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## **Your Humble Servant Shows Himself: Don Saltero and Public Coffeehouse Space**

By Angela Todd<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

In 1695, James Salter, who fashioned himself as “Don Saltero,” opened a coffeehouse on a respectable corner in Chelsea. The chief attraction of the coffeehouse, from Salter’s point of view, was the array of natural science detritus and colonial souvenirs displayed on the walls and ceiling. For the price of a cup of coffee, patrons could view the immensity of England’s global grasp, and ponder the bizarre workings of far-away lands and the earth’s creatures. What is noteworthy about Salter’s collection, however, is not the oddities on display--and there were many--but that his collection overlapped considerably with that of the esteemed collection held by Sir Hans Sloane, whose natural science collection became the basis for the British Museum. One collection was marked for Science and Knowledge in a museum; the other for Entertainment and Amusement in a coffeehouse. Coffeehouse space provided the foil for museum space. Taken together, they provide a significant narrative of the British empire, masculinity, and the formation of scientific hegemony in the modern era.

This cultural studies analysis examines the role played by these two dissimilar men and their similar collections, their roles in British society, and the spaces they inhabited. Ultimately the paper suggests that overdetermined cultural pressures ensured that the realms of science and entertainment remained polar opposites in British modern culture, constituting competing epistemological formations.

*Keywords:* masculinity, curiosities, coffeehouse culture

The museum coffeehouse of James Salter (d.1728) exists on the boundary between modern categories of science and spectacle. Such problematic spaces as Salter’s--not quite science, not just public entertainment--often are left out of modern histories, reflecting modern biases about what counts as science. But the collection of Salter’s most famous patron, Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753), also exists somewhere between science and spectacle; it is a side effect of historicization that these entwined collections were relegated to separate disciplines and Sloane was held up as a shining example of scientific collecting. Examining them in tandem reveals how gender and spatial pressures worked to separate them and reveals what was lost by this overdetermined rift. By focusing on these two figures and the coffeehouses they created, this paper traces the construction of the epistemological distinctions between “science” and “entertainment” through the effects of these discursively-different men and their discursively-differing collections in eighteenth-century London. Using coffeehouse space as my lens, I show

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how the performative dimensions of the coffeehouse, as a primarily masculine space where *scientific meaning* was debated, helped consolidate the very distinctions that someone like James Salter threw into question. This cultural studies analysis examines the social roles played by these two dissimilar men and their similar collections, the spaces they inhabited, and the effects of each on subsequent narratives of science, nation, and masculinity.

Sir Hans Sloane was voyaging physician to the governor of Jamaica, served as physician to Queen Anne, and was knighted. Sloane was a doctor who served the poor for reduced rates, supported a foundling hospital, and was appointed fellow, secretary, and then president of the Royal Society. Perhaps most famously, Sloane bestowed his large collection of rarities and natural history objects upon the English nation in 1753. This historical transfer, the moment Sloane's collection is "acquired by the Nation," is widely heralded by historians of museums, of science, and of art, as marking the beginning of the public or national museum; and indeed his natural history collection inspired the formation of the British Museum.

But what interests me most about Sloane is a less known story. Sloane had a traveling servant named James Salter, whom the great collector set up in a coffeehouse that also served as a kind of amateur museum. Sloane gave his former employee duplicates from his own world-renowned natural history collection for display in the trendy coffeehouse. Salter's biography is difficult to piece together. Also known as "Don Saltero," Salter opened a coffeehouse near Chelsea Church in 1690 or 1695 (Lillywhite 194; A. Ellis 154). Salter was not in the Royal Society; nor did he collect or display his curiosities systematically. Salter intended his collection for "entertainment" (not "use," as Royal Society collections were), and placed it in the same publicly-accessible space as his barber and tooth-pulling practices. Today, Salter is most often included in histories of marginal entertainments or period oddities (see Altick; Boulton; Lillywhite; and Rigby and Rigby).

When Sloane retired from public life in the 1740s and took up residence in his manorial estate in Chelsea, Salter's coffeehouse shared space in Sloane's Chelsea building. But in spite of their shared visitors, inventory, and for many years, even shared physical space, Sloane's and Salter's collections came to represent opposite cultural positions, with Sloane the father of the British Museum and Salter practically lost to history. Ironically, modern access to archival documents favors Salter. He catalogued his collection frequently, and these catalogues led visitors through the physical space of Salter's coffeehouse, describing each object in his collection and, in effect, describing the internal space of his coffeehouse. Many of the 40 editions of Salter's catalogue are currently available on microfilm, so there is a thorough paper trail documenting his collection. Sloane, on the other hand, had multiple collections, each numbered in the tens of thousands. Sloane catalogued his extensive collections of shells, fossils, taxidermy specimens, and gems; he even had a series of full time employees who managed and catalogued his collections. However, the sheer enormity of both the collections and subsequent catalogues made them unmanageable, and indeed, a complete inventory remains unpublished to this day. Because of their differences in "station," in spite of their material and spatial connections, and in inverse proportion to their respective paper trails, Salter and Sloane are historicized separately--one as oddity, one as science.

