fabulously rich and proceeded to destabilize both the domestic economy and the aristocracy's firm grip on fashionable society."²⁰ While *The Nabob* satirizes a negative example, Sheridan "substantially refines Foote's critique," in O'Quinn's view, by making Sir Oliver "the play's moral arbiter," whose "ability to reward Charles Surface for his moral worth depends upon his prior Indian service."²¹ Mita Choudhury, examining Sir Oliver's part in the play's "benign materialism," calls him its "moral and sentimental core."²² As an "honest nabob," Sir Oliver also recapitulates the benevolent international trader of sentimental literature, who originated with characters like Sir Andrew Freeport in *The Spectator*. According to Gillian Skinner, the British Merchant is a key character type in sentimental fictions, who combines "the 'aristocratic' virtues of nobility, courage and honour with the middle-class trading qualities of frugality, probity, and industry"; he mediates "the best aspects of the upper and middle classes by shedding . . . both aristocratic luxury and bourgeois self interest."²³ Sir Oliver is such a figure, who overlooks the extravagance of one nephew and leaves his friend Sir Peter to curtail feminine excesses of consumerism.

Because Sheridan is vague about Sir Oliver's wealth, he risked evoking

anxiety about its origin, like that described by Sir Matthew Mite in *The Nabob*: “Nowadays, riches possess, at least, one magical power, that, being rightly dispensed, they closely conceal the source from whence they proceeded.”²⁴ Having reported Sir Oliver’s dispensing riches to his nephews, the play accents his participation in a mercantilist economy through two disguises—merchant and money lender—which connect his wealth to more familiar metropolitan figures. The first is Mr. Stanley, who is “nearby related to [his nephews] by their mother . . . once a merchant in Dublin . . . ruined by a series of undeserved misfortunes” (387). If the Surface estate goes back to the Norman Conquest on the father’s side, trade affects the family’s recent history; Joseph and Charles’s mother is possibly a merchant’s daughter. Sir Oliver uses this identity to contact both nephews; where Charles raises “a sum of money,” Joseph only provides “evasive promises” (387). Sir Oliver does not complete his Stanley role until Act 5. As soon as Charles receives eight hundred pounds for the family pictures, he sends a hundred to “poor” Stanley, whose “wants are pressing” (409). Joseph manages to “put a little Charity into my Face” (423), as he denies to the disguised Sir Oliver that he has the means to assist him. If sensibility includes, in Robert Markley’s phrase, “the affective spectacle of benign generosity,”²⁵ Sheridan’s scene inverts the expected performance.

Sir Oliver. If your Unkle Sir Oliver were here—I should have a Friend.

Surface. I wish He were Sir with all my Heart—you should not want an advocate with him believe me Sir—

Sir Oliver. I should not need one—my Distresses would recommend me—but I imagined—his Bounty had enabled you to become the agent of his Charity.

Surface. My dear Sir—you were strangely misinformed. Sir Oliver is a worthy man—a very worthy sort of Man—but—avarice Mr. Stanley is the vice of the age—I will tell you my good Sir—in confidence!—what—he has done for me has been a mere—nothing (424-25).

While Joseph’s ingratitude is significant, the dialogue turns more to his failure as a benevolent “agent” for Sir Oliver’s wealth.²⁶ As he rails about avarice, Joseph demonstrates a possessive individualism that is problematic. In soliloquy he relates his reputation for “good Character” to precious metals: “The silver ore of pure Charity is an expensive article in the catalogue of a man’s good Qualities—whereas the sentimental French Plate I use instead of it, makes just as good a shew—and pays no tax” (426). His metaphors turn Sir Oliver into a kind of assayer, who tests his nephew’s “metal”; because it is inferior, Joseph loses credit with his uncle.

Sir Oliver’s test of Charles necessitates a second disguise, Mr. Premium,

identified as “a Gentleman from the city . . . formerly a Broker” (389). In this role Sir Oliver visits Charles with the money lender Moses, “a friendly Jew . . . the honest Israelite” (388), who coaches his uncle on the strategies of usury. Various characters—Sir Peter, Sir Oliver, Rowley, Charles, and Careless—accept Moses warmly, and despite talk of fifty percent interest, he has few stereotypical features of Jewish entrepreneurs, features that Foote evoked with Moses Mendoza and Nathan in *The Nabob* and Sheridan, through Isaac Mendoza in *The Duenna* (1775). After Sir Peter mockingly remarks: “A good Honest Trade you’re learning.” Sir Oliver replies without rancor: “Truly I think so—and not unprofitable” (390). As he did with wealth derived from India, Sheridan sentimentalizes the harsher aspects of this business and Jewish characterizations associated with it. He even has Sir Oliver consider being “able to pass for a Jew” (389).²⁷ Todd M. Endelman points out that the Jewish stereotype represented “unrestrained, morally unfettered, economic individualism”; instead, he argues, many prosperous Jews successfully participated in “the growth of a broad-based domestic consumer market” that “stimulated the demand for imports and thus intensified the need for the financial and brokerage services in which the Jewish elite specialized.”²⁸ While some plays used stage Jews to deflect anxiety about the market economy, Sheridan represents the new alliance between Moses and Sir Oliver.

