IN 1778, SAMUEL JOHNSON was asked to weigh in on the prose of a new bourgeois tragedy, *The Female Gamester*. Its author, Gorges Edmond Howard, was a Dublin-based lawyer and literary dabbler whose attempt at domestic drama might have been wholly forgotten were it not for the fragment of Johnsoniana he preserved in its preface. Having originally written the play in a mixture of prose and verse, Howard had been advised by “several of [his] literary acquaintance” that his “not much exalted” prose was much more suitable to the “scene ... laid in private life, and chiefly among those of middling rank.” For many, it seems, the bourgeoisie suffered in prose. But Johnson, Howard recalls, would have none of this:

Having communicated this to Dr. Samuel Johnson, his words (as well as I remember) were, “That he could hardly consider a prose Tragedy as dramatic ... that let it be either in the middling or in low life, it may, though in metre and spirited, be properly familiar and colloquial; that, many in the middling rank are not without erudition; that they have the feelings and sensations of nature, and every emotion in consequence thereof, as well as the great, and that even the lowest, when impassioned, raise their language.”

Johnson’s argument tweaked the older, neoclassical assumption that poetic decorum mandates a correspondence between the language and social rank of a drama’s principal figures. Here a tragedy’s verse style has less to do with the nobility of those represented—as had been the case for John Dryden in *An Essay on Dramatick Poesie* (1668), where heroic rhyme’s “exalt[ation]...
above . . . common converse” images “the minds and fortunes of noble persons . . . exactly”—than with the intensity of the depicted afflictions. Tragedy needs verse not because its “elevation” allegorizes the status of its heroes, but because it corresponds to the magnitude of the drama’s subject matter, quite literally inscribing an emotional richness otherwise lost in the flatness of prose.

Johnson’s intervention plays out a mid-eighteenth-century discussion of the representation of emotion on the tragic stage, disclosing an unease with the degrading (if not also disenchanting) effects of prosaic suffering. Contemporaries in the period worried that prose was “fine and nervous,” disconcertingly “artless,” and “offensive,” while at the same time mere “trifling,” “below the dignity of Tragedy,” and even, for that reason, somehow “unnatural” in its expression. Consider, for example, that Johnson himself asserts that affliction “raises [one’s] language,” lapsing—naturally, he suggests—out of the grittiness of prose into the elegance of the poetic. A sort of poetry in the raw, suffering reaches after what’s already aesthetic and universal to misfortune, while prose trivializes and bogs down in the particular, rendering a tragedy “hardly dramatic,” untrue to the genre and affliction it purports to represent. Writing a few years later, Henry Mackenzie saw the genre’s strength as its ability to simulate those very same particulars, “the ordinary feelings and exertions of life” that nevertheless remained in tension with the tragic. In his view, suffering of this sort was if anything too true, its realism overburdening one’s perception. “Real distress, coming in a homely and unornamented state,” he concludes, “disgusts the eye.” Obscuring its art with disturbing efficacy, the outward formlessness of prosaic suffering threatened to neutralize the pleasures of the tragic.

These concerns spoke to a moment of renewed interest in bourgeois and domestic tragedy, capping a period of formal experimentation in Britain, France, and Germany that Peter Gay claims was crucial to the Enlightenment’s “emancipation of art.” Beginning around the production of George Lillo’s landmark 1731 tragedy The London Merchant, a series of important works fashioned a new aesthetic idiom calibrated to “the ordinary feelings and exertions of life” by working through varieties of verse, prose, and the visual arts. Scholars have long cited Denis Diderot’s Le Fils naturel (1757) and Discours sur la poésie dramatique (1757) as well as G. E. Lessing’s Miss Sara Sampson (1755), Hamburgische Dramaturgie (1767–69), and Emilia Galotti (1772) as key moments in the drama’s modernization. But a variety of lesser-known works such as Charles Johnson’s prose Caelia; or The Perjur’d Lover (1732), Lillo’s 1736 encore to The London Merchant, Fatal Curiosity (which contemporaries claimed produced domestic interiors to horrifying effect in the cramped Little Haymarket theater), and Trauerspiele like Clementina von Poretta (1760; by Christoph Martin Wieland) and Clarissa (Johann
Heinrich Steffens’s 1765 dramatization of Samuel Richardson’s novel played with the representational mechanics of what one might call “ordinary suffering,” inhabiting familiar spaces and embodied emotion in ways that contemporaries took to be radical departures from established tragic convention. Among the most revolutionary of these innovations was the sustained use of prose, which until then had been largely confined to the domain of comedy. Indeed, in London, the 1770s and '80s alone saw the production and publication of a number of prose tragedies, including notable revivals of *The London Merchant* and Edward Moore’s *The Gamester* (1753), curious adaptations such as *The Fatal Interview* (1782; a domestic tragic sequel to *Pamela*), quasi-gothic meditations on domestic violence like Richard Cumberland’s *The Mysterious Husband* (1783), as well as *drames bourgeois* in the form of Diderot’s 1758 *Le Père de famille* (translated “by a lady” as *The Family Picture* in 1781) and Louis-Sébastien Mercier’s *L’Indigent* (1772; translated in London and Edinburgh as *The Distressed Family* in 1787).

Despite the concerns of those like Johnson and Mackenzie, by the latter half of the century, a deft use of prose on the stage could render the theater uncannily intimate, calling forth a space where private woe played out for all to see.

In what follows, I want to explore the affective stakes of this turn to prosaic suffering. Or rather more precisely, I want to trace a line through the contested process by which suffering became prosaic in eighteenth-century bourgeois and domestic drama in order to draw some implications for the history of emotion and the dialectics of realism at midcentury. My claim is that the emergence of prosaic suffering on the period’s tragic stage helps to imagine modern forms of affliction, thereby navigating a range of confessedly “ordinary” feelings by evoking and engaging and testing them across page and stage. Unlike the “heroick suffering” of classical, pathetic, or otherwise “high” tragic forms prevalent at the earlier part of the century, prosaic suffering performed its grief with troubling immediacy and a raw intensity, in ways that were personal and familiar, absorptive rather than theatrical, and provocatively disenchanted in their implications. Prosaic suffering presents the tragic figure as an emblem of abandonment, in which (as Georg Lukács claimed of the novel) everyday life is experienced as simultaneously leaden and trivial. I anchor my discussion in a close reading of Moore’s *The Gamester*, a drama whose importance to the development of realism was well known in the eighteenth century, and whose use of prose at midcentury tracks this shift in suffering most clearly, though by no means exclusively (as will become clear). Adapting the novel’s “writing to the moment” for the theater (a method almost certainly absorbed in Moore’s reading of *Clarissa* and correspondence with Richardson on the novel’s formal effects), prose conferred a lively presence upon the performance.
of suffering, in ways that denied its spectators the sort of rhetorical elevation that stood in for transcendence. In making this case, therefore, I place the practices of British bourgeois tragedy in dialogue with contemporary performance and aesthetic theory so as to reconstruct the terrain of emotion’s exploration onstage. If, as one critic has claimed, versification serves to beautify the experience of suffering, prose insists on its crude intolerability, its reality and resistance to poetic gilding.