I argue that examining these two collectors and their collections in historical context reveals not only that early modern display practices were understood as spatial markers for interpreting the colonies, but that the politics of display are overwritten by spatiality and gender. Museums versus coffeehouses, gentlemen versus servants; the polarities established themselves early on, and the spatial politics of the era determined the outcome. Early-modern cultural narratives of display served to rationalize British colonialism and to justify British scientific enterprise--Sloane in the name of universal scientific truths, and Salter in the name of wonder and delighting the public. This cultural contest over authority and cultural control was not merely being played out discursively; it was also being played out spatially.

Global politics were put on display in sites accessible to a broad array of British citizens. Early modern British "science" cannot be understood without acknowledging the global spatiality of "the first British empire," which consisted of India, the West Indies (Barbados, St. Kitts, Antigua, Nevis, Montserrat, Jamaica), Newfoundland, Africa, Hudson Bay, and Ireland (Robinson 118 and James 17) and began to break up at the end of the eighteenth century with the independence of the American colonies and the loss of land in the West Indies (Fawcett 112). These British colonies were the locations from which many of the objects on display in curiosity collections originated. But if Sloane's rows and rows of mollusks were intended to convey the visual rationalizing of scientific inquiry and exploration, Salter's collection, which like Sloane's included several examples of a *type*--such as the tusk of a rat (number 46), a large tusk of a beaver (82), tusk of a Tyger (83) and teeth from a giant (70), a whale (72), and a skate (a genus of fish, 90) (*sic*)--nevertheless failed to convey the same sense of systematic inquiry. Scattered as it was throughout the coffeehouse, the colonial objects were on display because of their exoticism. By not being displayed together as tusks and teeth, these objects lose the *effect* of comprehensiveness that Sloane aimed for with his systematic display. Next I will relate a brief history of the coffeehouse and an overview of periodical literature found there to set the stage for thinking about Salter's collection as a cultural site under strife because of its very public quality.

### **The Coffeehouse**

Public coffeehouses emerged as cultural phenomena shortly before the Restoration. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the coffeehouse was both a site of cultural anxiety in the new public sphere and *the* place that the public could partake of the new science either by buying or reading the periodical literature that recapped it. The coffeehouse's emergence at this historical moment depended on English mercantilism and a global economy, both for the disposable income that it absorbed as well as the exotic commodities--coffee, tea, chocolate, sugar--that it retailed. One 1665 pamphlet suggests the volume in which this exotic new luxury was consumed when it proclaims that: "The Commonwealth-kingdom I'd say,/Has mighty reason for to pray/That still Arabia may produce/Enough of Berry for it's [*sic*] use . . ." (A. Ellis 257). And in London, "a survey of 1739 records 551 coffee houses . . ." (Brewer 35). Period literature shows and contemporary historians note that coffeehouses were popular new spaces of consumption that fostered new social interactions.

As new spaces where men of different classes could mix, there was also considerable cultural anxiety focused on the coffeehouse. As Brewer notes: "coffee

houses were controversial, looked upon with suspicion by Tory stalwarts, royalists (who remembered the radical gatherings and societies of the Interregnum) and those who feared political and religious polemics” (36). This new public space offered the opportunity to communicate differing political views in an unregulated atmosphere, which made political authorities nervous. Ironically, public coffeehouses apparently allowed for a large measure of secrecy, and sedition and various plots were repeatedly linked to this new social space. In an attempt to get a handle on such secrecy and any potential anti-monarchical activity, in 1663 Charles II decreed that coffeehouses must be licensed. In 1676-78, the Secretaries of State turned their attention to seeking out and restraining the newsletter writers that were reportedly plotting against the state in coffeehouses and cutting in on the state’s news monopoly (Lillywhite 18). The coffeehouse was repeatedly portrayed as the space for social problems--mixing classes, falling national economy, or secrecy and sedition.

Coffeehouses were attacked on cultural fronts as well. The Character of A Coffee House (1665), a pamphlet in verse, snidely recounts the mixed company of a group of satirical types: usurer, gallant, virtuoso, player, country clown, *pragmatick* and *phanatick* were all sitting together, and the absurdity of cross-class collegiality was the primary focus of that satire. Such class anxiety is articulated even more clearly in the 1672 A Broadside Against Coffee; Or, The Marriage of the Turk, where the anonymous writer laments that “Confusion huddles all into one scene,/Like Noah’s Ark, the clean and the unclean” (in A. Ellis 267). In the 1695 The Ale-Wives’ Complaint against the Coffee-Houses, women (or men posing as women) opposed regulation of coffeehouses because they provided a masculine space that served as an alternative to bars and drinking, which were far more destructive, they argued, of family life and conjugal relations. Patriots, for lack of a better term, conceived coffee and the coffeehouse as threats to England’s commodity production and its global position. In 1673, some of these English patriots petitioned that tea, coffee, and brandy should be prohibited as they took away from mass consumption of native products such as barley, malt, and wheat (Lillywhite 17). Popular literature of the period shows that the coffeehouse served as a spatial nexus for a mass of class and gender anxieties.