The picture auction scene in Act 4 also focuses attention on a relatively new institution, the businesses established by James Christie and others at mid-century. Cynthia Wall describes their auctions as “increasingly popular as spectacle as well as opportunity,” as having “their own peculiar narratives and narrative structures . . . of social power and possibility. Any new order presupposes some sort of reconfiguration . . . of an older one.” Auctions involve “competitive redistribution,” while their catalogs manifest “the visible disintegration of a collection, a house, an estate, a family.”²⁹ Freeman associates *The School for Scandal* with comedy that “cast its eyes not on the vices of the aristocratic classes . . . but rather on the manners, follies, and concerns of the middling classes whose influence and power were in the ascendancy.”³⁰ Sheridan’s representation of social life attends to the transition from aristocratic to middling, and the picture auction epitomizes the change. As Sir Oliver uses his new wealth to buy back remaining objects of the family’s old wealth, he complains that it is “a rare Joke to Sell one’s Family by Auction,” and calls Charles “an unnatural Rogue!—an ex post facto Parricide!” (403, 405). To complete the analogy, Charles titles Careless “Mr. Auctioneer” and permits the latter to use the family tree “not only as a Hammer, but a Catalogue into the Bargain” (404, 405). At this point, he retains little more of his genteel past than the building that once belonged to his father; refashioning his estate depends on Sir Oliver’s liberality.³¹

Charles redeems his position by refusing to sell his uncle’s portrait. He declares, “No hang it, I’ll not part with poor Noll—The Old Fellow has been very

good to me, and Egad I'll keep his Picture" (407). Sir Oliver declares Charles "A Dear extravagant Rogue!" (408); by play's end, he is his uncle's heir, soon to marry the heiress Maria. When Sir Oliver reveals his disguise, Charles affirms his "warmest satisfaction" in being reunited with his "liberal Benefactor" and expresses gratitude (437). Old fashioned feelings merit new money as this nephew fulfills Rowley's prediction that he "may yet be a Credit to his Family" (385). Moreover, Sheridan's representation of Charles's extravagance differs from his critique of Lady Teazle's luxury. Sir Oliver declares that he prefers Charles's "great Piece of Extravagance" in buying his father's house, inherited by Joseph, to the latter's "oeconomy [sic] in selling it to him" (395). Admitting that he and his brother were not "very prudent youths," Sir Oliver states that "if Charles has done nothing false or mean I shall compound for his extravagance" (385). While Charles admits he is "an Extravagant young Fellow" (400), the pleasures he enjoys — drinking and gambling — are traditionally those of gentlemen.³² Because they do not provoke the anxiety of Lady's Teazle's consumerism, Sheridan exhibits the "ambivalence towards women's pursuit of consumer pleasures" that G. J. Barker-Benfield finds characteristic of "the culture of sensibility."³³ Charles's generosity to "Mr. Stanley" and affection for "old Noll" trump his vices and make immediate reform unnecessary.

Before and after Sir Oliver's tests and the Teazles' disagreements, the play features two scenes that feature prominent purveyors of scandal, Lady Sneerwell and Snake. This lady, who takes pleasure from "reducing others, to the Level of my own injured Reputation," is an artist of scandal, capable of "delicacy of Hint —and mellowness of sneer" (360). She befriends Joseph out of "mutual interest," while, as a female libertine, she "would sacrifice—everything" for Charles (361). Lady Sneerwell's School includes Mrs. Candour, Crabtree, Sir Benjamin Backbite, and Joseph, all "People of Rank and Fortune" (376), and Sheridan describes their dispersal of scandal explicitly as circulation. One of Lady Sneerwell's first questions to Snake is this: "Did you circulate the Report of Lady Brittle's Intrigue with Captain Boastall?" (359). Lady Teazle later complains that "Lady Sneerwell has circulated I don't know how many Scandalous Tales of me" (411). Mrs. Candour, who remarks on another story "circulated last month," summarizes the desired effect of this process: "Why to be sure a Tale of Scandal is as fatal to the Credit of a prudent Lady of her Stamp as a Fever is generally to those of the strongest Constitutions" (365, 368). A coin stamped with the image of a prudent woman cannot sustain its worth amid the circulation of false reports. Even an older man faces such prospects. Sir Peter, who resents being "paragraph'd—in the news-Papers," calls Lady Sneerwell and her friends "coiners of Scandal" (371, 376); Joseph expects that he "will hold his tongue for his own credit sake" (435). The assumption of the School, that self-interest rules the metropolis in this as in other matters, necessitates Sheridan's exposure of them. Act 5, Scene 2, in which