In recent years, several scholars working across the humanities and social sciences have attempted to triangulate a new approach to affects associated with realism and the ordinary. Yet despite this renewed attention, the staging of prosaic suffering in the eighteenth century remains curiously untheorized—a fact all the more puzzling given the importance of those same analytical categories to discussions of the novel’s development over the period. In fact, the mixed record of prose on the tragic stage offers an instructive comparison with one influential account of the early novel, where realist fiction—often defined by an increasing attentiveness to the prosaic as mediated through the prosaic—arises as the literary arm of a middle class demanding to be taken seriously. Franco Moretti’s recent distant reading of bourgeois culture, for example, draws on the insights of Lukács, Erich Auerbach, and Northrop Frye, noting that the middling sort come into their own precisely by a relentless unfolding of prose. According to this tradition, the realist novel plots out the instrumentalization of the world, its great authors (Moretti cites Daniel Defoe, J. W. von Goethe, George Eliot, Gustave Flaubert) cataloging the opaque materiality of things, their prose running over so many descriptions of impenetrable surface. Prose demythologizes and eschews the allegorical, in this account, refusing to yield us metaphysical depth, trading an “epic significance that has been lost” for more and more detail. As Auerbach put it in Mimesis, modernity oversees the creation of a type of “formless tragedy,” a realism defined more than anything else by “the serious treatment of everyday reality” in which, for its middling figures, “nothing happens, but that nothing has become a heavy, oppressive, threatening something.” From this vantage point at least, many of the concerns raised in eighteenth-century Britain concerning prose tragedy’s formlessness would seem to have been spot-on: too prosaic, too real, and art forecloses the cathartic.

My argument sees a similar effect (or is it not, rather, affect?) at work in mid-eighteenth-century stage tragedy, though in ways manifestly different from the novel’s descriptive leveling in prose. Rather, prosaic suffering enacts the paralyzing in-betweenness Auerbach detects in the realist novel through its staged experimentation in tableaux, dramatizing a world poised between elevation and mediocrity, between profound meaning and the senselessness of one’s suffering, between art and nonart. The middlingness
of its form, in other words, goes hand-in-hand with that of the ambivalent feeling it performs and reduplicates onstage. In building this case, therefore, I turn most of my attention to the materiality of those emotional practices forged by their performance in prose. Following the insights of ethnohistorian Monique Scheer, who urges theorists of feeling to think of emotion as “practices” that both rely upon and shape the sort of deep cultural memory Pierre Bourdieu termed “habitus,” I take emotion to be a kind of “body knowledge,” entangled in modes of enactment that undergo continual stylistic negotiation in the voice, body, and gestures of the actor in theatrical space. “Situated” within historical “schemes of perception, thought, and action,” the body materializes an ongoing story of emotion in every feeling it performs. Prosaic suffering thus not only drew upon the familiarity of its linguistic form but also brought its uniquely modern character into being, offering up a style of affliction for the era’s tragedy that was at once recognizable and new. Or as Frye recognized some time ago: “One of the curious facts of literary history is that M. Jourdain’s celebrated discovery [in Molière’s Le Bourgeois gentilhomme (1670), that he—a bourgeois—was speaking in prose] in fact is a discovery.” For Frye, prose is the medium through which the middling feel their way into the world, but it is also a quality of the world left in the wake of these processes. My claim is similar: that prosaic suffering comes into its own in the process of trying its emotion onstage, and this is something achieved in the era’s bourgeois tragedy.

Though today The Gamester is seldom read, Moore’s 1753 drama was once among the most popular eighteenth-century plays in the repertory. A modest success at its Drury Lane debut, the drama would go on to exert a profound influence on Diderot, who translated it in 1760 (the first French translation of what would be a very successful play on the Continent), as well as Lessing, whose decisive theorization of bourgeois tragedy drew upon the practical insights of both Lillo and Moore. Versions in German, Dutch, Spanish, and Italian followed soon after. Established as a stock piece following its celebrated 1771 London revival, no other Restoration or eighteenth-century tragedy saw more performances over the next century, a fact perhaps unsurprising given its interest in the vicissitudes of a middle class eager to be seen as having arrived. Its plot warns of the Beverley household’s downfall and depicts the emotional distress of its namesake and his wife as the former gambles away their assets and the family becomes increasingly destitute. Having been encouraged in his gaming by his erstwhile friend, sometime financial partner, and eventual betrayer, Stukeley, Beverley leverages what remains of his wealth in a desperate attempt to keep creditors at bay. Stukeley’s plan, Beverley learns only too late, involves a confederacy of sharpers in collusion, so that Stukeley can despoil what’s left
of his friend’s estate, especially his charming wife. Actresses who played Mrs. Beverley were given plenty to chew on in the role: she pleaded, assured, and affectionately forgave her husband for his many lapses of judgment, begging him to forgo the risks inherent in the gaming world and return to the pious stability of bourgeois life. This stability is illusory, however, and the pressures of maintaining their home in the face of its precariousness mark that space as little refuge, and its matriarch as deludedly sanguine as her husband. Ultimately, Mrs. Beverley’s entreaties prove fruitless as despair takes over the destitute gambler, whose debts are piling up and options running out. In the play’s closing scenes, Beverley poisons himself while awaiting his fate in prison, against the council of his wife and his sister, Charlotte, moments before the drama’s plot is unraveled and set aright by Charlotte’s suitor, Lewson, who condemns Stukeley to a life of “un pity’d Misery” (269.7).

Moore’s play brings to mind the desperate final scenes of early modern domestic plays like The Yorkshire Tragedy (1608), where the family patriarch’s debts provoke an attempt at their murder-suicide. More likely, however, The Gamester drew its inspiration from a much later domestic piece, Aaron Hill’s 1721 tragedy The Fatal Extravagance, whose plot figured the collapse of South Sea Company investment (a wound still fresh at the play’s April debut) in a series of tropes exposing the middling sort’s twin fascination with gambling and commercial speculation. Sedimenting its topicality into the beats of the plot, Moore repurposes Hill’s fable in order to talk about the risks that accompany middle-rank aspiration and bourgeois life. Much like the principal figures in the older play, Beverley’s skeptical, pseudo-aristocratic Epicureanism jostles against a belated desire to believe in the providential and the simple pleasures of home, voiced by women like Mrs. Beverley and Charlotte, whose suffering is moralized with the kind of fear and trembling that usually indicates that belief’s tenuousness. Nevertheless, The Gamester differs rather radically from its source material in one crucial respect: Moore’s use of prose broke with Hill’s conventional blank verse in order to represent the failed bourgeois with an increased sensitivity and realism. In this way, the former drew upon Lillo’s fateful artistic choices in The London Merchant, strengthening the bond between prose as a formal stylistics and the prosaic as a middling mode of existence. Indeed, as Moore was to argue in the 1756 preface to the play, The Gamester “was intended to be a natural Picture” of the tragic, one that worked “[b]y adapt[ing] its Language to the Capacities and Feelings of every Part of the Audience” (204). At once average and universal, the prosaic imagines bourgeois drama as an art form akin to realist portraiture, a “natural Picture” in which ordinary suffering plays out in familiar language and gestures.