Jurgen Habermas, on the other hand, has written that in the emerging social space of the coffeehouse, “critical debate ignited by works of literature and art was soon extended to include economic and political disputes, without any guarantee (such as was given in the *salons*) that such discussions would be inconsequential, at least in the immediate context” (33). Habermas sees the coffeehouse as a revolutionary space for the people and argues: “The coffeehouse not merely [*sic*] made access to the relevant circles less formal and easier; it embraced the wider strata of the middle class, including craftsmen and shopkeepers” (33). Coffeehouses:

organized discussion among private people that tended to be ongoing; hence they had a number of institutional criteria in common. *First*, they prescribed a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether.... *Secondly*, discussion within such a public presupposed the problematization of areas that until then had not been questioned. [P]hilosophical and literary works and works of art...no longer remained components of the Church’s or court’s

publicity of representation. *Thirdly*, the same process that converted culture into a commodity (and in this fashion constituted it as a culture that could become an object to begin with) established the public as in principle inclusive. (36-37)

Habermas argues that the coffeehouse was the spatial prerequisite for the ideal British citizen, and that Richard Steele, in his eighteenth-century periodical, *The Spectator*, consciously used the coffeehouse patron as a model for the ideal man.<sup>2</sup> Texts from the period, however, show that the coffeehouse was a far more complex site--it did serve as a site for the utopian imaginings of Steele, but it was also a space of social mixing and the vague fears that attend new social formations. So this new public space was a container for both fears and hopes--but both narratives are traditionally focused on men.

Despite the cross-class spatiality the coffeehouse invites, gender divisions remained in place. In an attempt to delineate coffeehouse gender dynamics, E. J. Clery synthesizes coffeehouse histories and writes that the coffeehouse came to be represented as a “matrix for social transformation, and an emblem for an unattained ‘ideal type’ of democratic interaction” and that “each account takes the fact of women’s exclusion from coffeehouses and similar public gathering places as irrelevant or self-evident” (168-69). Clery rightly charges that when women are shut out of the coffeehouse they are “shut out of a constitutive role in the development of the intellectual and political self-consciousness of the bourgeoisie, the emergence of characteristically modern literary forms, the initiation of democratic forms of participation in society” (169). Clery then “sets out to disprove that unspoken assumption” that women did not participate in the public sphere epitomized by the coffeehouse. Certainly she is right to do so. As Thomas Kuehn and Anne Schutte note, it is important:

to reject a simple equation of public space gendered as male space and private space gendered as female. For one thing, since men came home, the ‘private’ was also their space. For another, no matter how absolutely women were legally and constitutionally excluded from official forms of power, they had reason (including reasons of male interest) to become ‘public’ agents on occasion. The public/private dichotomy, a product of the nineteenth century’s social, political, and legal developments, ill serves historical analysis of earlier eras. (xv)

Although her goal of problematizing the hopeful yet exclusionary Habermasian narrative is noble, Clery is only moderately successful in demonstrating women’s public participation in coffeehouse culture and the emergence of the public sphere. Ultimately I am not convinced by the evidence she presents, nor do I see evidence for her claims in my research of the diaries and letters of men of science, as we shall see.

Clery argues for the frequency of female barmaids or ticket takers in coffeehouses in periodical literature who “were reconceived as the moral guardians of the establishment”; men were asked to behave themselves in front of these ladies, resulting in “a new modeling of the code for the public conduct of men, in accordance with the norms

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<sup>2</sup> See Markman Ellis for more on how this eighteenth-century periodical tried to mold a model public citizen.

of private mixed company” (172). Clery’s article points briefly to the coffeehouse as a gendered space, and traces how in pamphlet literature, “coffee consumption and coffee-house talk carried connotations of effeminacy” (172). She argues for the coffeehouse patron as a feminized man, a new gender formation based on male behavior, as a way to counter the coffeehouse’s sexual exclusivity: “He regulates his behavior with respect to the working woman who stands behind the counter, drinks coffee rather than alcohol as if he were in mixed company, talks freely and easily about whatever comes into his head as if he were a woman in the privacy of her home, reads and writes perpetually on the subject of ‘the fair sex’” (177). Yet she is unconvincing that this feminized man contradicts the idea of the coffeehouse as an unambiguously masculine preserve.<sup>3</sup> In my reading of the diaries and correspondence of early-modern science figures, all mention visiting coffeehouses; none are self-conscious that doing so affects their public persona and none mention female workers having any regulatory effect on them or on the other men patronizing the coffeehouse. I argue that sex and class would have disqualified these working women from having the cultural power to regulate men’s behavior in the new public space of the coffeehouse. My research suggests that for the scientific figures, at least, the coffeehouses that they frequented were sexually homogeneous spaces. A Broadside Against Coffee notes mixing of “the clean and the unclean” and The Character of A Coffeehouse represents patrons as usurer, gallant, virtuoso, player, and country clown. These patrons do suggest a wide array of *masculine* gender positions, pointing to another problem with Clery’s argument. She relies on a simple conception of gender as a binary that does not account for multiple gender identities.