these characters cannot sort out the facts of the screen scene, satirizes their efforts to circulate absurdly false reports.

Unlike Lady Sneerwell, Snake is a professional, for whom scandal is commerce. He "inserts" paragraphs in publications; of one acquaintance he reports, "I have more than once traced her causing a Tête-à-Tête in the Town and Country Magazine—when the Parties perhaps have never seen each other's Faces before" (359). His misinformation circulates in the very profitable *Town and Country Magazine*, which had "monthly sales at 2,000-3,000, with a readership of double that figure," placing it slightly "below the market leader, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, but ahead of the more specialized and salacious periodicals such as the *Rambler's Magazine*." It published the *tête-à-tête* series, including visual and verbal summaries of scandal, for more than 24 years, a lengthy period that indicates profiting from these articles "clearly outweighed" possible libel costs.³⁴ As an entrepreneur, Snake finally refuses to be complicit with Lady Sneerwell. He explains why: "I beg your Ladyship—ten thousand Pardons, you paid me extremely Liberally for the Lie in question—but I have unfortunately been offer'd double to speak the Truth" (439). Here Sheridan parodies the play's sentimental economies, by rewarding Snake for his "good Deed," prior to the truth telling (440). Unlike Lady Teazle or Charles, Snake does not want anyone to know about this action, for he thrives "by the Badness of my Character" (440). As a merchant of scandal, Snake leaves such theatrics to others; his income depends on the traffic in reputations that allowed periodicals like the *Town and Country Magazine* to flourish.

In this context it is not surprising that David Garrick's Prologue gently mocks Sheridan for trying to curtail scandal:

Proud of your Smiles once lavishly bestow'd
Again our young Don Quixote takes the road:
To shew his Gratitude—he draws his pen,
And seeks this Hydra—Scandal in Its den

.....
For your applause, all perils he would through,
He'll *fight*, that's *write*, a Cavalliero true,
Till Ev'ry drop of Blood, that's Ink, is spilt for *You* (356).

Garrick's image of the quixotic author fosters one version of the play's cultural work, while it acknowledges that Sheridan wrote for "applause," properly grateful for "Smiles" bestowed on his earlier plays. Seeking again to please audiences with *The School for Scandal*, the author satisfied himself as a manager though public attention and ticket receipts.

Given the play's attention to sensibility and its rewards, Sheridan exercises a certain sleight of hand. By title and framing plot, a satirist of scandal, he flatters audiences, through laughter, with their sense of superiority to the Scandal School;

at the same time, he provides a sentimental critique of wit spoken by Sir Peter and Maria. The former tells Lady Sneerwell that “true wit is more nearly allied to good Nature than your Ladyship is aware of” (381). Similarly, the young heiress asserts, “if to raise malicious smiles at the infirmities and misfortunes—of those who have never injured us be the province or wit or Humour Heav’n grant me a double Portion of Dullness” (382-83). These speeches put Maria and Sir Peter, like Lady Teazle and Charles, squarely on the side of sensibility and inform Sheridan’s rebalancing of the wit found in Congreve’s comedies, with which his play was immediately compared, as he hoped by presenting three revivals earlier in the season.³⁵ Very appropriately, Abington, famous for her Congreve characters, finally dissociates herself from the latter’s wit. Her character asks Lady Sneerwell to inform the School that “Lady Teazle Licentiate—begs leave to return the Diploma they granted her—as she leaves off Practice, and kills Characters no longer” (439). In a delicious irony, Abington turned her back on one aspect of the comedies that had helped create her celebrity.³⁶