I’ll offer a close reading of how the text might enact this in just a moment. But here it’s worth noting that The Gamester formed part of a constellation of
works that sought to rethink depictions of the ordinary in the years that spanned bourgeois tragedy’s most intense development. I mentioned the novel in this respect earlier, but the era’s realist art developed by emulating and refining techniques across other disciplines as well. Moore’s pictorial metaphor, to take an important example, calls to mind the absorptive aesthetic famously identified by Michael Fried as a feature of mid-eighteenth-century art. For Fried, absorption’s central antitheatrical conceit—that the world depicted in the art object is cordoned off from that of the beholder’s—imagines the commonplace (a child thumbing a book, a girl pondering flowers, a family attending its patriarch) as scenes of intense libidinal investment for both viewer and subject, truer or more authentic in its expression of feeling because unobserved. Real feeling is what happens when no one is watching, or at least when that fiction can be carefully maintained. Prose was one way to achieve this, as Diderot realized, its rough simplicity standing in for truth, performing a scene that was self-contained, seemingly unconcerned with the spectatorial pleasures of rhyme and meter. Not unlike the celebrated genre scenes that were models of honesty and domestic intimacy for the philosophe, the prosaic’s ability to mimic middling feeling seemed to offer a new approach to the ordinary, one in which the veil of mediation was dramatically reconceived.

The aesthetics of prose tragedy, however, also found a contemporary analogue in the era’s performance theory, which, like absorption, owed much to Diderot’s pioneering influence and fateful encounter with British drama in the 1750s and ’60s. Joseph Roach has demonstrated, for instance, that the period between Diderot’s *Entretiens sur le fils naturel* in 1757 and his *Le paradoxe sur le comédien*, sixteen years later, saw a paradigmatic shift in the way performance theory was conceived, a shift that has decisively shaped our subsequent ideas about theatrical naturalism by merging diverse currents of Enlightened physiology, aesthetic theory, and vitalism. The reigning paradigm, prior to this synthesis, was one that saw the actor’s body as inspired and sensibly inflamed by the emotions called up in the drama. As Roach clarifies: “The [older] rhetoric of the passions literally incorporated the audience into the performance event. The fiery spirits, emanating from the eyes of the spectator, flowed across the intervening space and penetrated the eyes of the spectator, linking their emotions physically.” Powerful though inconsistent, feeling moved between actor-orators and the audience their “turned out” bodies clearly acknowledged.

The new naturalist aesthetic, on the contrary, saw the performer’s body as a technical instrument, subject to physical law, in which a complex “semiotics of affect” was open to analysis and consistently reproducible onstage. Crucially, according to Diderot, this mechanical regularity depended on the actor’s ability “to overcome the influence of sensibility... [and] to discipline
his gestures and expression to the threshold at which their sensible content ceases to register on his consciousness.” What distinguished the genius’s performance from that of mediocre acting was an explicit deemphasis of theatrical ornamentation and elevation, bringing the intensity of the moment under the control of embodied habitual techniques bound by a sort of affective memory. Rather like prose then, the actor became a sort of vanishing medium, one whose artifice rests on the ability to mimic the lack of artifice, to be both present and absent in the representation. Yet the ironies are thick here, for if this view imagines a performance of emotion brought wholly under the actor’s craft—which is to say, faked—that performance is no less grounded in the particularities of real experience, in the sedimented and habitualized corporeal feelings of one’s past. The “real distress” that unfolded onstage offered what seemed a naked rehearsal of past emotion, the “drapery of the figure” (as Mackenzie put it) lifted for all to see. Art mines the body’s history and places it on display, replacing depth with a technical, prosaic surface redolent of what Roland Barthes saw as l’effet de réel in the novel.

One way to conceive of this shift in performance theory is as a prosaification of the body, a disenchantment and naturalization of dramatic craft under the sign of the real. And in the British context at least, this sort of performatively practiced found a natural outlet in bourgeois dramaturgy like Moore’s. Actresses like Hannah Pritchard (the original Mrs. Beverley) and later, Sarah Siddons (for whom Mrs. Beverley was a signature role) were singled out for praise in their “natural” turns as bourgeois women, which is to say, versions of themselves. Early notices of Pritchard’s self-effacement in the role of the family matriarch, for example, underscored the remarkable subtlety of the actor’s artifice which, like the prose mediating its performance, seemed to hide in plain sight: “Nothing of herself appeared, but all the character.” Indeed, as one critic saw it, this kind of naturalism went hand-in-hand with absorption, playing with the uncanniness of the home’s interiors:

[She] gave a specimen of the most natural acting that had ever been seen. She did not appear to be conscious of an audience before her: She seemed to be a gentlewoman in domestic life, walking about in her own parlour, in the deepest distress, and overwhelmed with misery.

Another critic, recalling the disbelief of spectators whose first experience of the celebrated Siddons was in the middling role, remarked that those who came expecting the “pompous, buskined deportment … assumed by tragic actors … saw no cause to be smitten with her performance of this character in private life, because Mrs. Beverley, in her hands, was just what Mrs. Beverley should be, and in nothing either short of it, or beyond it.” Tautologies like...
these reproduced the logic of Moore’s prosaics and Diderot’s theorized appropriation of English stagecraft in the actual practices of actors on the stage. In a performance so “near . . . to the chastity of nature,” Siddons vanishes and becomes a bourgeois and prosaic type; in effect, the actors performing Moore’s play became one of those assembled to view it.30