More convincing is Markman Ellis’s claim, not that coffee-women help constitute the well-mannered feminized public man as Clery argues, but rather that “the figure of the coffee-woman, by...animating the issue of gender, has the greatest power to disrupt Habermas’s model of the public sphere” (31). M. Ellis recounts not only female employees, but female owners of coffeehouses as well: Blunt’s Coffee House, Mrs. Wells’s Coffee House, Jenny Mann’s Coffee House, Widow Rudd’s Coffee House and Daniel’s Coffee House were all owned by women. M. Ellis surveys popular literature (periodicals, coffee-women’s biographies, whores’ biographies, satires and plays) to show how “the coffee-woman” emerges as a figure of sexual intrigue: “The beguiling flirtation of the coffee-women offered their sexuality as a commodity alongside the addictive bitter liquid” (32). M. Ellis cites several sources that attest to the women’s marketed sexuality being disruptive or corruptive, before suggesting that there may be another side to the story:

From the women’s point of view, of course, the disruptive impetus of seduction flows the other way across the bar. The assiduous courting of her Gentleman wooer is comically phrased in the language of a military siege....Behind the ironic badinage one might detect a note of barely suppressed sexual harassment, and conclude that the coffee-woman places

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<sup>3</sup> The Ale-Wives Complaint against the Coffeehouses, however, argues that men who drink coffee, and are thus not inebriated, are more virile and more able to please their wives--that coffeehouse patrons are more masculine.

the Spectatorial coffee-house sociability under considerable and revealing pressure. (33-34)

Clery and Markman Ellis both remark on the sexual division of space within the coffeehouse, with women behind the coffee bar or figured on signs without. But Ellis's argument that the idealism of the coffeehouse is actually "overlaid by another kind of status difference that recognizes and reads gender and sexuality" more successfully complicates traditional Habermasian arguments.

Further, Clery claims that "coffee-houses were remarkably free of protocol" (170), but my research in early modern scientists' letters and diaries suggests that the protocols were more complicated than she allows. John Evelyn recounts in his diary seeing Newton at a coffeehouse, sitting not on a bench but on an oak chair that was always reserved for him, indicating that there was indeed a spatial manifestation of a hierarchy of patrons and services. Robert Hooke frequented a string of coffeehouses depending on what business he wanted to conduct and whom he wanted to meet, suggesting that the coffeehouse recapitulated the logic of the marketplace. Historian John Brewer quotes Boswell in the 1760s on his regular Saturday visits to Child's Coffee House in emulation of Addison: "The Spectator mentions his being seen at Child's, which makes me have an affection for it" (33). Such a declaration suggests an elaborate system of masculine patronage, cultural capital and attendant protocols, as well as a well-developed circulation of knowledge about that patronage as a form of advertisement. In practice any individual attended more than one coffeehouse to conduct business or tend to different aspects of their identity.

Aytoun Ellis's modern history of coffeehouses notes that, by 1685, the masculine diversity found earlier under one coffeehouse roof increasingly served as multiple loci around which separate coffeehouse cultures emerged:

There were Puritan coffee-houses where no oaths were heard, and where lank-haired men discussed election and reprobation through their noses; Jew coffee-houses, where dark-eyed moneychangers from Venice and Amsterdam greeted each other; and Popish coffee-houses, where, as good Protestants believed, Jesuits planned over their cups another great fire, and cast silver bullets to shoot the king. (270)<sup>4</sup>

Coffeehouse culture was perhaps not as balkanized as A. Ellis implies, but Evelyn's, Hooke's, and Boswell's accounts of themselves each suggest the growing number of coffeehouses that coalesced around different identities, ideas, or social exchanges. The development of coffeehouse specialization suggests the materialization of spaces built on

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<sup>4</sup> In addition, John Brewer writes: "As the numbers of coffee houses grew, they became more specialized. The modern stockmarket originated at Jonathan's Coffee House in Exchange Alley . . . . Shipping and insurance services were centred on Lloyd's Coffee House in Lombard Street. Lawyers met at Alice's and Hell Coffee House, both close to Westminster Hall, while politicians--Tories at the Cocoa Tree, the Whigs at Arthur's --had their own coffee houses in the West End. Booksellers met at the Chapter Coffee House in Paternoster Row . . . . Artists . . . gathered at Old Slaughter's Coffee House in St. Martin's Lane; *literati* patronized Will's and the Bedford Coffee House, both in Covent Garden; actors gathered at Wright's nearby, and opera singers and dancing masters met at the Orange in the Haymarket." (35)



and for many masculine types in addition to driving a spatial wedge between men and women. I contend that the gendered striation of space both in coffeehouse culture at large and within individual coffeehouses suggests that the rational modern masculine subject constructed by Steele in the eighteenth century and endorsed by Habermas in the twentieth was the product of carefully constructed and regulated spatialities. Now I will turn to coffeehouse periodical literature as a primary agent of constructing coffeehouse spatiality and masculinity.