In his first season at Drury Lane the young playwright proved to be an astute manager, who, like his more amiable characters, profited from sensibility. After preparing audiences with versions of old comedies, he gave them something new to consume, and they consumed it eagerly. Like the periodicals that circulated scandal, those that published reviews of *The School for Scandal* in May 1777 contributed to this process. For example, in *The Gazetteer* a reviewer wrote: “The piece abounds with manly sentiments, intirely divested of affectation, and which are conveyed to the heart through the purest channels of wit”; he concludes, “if any author has the right to dispute Congreve’s royal supremacy, it is the writer of *The School for Scandal*.” The reviewer for *The London Evening Post* praises the play’s new synthesis: “Mr. Sheridan, who, at the same time he indulges his Muse in all the flights of wit and fancy, restrains it within the pale of decency and morals.”³⁷ Such reviews brought in money. If Sheridan’s average profits per night at Drury Lane during the season were not quite as high as those of the rival patent house at Covent Garden (£191 versus £212), “the real money-maker,” according to Mark S. Auburn, was *The School for Scandal*, which averaged £233 over twenty nights, “fairly remarkable so late in the season”; it also primed the next season by earning a “stunning” £255 nightly in forty-five performances.³⁸ To his management of sentimental economies in *The School for Scandal* Sheridan owed no small part of this success. Choudhury observes that “Sheridan’s play and ‘its material conditions of possibility’—amidst which its popularity was embedded—are, in fact, inextricable, for the one is part of the other; the play, in other words, is part of the discourse that it embodies.”³⁹ The play’s circulation of money and scandal and the initial production’s circulation of cultural capital and celebrity are part of one discourse that represented a market model of value as it merged the rhetorics of economy and sensibility.

Notes

1. Mary Poovey, *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 1-2.
2. Gillian Skinner, *Sensibility and Economics in the Novel, 1740-1800: The Price of a Tear* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999), 2. Markman Ellis observes that “Sensibility was one of the tools of a thorough-going and self-conscious analysis of the emergent consumer-economy of British society and culture. Sensibility was drawn into, and helped define, an increasingly open debate that identified and analysed these problems” (*The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 17).
3. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 2 vols, R. H. Campbell, A. S. Skinner, and W. B. Todd, eds. (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1976), 1, 291.
4. *The School for Scandal*, in Volume 1 of *The Dramatic Works of Richard Brinsley Sheridan*, 2 vols, Cecil Price, ed. (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1973), 374. I cite subsequent quotations parenthetically.
5. Sheridan at one time conceived of Sir Peter as “silly Solomon,” who has “left off Trade” and been twice widowed (*The Origins of The School for Scandal*, Bruce Redford, ed [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press for Princeton University Library, 1986], 72, 74). In revising this character, he made Sir Peter “an Old Bachelor,” who is defensive about making his wife “a woman of Fashion, of Fortune, of Rank” (371, 375), and who thus sounds more like a wounded gentleman than a resentful tradesman.
6. Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger, “The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates,” in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, Berg and Eger, eds. (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave, 2003), 7.
7. John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1988), 2.
8. Lisa A. Freeman, “The Social Life of Eighteenth-Century Comedy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730-1830*, Jane Moody and Daniel O’Quinn, eds (Cambridge: UK Cambridge University Press, 2007), 76.
9. Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 121, 119, 120.
10. Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects*, 5.
11. Gillian Russell, *Women, Sociability and Theatre in Georgian London* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 209.
12. Philip H. Highfill, Jr., Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800*, 16 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973-93), 1: 18.
13. Felicity Nussbaum, “Actresses and the Economics of Celebrity, 1700-1800,” in *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660-2000*, Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody, eds (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave, 2005), 150.
14. Joseph R. Roach, *It* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 4.
15. Roach, *It*, 163. See also 186-87 for his discussion of Abington as one of “the historic Galateas of the English stage who flaunted It.”
16. Russell, *Women, Sociability*, 128.
17. Eric Rump, “Sheridan, Congreve and *The School for Scandal*,” in *Sheridan Studies*, James Morwood and David Crane, eds (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 58, 70.
18. Mark S. Auburn, “Theatre in the Age of Garrick and Sheridan,” in Morwood and Crane, *Sheridan Studies*, 39.
19. Daniel O’Quinn, *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800*

(Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 46.

20. O'Quinn, *Staging Governance*, 55. In *The Nabob* Lady Oldham, threatened by Sir Matthew, deplors the nabob's "scattering the spoils of ruined provinces" in a way that "corrupted the virtue and alienated the affections of all the old friends to the family" (*Plays by Samuel Foote and Arthur Murphy*, George Taylor, ed [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984], 84).