But the fate of midcentury performance also converged decisively with that of Moore’s pictorial metaphor in what was to become the paradigmatic theatrical surface: in the Salons of 1767, Diderot imagined what we now know as acting’s fourth wall, an insight that—once we know to look for it—intersected decisively with the work being done on the English stage in the decade prior. Diderot’s celebrated insight— in which he “advised the dramatist to write the play as if the curtain had not been risen, as if the spectator did not exist”—codified the intuitions of prosaic suffering as it was coming to be practiced onstage, giving form and theoretical heft to The Gamester’s claim to depict ordinary suffering realistically.31 The fourth wall, after all, imagines theater as a species of absorption, its various scenes playing out according to a real time in which prose could be taken to be extemporaneous, the stuff of raw and unadulterated feeling seemingly untouched by the artificiality of verse. Following the influential work of prose tragedies such as The London Merchant and The Gamester, Moore’s “natural Picture” became, in Diderot’s mimeographic phrasing, “tableaux réels”—real pictures—and the rhetoric of prosaic authenticity was transmuted into a dramaturgy premised on twin conditions: “si naturelle et si vrai,” that is, the natural and the true.32 Over time, as one influential account of realism goes, the work begun here would result in the erosion of tragedy into le genre sérieux, “formless tragedy,” or in fact (as Fredric Jameson recently put it in relation to the novel) the collapse of classical genres under the weight of the ordinary.33 Still, my point here has been not simply to rehearse a genealogy of influence, nor simply to place domestic drama in its broader context, but rather to begin homing in on the way that prose becomes a formal adjunct to the ordinaries of theatrical absorption, underwriting many of its signal effects and reconfiguring the operative relations and emotional resonances felt between the suffering actor and mourning spectator. The tableau creates, as it were, a highly public illusion of private woe, in which ordinary suffering has the texture of the real rather than the ideal.

If we turn to a comparative reading of The Gamester and its versified model, The Fatal Extravagance, the shape of prosaic suffering becomes much clearer. Indeed, the closing scenes of these plays, in which the male leads break down and consider the tragic costs of their financial insolvency, offer us the closest thing to a direct comparison between the emotional practices of high tragic and ordinary suffering as it was imagined onstage. Here, for
example, is Hill’s Bellmour (the prototype for the later Beverley) ruminating on the temptation to suicide in cascading blank verse, deliberately reproduced at some length below as a poetic control case:

Enter Bellmour, alone, Pensive.

Bell. Why shou’d I pause! Nothing can be a Crime
Which puts a stop to Evil. A thousand Men
May have been poor as I,—and yet liv’d happy!
Miseries, we make our selves, are born with Ease;
But He, who beggars his race to Posterity,
Begets a Race, to curse him—Profuse in Ills,
He, propagating Ruin, with his Name,
Entails Descent of Anguish!

Over the following eleven lines, omitted for space, Bellmour wonders if it would be an act of mercy to put his family out of their misery. He goes on:

Oh! —— Could I feel no Misery, but my own!
How easy were it for this Sword to free me,
From all that Anguish, which embitters Life?
But, when the Grave has given my Sorrows Rest,
Where shall my miserable Wife find Comfort?
Unfriended, and alone, in Want’s bleak Storm,
Not all the Angelic Virtues of her Mind,
Will shield her, from the unpitying World’s Derision.
Can it be kind to leave her so expos’d,
And, while I sleep in Death, not dream of Her?
Better a thousand Times, to lead her with me,
Thro’ the dark Doubtfulness of deep Futurity!
Whate’er uncertain Fate attends, hereafter,
It can but be the worst of what is bad,
And that’s our State, already. —— It shall be done!
But how? That asks some Thought ——

(33–34)

Bellmour pauses at this point to consider how to bring about the death of his family painlessly, concerned that what seems an act of compassion to him will seem cruelty to others. Seven more lines omitted, and he concludes:

What if I use th’unwounding Aid of Poison?
I have at Hand that Sovereign Remedy.
For all Diseases, Want and Woe can plague with,
Mix’d with some unfear’d Draught ’twill gently Murder:
Bear off Death’s painful Edge, and, in sweet Slumber,
Swim soft, and shadowy, o’er the misty Eye ball.

(34–35)
Over forty-eight lines of monologue, Hill’s Bellmour contemplates the situation he finds himself in and resolves with reluctance—but crucially, with discursive transparency—that a painless death is ultimately the most favorable course forward for him and his family. All the trappings of the era’s heroic tragedy are shoehorned into the eighteenth-century home here, as if the grandiose rhetoric of a Hamlet or a Marc Antony decamped Denmark and an antique Alexandria and found their way to this unremarkable home. As Hugh Blair would argue in his survey of period poetics, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (1783), ornamentation of this sort “bestows dignity,” acting like “the rich and splendid dress of a person of rank; to create respect, and to give an air of magnificence to him who wears it.”

A sort of verbal costuming, Hill’s mannered verse transposes the language of the heroic onto the everyday exigencies of domestic life, in effect making what might be otherwise ordinary unordinary.

We find an altogether different approach to the scene if we turn to The Gamester’s corresponding deliberations, reproduced here in full:

Beverley is discover’d sitting. After a short 
Pause he starts up, and comes forward.

Bev. Why, there’s an End then. I have judg’d deliberately, and the Result is Death. How the Self-Murderer’s Account may stand, I know not. But this I know—the Load of hateful Life oppressed me too much—The Horrors of my Soul are more than I can bear—(Offers to kneel.)—Father of Mercy!—I cannot pray—Despair has laid his iron Hand upon me, and seal’d me for Perdition—Conscience! Conscience! thy Clamours are too loud—Here’s that shall silence them. (Takes a Vial out of his Pocket, and looks at it.) Thou art most friendly to the Miserable. Come then, thou Cordial for sick Minds—Come to my Heart (Drinks.) O, that the Grave wou’d bury Memory as well as Body! For if the Soul sees and feels the Sufferings of those dear Ones it leaves behind, the EVERLASTING has no Vengeance to torment it deeper—I’ll think no more on’t—Reflection comes too late—Once there was a Time for’t—but now ’tis past—Who’s there? (263.20–39)

We might note at the outset that from the standpoint of their most basic semantic contents, the two scenes seem remarkably similar. As vehicles for the plot, they accomplish almost the exact same ends at practically the same point in the play’s fable: the protagonists offer a justification of suicide, before expressing second thoughts on account of the effect their death will have on their families, lamenting their inability to spare them, before resolving to die, convinced that death is deliverance from pain. In moments like this, Moore certainly has Hill’s pioneering domestic drama in mind.