### **Coffeehouse Periodicals**

Virtuosos patronized coffeehouses, and coffeehouses also frequently brought their patrons into contact with natural sciences--lectures on oratory, medicine, and new science were delivered there.<sup>5</sup> Increased circulation of news and reports on new science at this time also meant increased readers of periodical writing on new science--captive audiences in coffeehouses. Not only could periodicals be bought or borrowed in coffeehouses, but one could also hear them being read aloud, discussed, and debated. Periodical literature helped define the topics relevant to, and the spatial boundaries of, coffeehouse culture. News publications like Gentleman's Magazine and Literary Magazine, or the Select British Library were available in coffeehouses and responsible for much of the popularizing of the Royal Society, and regularly included synopses of what was found in the latest edition of the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. While coffeehouses were spaces in which debates over sobriety, the constitution of the public, and news regulations coalesced, Hooke's diary indicates that they also served as places essential to the circulation of new science ideas.<sup>6</sup> Coffeehouse history and science history also imbricate at the scientific descriptions of the new commodities found in the coffeehouses. The natural products of the coffeehouse--coffee, tea, cocoa, sugar, and tobacco--were all described and rationalized in the pages of scientific publications.<sup>7</sup>

Along with periodicals that popularized Royal Society doings were those critical of new science projects. In Steele's The Tatler, he aimed at the reformation of manners and morals under the name of Isaac Bickerstaff. Both Spectator and Tatler worked from 1709 to 1715 on the formation of a particular type of masculine public citizen, largely by satirizing what was *not* the ideal subject. Virtuosos came under fire frequently. For example, the figure of Gimcrack, the title character made famous in Thomas Shadwell's 1676 play, The Virtuoso, reappeared in The Tatler over 30 years later. On August 26,

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<sup>5</sup> A "virtuoso" was one with a special interest in natural history--the word carries a negative connotation of pursuing such an interest in a trifling or dilettantish manner.

<sup>6</sup> There is some speculation that the Temple Coffee House was *the* spot for naturalists, and indeed the diaries of Hooke and Evelyn report many visits. But according to science historian L. Jessop, the evidence is tantalizing in its inconclusiveness. Based primarily on Hooke's diary, I suspect instead that naturalists met in several places in smaller groups, while their primary new science meetings were held in conjunction with the Royal Society.

<sup>7</sup> Leuwenhoeck described the particles of sugar candy in Philosophical Transactions in 1709; tea was described by Johannis Nicolai Pechlini in 1684-85. There is also a "Description and Management of the Cacao-tree" from 1673. Other exotic foodstuffs introduced or described in the pages of Philosophical Transactions include saffron, salts, lemons, oranges, and nuts.

1710, Steele set up his representation of Sir Nicholas Gimcrack by disclaiming any scorn for *minutiae*:

Nature is full of wonders, every atom is a standing miracle, and endowed with such qualities as could not be impressed on it by a power and wisdom less than infinite....However, since the world abounds in the noblest fields of speculation, it is, methinks, the mark of a little genius to be wholly conversant among insects, reptiles, animalcules, and those trifling rarities that furnish out the apartment of a virtuoso. (110)

Steele's rhetorically pronounced awe of nature reveals itself to be merely obligatory; his invective against "insects, reptiles, and animalcules," continues a literary trope of devalued small "natural" (as opposed to commodified) objects. While what counted as "trifling" changed, most of those objects and topics that were deemed worth pursuing were aligned with commercial pursuits. Steele's account features standard conservative charges against the virtuoso's misunderstanding of market values. Steele apparently wanted to keep a clear distinction between business and diversions, and consequently between the industrious and the idle. The plea for such a division suggests the continuing social anxiety about science's emergence as the gauche leisure concern of men who were newly wealthy, or whose fathers were.

Social anxiety about economics and changing class markers was attached to those objects found in natural history collections and mocked for not being "real" knowledge. For example, in the same issue of The Tatler, Steele writes that he has been:

shown a beetle valued at twenty crowns, and a toad at a hundred: but we must take this for a general rule, that whatever appears trivial or obscene in the common notions of the world, looks grave and philosophical in the eye of a virtuoso. To show this humour in its perfection, I shall present my reader with the legacy of a certain virtuoso. (111)

The word "value" incorporates regimes of both economic value and intellectual value, and these separate realms are collapsed into one. In some ways Steele was right: the economies in which a beetle would sell for twenty crowns are removed from use value; such economies rely solely on exchange value. Colonialism and global economic structures both allowed the kind of profits that made luxury items mandatory and introduced natural objects--new to the west--to buyers. So I see Steele leveling an argument not against capital but against bad capitalists with his criticism of virtuosos, and those criticisms are overwritten with what counts as 'proper' masculine behavior. Further, this chastisement of bad capitalists was launched in a periodical that circulated through the coffeehouse culture where Steele would have reached the very targets of his satire.