21. O'Quinn, "Theatre and Empire," in Moody and O'Quinn, *Cambridge Companion*, 238. Charles's phrase for Sir Oliver, "little honest nabob," stresses his differences from Sir Matthew Mite. It also reflects the play's problematic textual history, resulting from Sheridan's refusal to authorize publication. Following the Georgetown Crewe MS and other manuscript sources, Price includes the adjective "honest" in his edition. One of the three published texts he deems notable (Dublin, 1799), prints "little nabob." Two early, unauthorized printings (Dublin, 1782 and London, 1783) use another variant, "honest little nabob."

22. Mita Choudhury, "Sheridan, Garrick, and a Colonial Gesture: *The School for Scandal* on the Calcutta Stage," *Theatre Journal* 46 (1994): 319.

23. Skinner, *Sensibility and Economics*, 11.

24. Foote, *Plays*, 111.

25. Robert Markley, "Sentimentality as Performance: Shaftesbury, Sterne, and the Theatrics of Virtue," in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, Literature*, Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown, eds (New York: Methuen, 1987), 211. Markley calls money "the sentimentalist's medium of exchange, a palpable, materialist manifestation of good nature as a commodity" (210).

26. See Maaja A. Stewart, "Ingratitude in *Tom Jones*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 89 (1990): 512-32. Stewart contrasts the virtue of gratitude in the old order with its peril in a credit economy.

27. On the cultural implications of this trope, see Michael Ragussis, "Passing for a Jew, On Stage and Off: Stage Jews and Cross-Dressing Gentiles in Georgian England," *The Jews and British Romanticism: Politics, Religion, Culture*, Sheila A. Spector, ed (Houndmills, UK: Hampshire: Palgrave, 2005), 41-60. On stereotypes, see Abba Rubin, *Images in Transition: The English Jew in English Literature, 1660-1830* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1984).

28. Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 70-71, 48.

29. Cynthia Wall, "The English Auction: Narratives of Dismantlings," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 31 (1997): 10.

30. Freeman, "Social Life," 74.

31. In *Slavery, Colonialism, and Connoisseurship: Gender and Eighteenth-Century Literary Transnationalism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), Nandini Bhattacharya argues that "a system of invisible exchanges between moral and fiscal value—symbolic and commercial capital—is set up by the advent of Sir Oliver upon the British scene." She asserts that his "transfusion" of wealth "enables and triggers the auction scene's exchange mechanisms" (92). I remain less confident than Bhattacharya in "Charles' reformation from an auctioneer to a connoisseur" and thus skeptical of her view that "the colonial may indeed be effecting metropolitan reform" (108).

32. Charles expresses the older aristocratic code of gambling when he declares "I never lose—at least I never feel my losses which is exactly the same thing" (397). In *Enlightenment and the Shadows of Chance: The Novel and the Culture of Gambling in Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), Thomas M. Kavanagh points out that the gentleman, guided by conduct books, "never plays *only* to win money," but to demonstrate superior "prowess" (40-41).

33. G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 190.

34. Cindy McCreery, "Keeping up with the *Bon Ton*: the *Tête-à-Tête* Series in the *Town and Country Magazine*," in *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and*

Responsibilities, Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus, eds (London: Longman, 1997), 209, 212. The paragraphs that make Sir Peter anxious are likely those "inserted in columns of *The Morning Post*, which was London's first scandal sheet and the forerunner of the modern tabloid," begun in 1772 (John M. Picker, "Disturbing Surfaces: Representations of the Fragment in *The School for Scandal*," *English Literary History* 65 (1998): 641).

35. Sheridan revived Steele's *The Conscious Lovers*, once before and once during the Congreve revivals, perhaps to prepare audiences for his modifying comedy in the direction of sensibility. In a nice instance of continuity, the actor William Smith performed Bevil in *The Conscious Lovers* and Charles Surface in *School*.

36. For a different perspective, see James Thompson, "Sheridan, *The School for Scandal*, and Aggression," *Comparative Drama* 42 (2008): 89-98. He argues that the play "stages an indecisive contest between sophistication and simplicity, scandal and sentiment" (91).

37. Quoted in Rump, "Sheridan, Congreve," 68.

38. Auburn, "Theatre in the Age of Garrick," 39, 40.

39. Choudhury, "Sheridan, Garrick," 320. Choudhury argues for reading "the play as a product and the performances as a process . . . contextualized, among other arenas, within the unfolding economic structures of a given season or year." She adds that full understanding of plays as "economic products" is "partially obscured" if we do not consider "simultaneously, the economic forces that defined and created the London of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" (318).