Yet the drama’s movement toward Auerbach’s “formless tragedy” is also clearly legible in the brokenness of Moore’s syntax. What seem at first to be identical sentiments embody different grammars of feeling, suggesting that
the cultural assumptions behind ordinary suffering’s performance are under some pressure by midcentury. How might one characterize this difference? One way would be to appropriate for the drama of the period the well-known rhetorical distinction between narration and description: whereas Bellmour’s verse monologue essentially tells the spectator-reader, Moore’s prose shows. This distinction is not at all obvious. After all, Hill’s lyricism elaborates and ornaments the mental states of its speaker, doing the rhetorical work of amplificatio that Cynthia Wall notes was central to description in late Renaissance and neoclassical theory. Bellmour lingers upon his decision, painting the moment with words somehow taken to be more true to life and hence signaling the sort of care many took to be fundamental to tragedy’s cultural authority. Feeling is “wrought up to an higher pitch” in this way, so that even though “no man spoke any kind of verse extempore,” as Dryden claimed in the Essay’s defense of high tragic style, its metrical arrangement and metaphorical play expand the ambit of its passions (66). In this way, the baroque extravagance of Hill’s verse comes to connote the gravitas of the genre. And yet the monologue’s emblematic tokens (“Ruin,” “Grave,” “Want’s bleak Storm,” “Sovereign Remedy”) seem primarily to serve the deliberative process that stands for narrative in this case. Marked by its careful rationalization of a difficult ethical choice, Bellmour’s lines perform an elaborately self-conscious mode of interior monologue as the mental tracing of plot, inevitably rushing us past the surface of its emotion into metaphysical speculation, explaining aloud and in some detail, the imagined consequences of his demise. Stitching together the argumentative links that might frame this death as one of a series of “gentle Murder[s],” Bellmour’s casuistical redefinitions beckon us to conclude that his choice represents the lesser evil. Crucially, none of this emerges by implication, but is rather told to us with a lucidity in its verse that belies its speaker’s anguished confusion and moves us toward the play’s final turns. Confirming the collective experience of witnessing the high tragic, Hill assumes a spectator in need of persuasion.

By contrast, Moore’s text repeatedly denies us this sort of clarity, breaking its rhythm, blocking the metrical cadences that would aesthetically polish the moment and thus refusing to provide a certain pleasure in its closure. Prose here is characterized in large part by what it withholds, denying information, trailing off in its reasoning, or otherwise relying on the subtlety of an actor’s bodily gestures to evoke rather than declaim feeling. If the tracing of passion was for Bellmour a pretense to metaphysical disquisition, here it culminates in the mere saturation of confused and panicked emotion, where sentiments are never fully formed before they are dropped and another oppressive thought predominates in a flash of new concern. “The Horrors of [Beverley’s] Soul” compel him to pray, before (attempting to kneel) his prayer.
admits that affliction has damned him to despair, stopping before it fully begins. Even when a figure presents itself in the monologue, as in the “iron Hand” of “Despair,” its utterance colors intense, momentary pulses of intoned meaning, never fully following their implications—at least not with the sort of dogged figurativeness of his pentameter source material. The prototypical Bellmour explains his intractable condition with a patient delineation of cause and effect, motivation and compulsion; Beverley shows us its toll. Demanding a more holistic semiotics of affect, in which attention to the action developing onstage is never subsumed by the flourishes of poetic text, Moore positions us—ironically, almost paradoxically—as voyeurs over a tableau seemingly indifferent to our presence.

Take, for example, the line immediately following Beverley’s draught of the lethal vial: “O, that the Grave wou’d bury Memory as well as Body! For if the Soul sees and feels the Sufferings of those dear Ones it leaves behind the EVERLASTING has no vengeance to torment it deeper” (263.33–37). This line may seem innocuous at first, but in the context of that moment in the play, its digression into the subjunctive is much more telling; complementing the disjointedness of the gamester’s elusive reasoning, the auxiliary “wou’d” activates the sense of skepticism and uncertain longing that frames much of the drama’s central concerns. The subtle indeterminacy of grammatical mood hangs in the air here, allowing Beverley to voice his dissatisfaction with a God he’s not sure he believes in as a wish that necessarily goes unanswered and unrepresented. Redemption, for Beverley, is just another trump card he can’t quite turn his way. In fact, his life seems to have been lived in middling aspiration, rendered metaphorical in the wagers he compulsively pursues and the happiness that remains always just outside his reach: I could be happy, if only, if only. . . . Here and throughout the play, the subjunctive is a way for the drama to play with what it might mean to risk one’s life in the pursuit of fantasies of the good life, to dwell in the counterfactual world of what could be, rather than the quotidian details of his bourgeois way of life. “I was so happy,” he laments earlier in the play, slipping, tellingly, into the past tense, “that even a Wish for more than I possess’d was arrogant Presumption” (256.3–5). Beverley’s suicidal ramblings momentarily condense these anxieties and give them life in performance, its caesural dashes and parenthetical interjections marring the soliloquy’s rhythms, blocking its resolution in a series of stops and starts that anticipates, in its prose, Diderot’s image of suffering “close to everyday life”:

What is it that affects us in the spectacle of a man animated by a great passion? Is it his words? Sometimes. But what never fails to stir us is cries, inarticulate words, a broken voice, a group of monosyllables with pauses in between, a murmur, impossible to describe. . . . As the violence of the emotion cuts off the breath and fills the mind with perturbation, so the syllables of words become disjunct, and the man
jumps from one idea to another; he initiates a great many lines of thought; he finishes none of them.

“Cries, inarticulate words,” voice the fragmentary realization of a fantasy collapsing, giving shape to one’s ambivalent attachment to a world that’s become unbearable. Here time stands at attention; plot presses inward into psychological crisis; the gambler’s wager merges into a Pascalian fugue. “Consider the Reward!” Stukeley enjoins parodically (263.15).

Now one might dispute this line of reasoning, pointing to the use of the subjunctive tense in The Fatal Extravagance—in a similar moment cited earlier, Bellmour exclaims: “Oh!——Cou’d I feel no Misery, but my own!” The play’s background in the world of gambling, financial speculation, and securities (all of which coalesce, interestingly, in the early lottery system) certainly animates the uncertainties voiced in the earlier text in ways that are similar and unmistakable. Yet here the subjunctive expresses a wish that is then quickly resolved in an elaborate, discursive rationalization rehearsed aloud. The resolution to kill his family is a way to limit their suffering, we are told, so that by this murder they might be delivered. If plot presses inward in The Gamester, in Hill’s older domestic tragedy, deliberation spins outward into plot, playing upon a rhetorical surface in a series of turns and counter-turns. Even the skeptical phrase several lines later, “Dark Doubtfulness of deep Futurity,” is counterbalanced against a recitative theology with clear consequences for those who transgress its limits. For Hill then, the subjunctive works to proffer rhetorical questions that are answered in soliloquy, a mode of “park-and-bark” Socratic method that would have been well adapted to those trained in the oratorical style of performance practiced in the early decades of the century. With this in mind, The Gamester’s slide into the subjunctive works to underscore a sense of the prosaic’s extemporaneity, its movement through an empty, real time in which the beholder’s presence is not assumed to benefit from a rhetor’s analysis. Whereas Hill’s older, versified suffering plays up its literariness and technical effects for an audience it seeks to elevate into mournful speculation, Moore’s prose works rather to obscure its presence as artifice. Acting as a sort of vanishing mediator, tragic prose divests suffering of its elevated meanings by inhabiting the conventions of absorption.