Later in that issue of The Tatler, Steele suggests that the deluded virtuoso may suffer least of all at the hands of his economic misdirection when he quotes from Gimcrack's "will":

I, Nicholas Gimcrack being in sound health of mind, but in great weakness of body, do...bestow my worldly goods and chattles in manner following:

*Imprimis*, to my dear wife,  
One box of butterflies,  
One drawer of shells,  
A female skeleton,  
A dried cockatrice  
*Item*, to my daughter Elizabeth,  
My receipt for preserving dead caterpillars.  
As also my preparations of winter May-dew,  
and embryo pickle . . . . (112)

Trifles here have replaced the standard commodities of inheritance. I argue that Steele has carefully enumerated low-value items in a textual and social space traditionally devoted to articulating valuables and monetary units. Steele inadvertently exposes the emergence of commodity fetishism--the tendency for relations between people to be mediated by, and thus to be seen as relations between, things. While traditionally a will can be glossed as evidence of love, familial generosity, or responsibility, Steele's document parceling out trifles erases such romance. Thus, Gimcrack's will acts out the virtuoso's failure to properly comply with the rules that govern the social structures of family, patriline, and reproduction of economic classes, while it lays bare the structure of commodity fetishism. Gimcrack is portrayed as failing in the social duties of marriage--he is a compromised ideal man and is meant to serve as a generalized example against such behavior.

Steele also was more specific when he wrote of Salter in 1709: "it is the misfortune of persons of great genius, to have their faculties dissipated by attention to too many things at once. Mr. Salter is an instance of this . . ." (281). Steele points to moderation as marking serious people and pleasures and shows how Salter fails. Steele's widely circulated writing perpetuated social concerns about diversions with "dissipating" effects. In his July 8, 1710 Tatler, Steele wrote:

I have given positive orders to Don Saltero, of Chelsea, the tooth-drawer, and Dr. Thomas Smith, the corn-cutter, of King Street (who have the modesty to confine their pretensions to manual operations), to bring me incomplete lists of all who are but of equal learning with themselves, and yet administer beyond the feet and gums. (vol.1, 14-15)

The most striking part of Steele's mention of Salter is the doubly scathing parenthetical assessment. Not only has he marked Salter as having a kind of false knowledge, but by implication he discredits those intellectual climbers who did not limit themselves to the manual operations of their station. Salter comes to fill a cultural space that supports rationalism and science by epitomizing its opposite--effeminate, working class, a non-systematic collector, and a self-proclaimed wonder-monger, as we shall see. This connection between The Tatler and Salter exemplifies how the spatiality of the

coffeehouse is overwritten with narrow gender possibilities and is delineated by the periodicals that circulated within it.

### **Don Saltero's Coffeehouse**

But lest I leave my reader feeling sorry for “Don Saltero,” let me also show that James Salter actively helped shape the image we receive of him. In advertisements and through his widely-circulating catalogues, Salter positioned himself as a proprietor of wonder. In 1728, the year before his death, Salter advertised his coffeehouse in the Tory Mist's Weekly Journal. Mist's was one of the government's most damaging critics during the reign of George I; the journal featured extensive reporting on the combative activities of troops and the harassment of citizens throughout the country and sparked debates on individuals' liberties. Salter's first audience, then, could be seen as populists critical of Whig repressions. Salter's ad ran:

*Monsters of all sorts here are seen,  
Strange things in Nature, as they grew so,  
Some relics of the Sheba Queen,  
And fragments of the famed Bob Crusoe.*

*Knick-Knacks, too, dangle round the wall,  
Some in glass cases, some on the shelf,  
But what's the rarest sight of all?*

*YOUR HUMBLE SERVANT SHOWS HIMSELF.* (in A. Ellis 158)

Salter did not try to make his collection seem like science, even though many of the items found there were just as likely to show up in a natural history space like Sloane's. He crafts an audience position diametrically opposed to the Prince of Wales's 1748 serious perusal of Sloane's collection where, according to Gentleman's Magazine, the Prince compliments Sloane on “immense treasures of the valuable and instructive productions of nature and art” (301). Instead of such serious goals, Salter taught his audience the modern non-scientific gaze of leisure (Stallybrass and White; D. Todd; Debord; Brown). His catalogue put the nonscientific objects into print and served to advertise his public space, lead his viewers through the space following his explanatory narrative, and mark his collection as opposite to the kind found in the hallowed halls of Oxford or in the hushed halls of Sloane's manor. Salter also positioned himself as another exotic object to be gazed at.

Salter's assumed name, Don Saltero, has been variously glossed as Salter's odd affect (Altick 24), a nickname dubbed by English Vice-Admiral Munden who was previously posted to the Spanish coast (A. Ellis 154), or a name given by Richard Steele (Lillywhite 194). Whatever its origin, “Don Saltero” marks Salter himself as a curiosity and his collection as a reflection of his “foreign” masculinity. The Spanish appellation ironically linked the collector to a discourse of colonialism that doggedly reported Spanish colonial projects as uncivilized and barbarous in comparison to English imperialism.<sup>8</sup> To compound his misfit persona, Salter was reportedly henpecked, getting

away to London frequently to escape his wife. He also is reported to have worn a muff.<sup>9</sup> In short, Salter represented a gender identity apart from Steele's ideal man; he was nonetheless taken up in popular literature repeatedly: I suggest that he became the dilettante so highly profiled in science satires. Salter's persona marks the nexus where gender identity and epistemology reinforce one another.

Chelsea, at the time of Salter's endeavor, was a place of courtly resort famous for its buns; for its china; for Strombolo House's fireworks; for Jenny's Whim, with its bowling green, cock pit, and mechanical mermaids and fish; and for Ranelagh Gardens--upscale pleasure gardens (Boulton 75; Brewer 66). In the midst of this elegance, Salter displayed curiosities on the walls and ceiling of his coffeehouse, which patrons could examine for the price of a cup of coffee. Salter claimed that his collection of curiosities was "for the delight of the Publick" (Salter 1736), and that his collection included such disparate and whimsical items as "the Queen of Sheba's Fan and Cordial Bottle, Robinson Crusoe's and his man Friday's shirt [*sic*], the Four Evangelists cut on a cherry stone, a curious Ball of Fishbones found near Plymouth, and Pontius Pilate's Wife's Chambermaid's Sister's Sister's Hat" (Salter 1736). Patrons could follow along with his explanatory catalogue for a shilling. Now let's examine how Salter's catalogues created a space for him between the ideal public man (epitomized by Sloane) and the Other of the colonies.

The forty editions of Salter's coffeehouse catalogue published between 1726 and 1760 point to the popularity of his coffeehouse. Given its overlap with Sloane's collection, the proliferation of inventories that it generated, as well as its textual representations and colloquial impact (at mid-century, surgeon John Hunter even reports picking up "Don Salteros" for his private museum), Salter's collection begs critical scholarly attention. Salter emphasizes the monsters, strange things, and knick-knacks in his collection at a time when eighteenth-century popular writers were deriding the "unthinking Mob," the "gazing multitude," and the "gaping throng" (D. Todd 149) in opposition to the earnest and inquisitive model reader constructed in scientific texts or the new British public man constructed by Steele. Salter's carnivalesque carefully cashes in on the public's thirst for exoticism in the wake of natural history's professionalization.

Those natural history objects on display are also part of larger processes by which the "exotic" was tamed, giving the British public a sense of control, even in the face of resistant colonial others. At the moment when Salter is opening his coffeehouse museum, the Barbadian code, which was copied in South Carolina, declared that the "barbarous, wild, savage natures" of the black workers called for more strenuous laws than those by which the white men lived (James 42). These laws, in part, fixed on the cultural objects of slave life such as conch shells and drums, imbuing them with powers of subverting racial and labor hierarchies. After the Jamaican and other colonial uprisings, slaves were closely regulated: "[c]olonial lawmakers saw the transmission of African customs as subversive and slaves were forbidden crepuscular drumming, blowing on conch shells

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<sup>8</sup> See Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, 1719 or the earlier, *Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, published in 1598 and 1600 and penned by Richard Hakluyt (1552-1616), for examples of the tradition.

<sup>9</sup> A covering usually worn by women, often of fur and usually of cylindrical shape with open ends, into which both hands may be placed for warmth.

and fetish ceremonies” (James 43). These objects, and others forbidden to slaves, were welcomed by collectors and often showed up on display back in England and Europe. And since England’s many Navigation Acts ensured that these colonial objects passed through England by Royal mandate, all British and colonial commodities literally passed through the colonizer’s regulatory space.<sup>10</sup> Many of these objects ended up on display, embodying the exoticism and material desire that drove British expansion. That display, and the courting of wonder, was part of creating a public sphere that served, among other things, as a site of management for cultural anxieties attendant upon English expansion. Salter’s exotic displays participated in this management and even seemed to be endorsed by the scientific community.

Salter’s 1736 Catalogue of the Rarities to be Seen at Don Saltero’s Coffee-House in Chelsea To Which is Added, A Compleat List of the Donors thereof lists “Sir John Cope, Bart. and his Sons, the first Generous Benefactors.” Next listed are Sir Hans Sloane, Sir Thomas Littleton, Sir Francis Drake, Sir Robert Cotton, and various colonels, earls, admirals, dukes, Marquises, and doctors. Salter’s list of donors, placed at the front of his catalogue, reads like a Royal Society membership list. And indeed, science practitioners included similar donor lists when they published catalogues of their own collections to garner cultural capital.<sup>11</sup> However, because Salter bills himself as a monster-monger, no guarantee of credibility for his objects can be, or need be, gotten from such a list of donors. The list does mark Salter as a friend to science, as it delineates Salter’s relationships with such new science players as Sloane, Drake, and Cotton Salter’s overall designation as “non-scientific” works in two ways: to reinforce his collection as a site of wonder and entertainment and to make “scientific” collectors rest easy that they had an opposite to which they could point and against which they could define themselves.

During a time when entrenched class distinctions were shifting from being blood-based to being work-based, I argue that Salter’s collection gives the emerging British public visible evidence of their similarities with each other--what comes to be called their “equality”--and their differences from both colonial members of the empire and from the “barbarous, savage and wild” slaves that worked the colonies.<sup>12</sup> Religious items in Salter’s collection included: “50 Pope Adrian IV, 136A Pair of Nun’s Stockings, 137A Nun’s Whip, 146A Chinese Nun, very curious, 147A Crucifix and Beads, 173 The Pope’s Infallible Candle, 274A Coffin of State for a Friar’s Bones, 299A Romish

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<sup>10</sup> The First Navigation Act in 1660 proclaimed that goods brought into England had to use English ships; foreign vessels were also forbidden access to English colonies. The Second and Third Navigation Acts (1663, 1672) prevented trade between the colonies without first going through England. In 1696, England passed an act to prevent abuses of the previous acts (such as smuggling).