I want to be careful not to overstate this, since of course, Hill’s oratorical style in Bellmour’s soliloquy is far from unique to verse, and one could easily imagine this back-and-forth playing out in prose. Here’s Barnwell in The London Merchant, at the key moment in which he embezzles his master’s funds in order to (he thinks) rescue the conning Millwood: “What am I about to do! [Is this a question though?] Now you, who boast your reason all sufficient, suppose yourselves in my condition and determine for me whether it’s right
to let her suffer for my faults, or by this small addition to my guilt, prevent the ill effects of what is past. [If it is, it’s rhetorical]” (2.2.180–84). Moments like this were faulted (tellingly) by Alexander Pope for their “poetical luxuriance,” suggesting that the earliest examples of tragic prose were hybrid forms, experienced as a kind of “slant” or broken poetics. Indeed, Barnwell’s tortured decision to kill his uncle begins in alternating stresses that scan as all but blank verse—“A dismal gloom obscures the face of day” (3.3.1)—before launching into a series of contrapuntal reasonings in which he entertains aloud rhetorical questions that explain the difficulty of his position. For Lillo at least, prose still instances the metrical care that sets it out of time by marking it as artificial, as an object of the poet’s retrospective adornment, dialoguing with an audience it acknowledges as the subjects of collective mourning.

The close proximity between prose and blank verse is certainly something that Moore is attuned to in *The Gamester*, though this has a tendency to weigh down the tragedy, to transform the prosaic artifice of nonartifice into a sign of meaning’s present obscurity or absence in the ordinary. If Lillo’s prose lapses into meter, seeming to confirm Johnson’s intuition about the natural affinity between suffering and the poetic, Moore’s principal figures routinely fail to elevate their misfortune, falling back into an in-betweenness that confirms them to be socially, stylistically, and metaphysically middling. So despite a similar admission in *The Gamester*’s preface that he (Moore) “often found it a much greater difficulty to avoid . . . Measure” (204.17–18), Beverley can never finally let the prosaic go, clinging to the last to a version of the world he desperately wishes would sustain him, but that has long ceased to do so. This may be the closest that early realist work in bourgeois tragedy approaches to the allegorical, insofar as that drama—as Blair Hoxby argues, modifying Walter Benjamin’s celebrated thesis on the *Trauerspiel*—ritually enacts liminality itself, depicting “a space betwixt-and-between the living and the dead, a world of dying and mourning.” Wandering aimlessly like an “Out-cast,” Beverley stammers: “Whither am I going?—My home lies there; all that is dear on Earth it holds too; yet are the Gates of Death more welcome to me—I’ll enter it no more” (252.23, 26–29). The spectator knows, however, that Beverley’s house has just been sold to appease creditors, so that, finally, there’s no home for him to return to, only variations of want and existential alienation, only the maintenance of a life unhoused that the text describes “As of a good Man dead. Of one, who walking in a Dream, fell down a Precipice” (220.27–30).

Beyond such self-consciously constructed images of ambivalence and middlingness, however, the play’s momentary uses of metrical arrangement inevitably underscore its negation as a kind of loss. Though the critical account of secularization-as-subtraction has become increasingly difficult
to sustain (and rightly so), these textual maneuvers clearly attempt to negotiate forms of disenchantment that emerge in tension with one’s attachment to living life in this world—and not the next. The play thus presents a version of disenchantment we know well, a version that (following Max Weber’s announcement of modernity’s Entzauberung) conflates the affective sense of the term (as one’s disillusion or disappointment with the world) with its sense as a historical process hitting its stride at about this exact historical moment (thus, the “de-magification” of the world). The result is not precisely the mediation of a wholly or mostly “secularized affect” in the prose of bourgeois drama, to be clear, but rather an attempt to imagine and enact forms of suffering that register a sense of the anxiety with which that possibility is met, that depict both a desperate grasping after transcendent clarity in one’s afflictions and a suspicion that this is ultimately all there is (and thus, the desire to remain despite the cruelty of that realization).

The prosaic’s inability to rise above or ennoble its earthliness thus enacts an intratextual enjambment that Giorgio Agamben calls a prose-metric “hanging-back,” a hesitant turn “in two opposed directions at once” that momentarily suspends meaning itself and hints at the complexity of secularization. Liminality haunts the plenitude that older forms of tragedy so often evoke in their afflictions and exorcise in poetic closure. And unsurprisingly then, the play repeatedly returns to the problem of a suffering severed from a theological economy, moving carefully between the prose of the world and brief, stylized impositions of the heroic aesthetic upon it. In a moment that must have been shocking to those assembled in the playhouse, Beverley follows a prayer that almost completely subsumes itself in verse:

Thou Power that mads’t me, hear me! If for a life of Frailty, and this too hasty Deed of Death thy Justice dooms me, here I acquit the Sentence. But if, enthron’d in Mercy where thou sit’st, thy Pity has beheld me, send me a Gleam of Hope; that in these last and bitter Moments my Soul may taste of Comfort! And for these Mourners here, O! let their Lives be peaceful, and their Deaths happy! (270.27–34)

...with what amounts to a prosaic series of half-beliefs, desperate bargains, and parenthetical hedged bets:

Lend me your Hand, Love—so—raise me—No—’twill not be—My life is finish’d—O! for a few short Moments! to tell you how my Heart bleeds for you—That even now, thus dying as I am, dubious and fearful of Hereafter, my bosom Pang is for Your Miseries, Support her Heaven! ... O, Mercy! Mercy! (271.8–13)

Abiding in the epistemic purgatory between belief and unbelief, this world and the next, the play of verse and prose here serves to disfigure the tidiness of a good death in a gesture of deflation and the literal slumping of the leaden body. Like Beverley’s suicidal deliberations, its omissions and
countermovements rehearse a stasis that will later be read as a signature effect of the theatrical tableau.