<sup>11</sup> This is the earliest catalogue available. Others are from the 1760s and 1780s. The later editions show that Salter’s collection was changed around periodically, and that national politics shaped the objects included on display. See, for example, Petiver; and Grew.

<sup>12</sup> The eight editions of Salter’s catalogues that I have been able to locate, of the forty reportedly printed, are important for reading early modern objects, such as “a Scots crystal,” “a curious ivory box,” “two mason flies from the West Indies,” “a wonderful beetle from the East Indies,” and “bones worshipped by the Indians,” in light of both their colonial origins and how the colonies were represented to English consumers.

Bishop's Crosier, and 300 The Friar's Discipline." With anti-Catholic sentiments rampant, a good Church of England Protestant at this time would not have appreciated the relics of saints that they accused Catholics of collecting. Salter's catalogue and collection mocks Catholics' covetousness toward relics by displaying such items.

As Edward Said has written, "the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience . . . Orientalism can be discussed and analyzed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient--dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, ruling over it" (1-3). Salter's collection displays the medals of European royalty mixed in with the tools of banality from the East--forks, paper, pens. Salter's collection thus simultaneously reinscribes the division between Occident and Orient while it establishes that division publicly. With its emphasis on the wicked objects of Catholicism, royal medals, and "native" weapons of Indians and Americans, Salter's collection recapitulated British nationalist, religious, and Orientalist ideologies.

The science practitioner or collector as a literary trope had a resurgence around mid-century, just as Sir Hans Sloane reached the apex of his popularity. But the role of the collector had changed in the public imagination for several reasons. Some highly effective, widely understood, and profitable new products had been generated by the new sciences. Science affected the populace through Thomas Sydenham's use of Jesuit's bark to successfully treat malaria in 1666, a steam cooker invented in the 1670s, and processes established for making large panes of glass in the 1680s. The 1690s saw the isolation and use of Epsom salts, the development of straitjackets, a steam-driven pump also known as the "miner's friend," an air thermometer, and champagne. The first decades of the eighteenth century welcomed Jethro Tull's multi-row seed planter; idiot cages; improvements in steel-making processes, letterpresses, steam engines, firearms; and the microscope was introduced to the lay public. My point is not that science simply proved itself or that it succumbed to the logic of capitalism (though both things may be true). Rather, particular *kinds* of scientific results--popular products used or approved by large numbers of the populace, not just scientists, doctors or experimenters--had to accumulate and make their way into the public imagination in order to alleviate that widespread public alienation to which the satires of the virtuosos attest.

Salter and his collection seemed perfectly to fill a cultural need for an obvious antidote to the professionalizing natural historian; generations later he was still being trotted out for those purposes. In 1778, when Frances Burney published Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World, Salter's fame was posthumously rearticulated in cultural discourses of vapid leisure highly inflected by class. Young Mr. Branghton grills Evelina on her knowledge of public places. When Evelina admits that she has never been to George's at Hampstead, the impudent Mr. Smith offers:

'George's at Hampstead!' repeated Mr. Smith contemptuously; 'how came you to think the young lady would like to go to such a low place as that! But pray, Madam, have you ever been to Don Salter's at Chelsea?' 'No, sir.' 'No! nay, then I must insist on having the pleasure of conducting you there before long I assure you, Ma'am, many genteel people go, or else, I give you my word, I should not recommend it'. (172)

Salter's continued appearance in cultural discourses of leisure is remarkable given that he had been dead for fifty years and his son-in-law had taken over then sold the shop. Salter's historically- and critically-ignored collection continued to serve as an ideological foil to Sloane's highbrow "scientific" collection through the class of both the collector and, as in the passage above, the visitor. Salter's coffeehouse was a space where his customers' shared ideologies were paraded before them, reinforcing their ideas about the English culture that they shared. His coffeehouse made public the castoffs of science and made clear the distinctions between the English working class and both the respected men of science and the colonized members of the empire. Salter's and Sloane's collections have come to embody that split between science and entertainment, with Sloane's collection figuring as a space removed from the realm of the political in favor of objective science and rational knowledge.

I argue that Salter's and Sloane's collections are important cultural sites where the distinctions between science and pseudo-science are maintained and reinforced. These collections *as a pair* suggest the emergence of two cultural formations--rational science and meaningless entertainment--that purport to be apolitical and ideology-free, but are in fact dependent upon one another. While critics tried to discount natural historians as frivolous gimcrack collectors, a pairing like Sloane and Salter begs a more complicated discussion of what counts as science, and of what other cultural work is being done through these dueling spaces of display. In the end, the rational man of the public sphere is constituted largely by exclusions--of women, the working class, and alternative masculinities--and those exclusions are initiated and maintained spatially. This examination of gender and space suggests the nearness of science and spectacle. But it is also meant to suggest that the epistemological and objective overlaps that Sloane and Salter encapsulate are forcibly separated into what have become hierarchized, even gendered, disciplinary divisions.



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