For Peter Szondi, whose work on the post-Enlightenment fate of tragedy is foundational for thinking about the cultural import of bourgeois drama, this slow, halting effect stands in opposition to the *coups de théâtre* (or plot turns) that were central to heroic (which is to say aristocratic) forms of tragedy. The tableau, in his reading, figures the interior and affective spaces of the domestic against the vicissitudes of the public world that lay outside its walls, formalizing the relative political powerlessness felt by many (even within an ascending middle class) as a retreat into an ostensibly passive suffering. Bourgeois drama thus foregrounds the psychological tensions and fraught intimacies of maintaining the home as emotional refuge. Yet I would caution against reading this as an instance of mere powerlessness. Because for all its etymological baggage, suffering can also encompass various states of emotional practice that bely the passiveness taken for granted in commonsense usage, a passiveness too often read into the stasis of tableaux by even as subtle a reader as Szondi himself. On the contrary, one might argue, suffering may also be helpfully conceived as “an action directed within” (as Lukács perceived clearly) or (as Talal Asad perceptively argues) wrapped up in ritual or cultural notions of pain in which afflictions sustain the actor by qualifying—and not simply erasing—his or her agency. Thus, Mrs. Beverley’s desperate embrace of affliction that would somehow confirm her sense of divine election: “Hear me Heaven!...On Me! on Me! if Misery must be the Lot of either, multiply Misfortunes! I’ll bear ’em patiently, so He is happy!” (265.35; 38–40). Suffering is borne then—but it’s also chosen and dwelt upon and enacted in the literal movements and performative utterances that make up prayer, lament, bargaining, and a host of other affective strategies for making sense of the world. To take this seriously would mean attending not only to how style qualifies or otherwise mobilizes the affective but also to how our own post-Enlightenment distinctions between active and passive, inner feeling and outer expression, may themselves be habitual and acculturated, “the product of the way we ... ‘do’ the experience,” and therefore often prone to smuggling in a form of dualism that splits feeling from the historical, embodied consciousness in which it’s situated. It would mean, in other words, retracing the praxis of ordinary feeling and, in this context in particular, thinking harder about how prose enacts emotion and what that implies.

In what remains, I want to highlight just two of the most striking implications of the formal-affective turn I’ve been exploring. On the one hand, as Moore saw clearly, the relatively plain style of such tragedies could be remarkably intimate and familiar in its enactment, the subtlety
of its artifice enabling modes of identification that would later become the hallmark of our entanglement with character. In practice, as we saw with respect to Pritchard and Siddons, this shift arose as actors performing in The Gamester and similar bourgeois dramatic works literalized the advice of thinkers like Lord Kames, who remarked in his Elements of Criticism (1762) that drama thrives when it “affects to speak plain.” For Kames, the ideal dramatist “maintains a moderate degree of dignity without reaching the sublime,” hugging the truth of an emotion without overextending its tonal elevation. Others agreed, yoking plainness of expression with true feeling. When it comes to sorrow especially, noted the divine and rhetorician Richard Hurd the year of The Gamester’s debut, even elevated minds sink into “the ordinary exactness of mere prose.” Though neither thinker was as radical as Lillo, Diderot, or even Mackenzie in advocating a wholesale turn to the concerns of the middle rank in tragedy, the upshot of this was clear: expert drama does well to affect the middling. This reasoning wasn’t new, of course. Both Kames and Hurd cited Horace’s claim in Ars Poetica that “in Tragedy, Telephus and Peleus often grieve in the language of prose...should he want his lament to touch the spectator’s heart,” a line that had been parodied in John Gay’s 1715 The What D’Ye Call It and Henry Fielding’s 1731 Tragedy of Tragedies, part of the early-eighteenth-century vogue for burlesque tragedies that played with the lowness of ordinary suffering in the run up to The London Merchant’s genre-bending debut. But in the emerging bourgeois moment, the artifice of authenticity took on a new, vital urgency for those thinking deeply about the affective possibilities and limitations of its performance. Audiences present at the early staging of Charles Johnson’s Caelia, for example, would have listened as its prologue spelled out its intentions in ways that seemed to grasp after Horace’s prosaic mediocritas:

He [the playwright] wou’d his humble Sentiments impart,
In Words that flow directly from the Heart;
To lofty Numbers he has no Pretence,
Who makes his Characters talk common Sense... 

Word and feeling merge in the aesthetics of the ordinary, flattening the hierarchies of affliction often reified in tragedy, as if its style dissolved the mediating presence of the theatrical apparatus itself in a lively display of the real. The “common sense” of prose here is immediate, “direct,” a matter of the heart that seems to bypass the higher faculties of the tragic sublime in favor of more homely feelings we all know well.

In his fascinating study of “the art of the average,” Paul Fleming underscores this socio-historical turn by pointing out that from its inception, bourgeois tragedy thrived on its audience’s ability “to be moved by what
resembles itself.”

Lessing, Diderot, and others, drawing on the work of British bourgeois dramatists, initiate a fundamental shift in emphasis in the period away from the “cold” affect of admiration in tragedy to an aesthetics of affective identification. Prose was just one aspect in this turn, he notes, but it was an important one. Unlike the average spectator’s estrangement from the experience of “heroick suffering” (in Joshua Reynolds’s coinage for the distancing misfortunes of tragedy and history), prose renders the scene in a language familiar and close at hand, a language recognized and inhabited in the everyday of their (and our?) lives. I’m hedging here, but not without reason. As Fleming goes on to note, what is ultimately at stake in valorizing identification is an averageness that comes to be read as universal, a suspension of the particularities of class and context that sees the suffering to which one identifies as being as ubiquitous as prose itself. Thus, in a well-known passage from the Entretiens sur Le Fils naturel, Diderot counsels: “What the artist must find [in scenes of suffering] is what anyone would say in a similar case; what no one could hear without immediately recognizing it in himself.” Or as Moore himself had put it years earlier, in “adapting” tragedy to the “Feelings of every part of the Audience,” the drama explores those passions the bourgeois recognize as their own redoubled and performed onstage, imagining ordinary suffering as part of a genre to which its spectator already belongs (and endures). We “hear” what already lies within us all. In this way, the theater engaged in a complex gesture of self-reflexivity, whereby the pain of ordinary people was displayed for them in scenes of households (like their own) exposed and ultimately destroyed. If prose is habitus, ordinary suffering brought tragedy, quite literally, close to home.

On the other hand, if bourgeois drama’s ability to evoke a “natural Picture” draws its viewer into a homely interior with which he or she identifies, that intimacy is never left uncomplicated by the imposition of the picture’s absorptive frame. Prose’s ability to close the distance between suffering actor and mourning spectator exists in tension, in other words, with that very form’s tendency to imply their radical separation along two sides of the imagined fourth wall. Prosaic suffering can be a lonely practice in this respect, resulting in a dialectical movement between modes of identification and disassociation, intimacy and its denial, the interior and exterior of what David Marshall termed the “frame of art’s” ability to blur fiction into reality. So if the average spectator comes to see him- or herself in the tragic figure, if they come to identify with the genre of real, ordinary feeling enacted onstage, they simultaneously see themselves as profoundly isolated in those afflictions. In fact, isolation becomes part of the very fabric of what makes that hardship authentically banal. These are the wages of experimentation in tableau.

What’s more, to look upon prosaic suffering was to actively play out the abandonment of the tragedy’s central figures who are witnessed by an
audience that understand themselves to be at once present and absent. Not unlike the providential agency claimed by its most pious figures, the play’s collective mourners stand as an absent presence haunting the play’s world, perhaps voyeuristically but certainly powerless to intervene. In beholding the tableau, therefore, the average spectator confirmed the inertia and liminality of the average sufferer’s experience of pain, in a sense becoming the “heavy, oppressive, threatening something” that Auerbach saw in the “nothing” of formless tragedy. Over the space of the drama’s representation, suffering could be explored as a half-disenchanted network of affective investments and fragile attachments that mirrored and thereby displaced the spectator’s own personal misfortunes. Beverley’s apology to his wife “for meanly dying” at the drama’s end underscores this complex negotiation of affect and form that was central to the archive I’ve traced in this essay. For “meanly dying” comes to connote not only the shame of one’s downward mobility, and the loss of dignity Arthur Miller found so central to the tragedy of common people, but also a dialogic anticipation of the prosaic’s leaden triviality, its overburdening of the aesthetic with a realism that is both quotidian in its concerns and sensational in its expression. Gravitas shades, slowly, into mere gravity.

At least, this seemed to be William Wordsworth’s verdict in his “Preface” to the 1800 Lyrical Ballads:

If...images and feelings have an undue proportion of pain connected with them, there is some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds... And hence, though the opinion will at first appear paradoxical, from the tendency of metre to divest language, in a certain degree, of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition, there can be little doubt but that more pathetic situations and sentiments, that is, those which have a greater proportion of pain connected with them, may be endured in metrical composition, especially in rhyme, than in prose.

Then, underscoring his point, he adds:

This opinion may be further illustrated by appealing to the Reader’s own experience of the reluctance with which he comes to the reperusal of the distressful parts of Clarissa Harlove, or The Gamester; while Shakespeare’s writings, in the most pathetic scenes, never act upon us, as pathetic, beyond the bounds of pleasure.

Enacting the practical contours of ordinary suffering— provisionally, speculatively, and indeed, proleptically—bourgeois drama imagines an age of prose that is just too heavy. If heroic tragedy enlivened and elevated to catharsis, prosaic suffering burdens its spectator with a truth it refuses to gild. It makes the reader suffer too then, because it seems real, all too real.
Notes

1. Gorges Edmond Howard, preface to *The Female Gamester* (Dublin, 1778), v.
3. In addition to Johnson, contemporary appraisals of prose tragedy appeared in periodicals like the *Scourge* no. 35 (February 15, 1753) and the *Monthly Review* (February 1753) as well as David Erskine Baker’s edited collection, *Biographia Dramatica* (published 1764, but expanded with Isaac Reed and Stephen Jones, eds., 3 vols. [London, 1812]), 2:256–57. The claim of prose tragedy’s artlessness was often touted by those working in the medium, as in the prologue to George Lillo’s *The London Merchant*, ed. William H. McBurney (Lincoln, NE, 1965).

4. Though domestic tragedy first appeared on the Jacobean stage, and in some cases provided a model for the bourgeois drama of the eighteenth century (see note 23), its use of prose was mixed and inconsistent, in every case utilizing verse for the tragic main plot.

5. Henry Mackenzie examined contemporary tragedy in *The Lounger* nos. 27–28 (August 6–13, 1785), later collected and republished as *The Lounger: A Periodical Paper, Published at Edinburgh in the Years 1785–1786*, ed. Henry Mackenzie (Edinburgh, 1785–87). For this part of his argument, see 105.


13. Representatives include Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC, 2011), Fredric Jameson’s *The Antinomies of Realism* (New York, 2013), and Kathleen Stewart’s *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC, 2007).


25. Ibid., 134.


31. Roach, *Player’s Passion*, 154. The salons of 1763 and 1767 occurred in the context of a Parisian stage where Moore’s play had already established a following: translations by Abbé de Loirelle (1762) and Bernard-Joseph Saurin (who partly versified the play in 1768) found regular audiences, as well as the admiration of those in polite French circles like Diderot’s fellow encyclopedist, Jean le Rond D’Alembert, who translated Beverley’s soliloquy as if it was a meditation on the precariousness of modern life. On Diderot’s relationship to British drama, see Robert Loyalty Cru, *Diderot as a Disciple of English Thought* (New York, 1913), esp. chap. 6, as well as Schier, “Diderot’s Translation.”

32. Diderot, *Oeuvres*, 4:1137 and 4:1136, respectively. Translations throughout this essay are my own.


38. Thus, as David Mazella argues, the play works in part by playing with a fear of one’s exposure. See “‘Justly to Fall Unpitied and Abhorr’d’: Sensibility, Punishment, and Morality in Lillo’s *The London Merchant,*” *ELH* 68, no. 4 (2001): 795–830.


40. The past decade has seen an explosion of interest in reassessing the legacy and limitations of secularization, adding much needed complexity to our understanding of the processes by which this did (or didn’t!) occur and tracking the particularities of its contemporary scope. Some representative work includes Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, 2003); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA, 2007); Michael Warner, Jonathan Van Antwerpen, and Craig Calhoun, eds., *Varieties of Secularism in a Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA, 2013); and Saba Mahmood, *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Report* (Princeton, 2015).


43. See “Tableau and *Coup de Théâtre*: On the Social Psychology of Diderot’s Bourgeois Tragedy,” trans. Harvey Mendelsohn, *New Literary History* 11, no. 2 (Winter 1980): 323–43. See also chap. 3 of Arnold Hauser’s landmark *The Social History of Art*, vol. 3 (New York, 1962), and Georg Lukács, “The Sociology of Modern Drama,” trans. Lee Baxandall, *Tulane Drama Review* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1965): 146–70, for views of domestic tragedy as the working out of class conflict. Peter Szondi concedes that his thesis works best in the case of the Franco-German context, where rates of political disenfranchisement were much higher than in mercantile Britain. I would add too that social historians have done much over the past several decades to account for the rich complexity and fluidity of rank


47. Ibid., 1:358–59.

48. See Richard Hurd’s commentary on the depiction of the passions in his edition of Horace’s *Ars Poetica, Epistola ad Pisones* (London, 1753), 57.

49. Lines 89–92 of *Ars Poetica* in Horace, *Satires, Epistles, Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Ruston Fairclough (Cambridge, MA, 1926). Henry Fielding’s *Tom Thumb* and its revision as *The Tragedy of Tragedies* both play ironically with Horace’s argument on this point. See, for example, the preface to the latter in Henry Fielding: *Plays*, vol. 1, 1728–1731, ed. Thomas Lockwood (New York, 2004), 544–45.


55. In a penetrating analysis of melodrama, Carolyn Williams suggests that the highly self-reflexive nature of such performative gestures marks “the function of the tableau as a moment both of interpellation and of critical class consciousness.” See her “Moving Pictures: George Eliot and Melodrama,” in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, ed. Lauren Berlant (New York, 2004), 140n8.


59. Ibid., 1: xxxi.