

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: CITY OF GRACE: POWER, PERFORMANCE,
AND BODIES IN COLONIAL SOUTH
CAROLINA

Matthew Thomas Shifflett, Doctor of Philosophy, 2014

Dissertation directed by: Professor Heather S. Nathans
School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies

Colonial Charles Town, South Carolina, was widely reputed to be one of the most refined and genteel cities in the early British Empire. As its planters and merchants grew rich from the overseas rice trade, they sought to embody their new elite status by learning the courtly styles of European social dancing, using dances such as the minuet to cultivate a sense of physical “grace.” This sense of grace allowed them to construct cosmopolitan identities and differentiate a social order that consolidated their power over the colony. Meanwhile, other social factions, such as the colony’s large slave majority and the emerging class of middling tradesmen, sought their own share in controlling the vocabulary through which bodies might mean. “City of Grace: Power, Performance, and Bodies in Colonial South Carolina” puts colonial Charles Town’s “bodies” into conversation in order to highlight how bodily behaviors such as dancing, posture, and comportment could organize power relations in an eighteenth-century British colony.

This dissertation considers in turn the part that four groups played in the conflict over the values assigned to Charles Town’s bodies: the wealthy elites who sought to use

“grace” as a means to proclaim and ensure their status, the dancing masters who sought to capitalize on the elites’ need for training, the African slaves whose syncretized performances of their own ethnically-specific dances troubled elite ideals of a graceful “white” body, and the emerging cohort of middling tradespeople and evangelical believers who critiqued the pretensions of elite manners. By using sources such as dancing manuals, paintings, and private letters, I put the colonial body back “on its feet,” in order to understand the kinesthetic qualities of movement itself as a site for creating and transmitting meaning. Within this framework, I suggest that genteel grace was a strategy by which eighteenth-century elites sought to perform class status without betraying the artificiality of the performance.

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POWER, PERFORMANCE, AND
BODIES IN COLONIAL SOUTH
CAROLINA

by

Matthew Thomas Shifflett

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Advisory Committee:

Professor Heather S. Nathans, Chair
Professor Richard J. Bell
Professor Gay Gibson Cima
Professor Clare A. Lyons
Professor Laura J. Rosenthal

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This dissertation is dedicated
to the memory of

Dr. James W. Parker

and

Dr. Linda Livingstone

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	vi
Introduction:.....	1
Chapter 1: The “Genteel Science”: Social Dancing and “Grace”	26
Chapter 2: “The Manners-Making Crew”: The Plight of Dancing Masters in Eighteenth-Century Charles Town.....	80
Chapter 3: “Pushing and Dancing”: Dance and Martial Arts in the Construction of the “African” Body	123
Chapter 4: A New Grace: The Rise of the Benevolent Class	175
Epilogue: Gabriel Transformed.....	225
Appendix: <i>The Dancing Master, A Satyr</i>	232
Bibliography	239

List of Figures

FIGURE A: Ashley Hall Ruins.....	1
FIGURE B: Charles Fraser Painting.....	2
FIGURE C: Drayton Hall.....	27
FIGURE D: Drayton Hall, Stair Hall.....	28
FIGURE E: Drayton Hall Ballroom.....	28
FIGURE F: Exact Prospect of Charles Town, Bishop Roberts.....	37
FIGURE G: Feuillet’s notation system.....	44
FIGURE H: Kellom Tomlinson’s <i>Art of Dancing</i>	45
FIGURES I-M: Bickham illustrations of minuet.....	52
FIGURE N: Taking hands (Bickham illustration).....	53
FIGURE O: Panoramic View of London, 1751.....	68
FIGURE P: Peter Manigault, by Allen Ramsay.....	76
FIGURE Q: Elizabeth Manigault, by Jeremiah Theus.....	77
FIGURE R: Pink house.....	37
FIGURE S: <i>The Old Plantation</i>	149
FIGURE T: William Byrd III, by Charles Bridges.....	157
FIGURE U: <i>Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences</i>	229

Introduction



FIGURE A: The Ruins of Ashley Hall, photo by Gazie Nagle.

All that is left now of Ashley Hall are the ruins of a semicircular set of rust-colored sandstone steps. Those steps once led to a brick Georgian mansion, one of the finest in South Carolina, replete with an alley of live oak trees leading to the door. Now Spanish moss hangs drowsily off the remaining oaks, and willowy tufts of Pampas grass have overtaken the lane. The ruins stand shaded by a canopy of cypress and tupelo, grown up from the blackwater swamp that lies just yards away. One can imagine the graceful façade that once rose behind these steps, with a strictly symmetrical arrangement

of multi-pane windows balanced according to classical proportions. But the building itself is gone, burned to the ground at the end of the Civil War. An 1803 painting by Charles Fraser provides little help; the building is almost completely obscured by trees. Nothing remains of the original structure—no material, pictorial, or anecdotal clues to the architectural face that greeted visitors to the home of four generations of the politically powerful Bull family. There are only these “stairs to nowhere” to suggest the scale and elegance of Ashley Hall. Crumbling and weed-ridden, these stairs are now being slowly reclaimed by South Carolina’s tidal swamp.



FIGURE B: Ashley Hall, Charles Fraser, 1803

The dynamic contrast between the Georgian mansions of the Ashley River and the untamed swamp that surrounds them calls to mind the inherent theatricality of the colonial project. Ornamental staircases and other modish architectural features set a stage for daily life that was full of referential power, mapping out patterns of European style onto a decidedly un-European landscape. Modern stagecraft practices attest to the power of a few well-chosen set pieces to transform a space. In my years of working in theatre, I

have constructed, acted upon, and stacked into storage at least a dozen such staircases, each meant to signify some larger architectural structure, from a chateau to a tenement. Just like the sandstone steps of Ashley Hall, these staircases transformed the spaces in which they stood into other locales, playing off the mind's ready leap into illusory worlds. Today, tourists visit what remains of Ashley River mansions in the hopes of making that leap, entering into the fantasyland suggested by Arcadian gardens and Palladian architecture. For the colonial barons who built these mansions, this fantasy was both imperial and empyreal, invoking European ideals of serenity and order to overlay the exotic and seemingly hostile wilderness of the Carolina Lowcountry. The website for nearby Drayton Hall invokes this leap when it promises, "This is more than a house. This is a staging ground."¹

But what did they stage? What performances played out on these Georgian stage-sets? How did colonial bodies (corporeal and corporate) carry through the referential power of their surroundings in their everyday social interactions? I argue that South Carolinians of the mid-eighteenth century constructed identities and differentiated a social order through their performances of "deportment"—manners, posture, carriage—in everyday life. Elites in particular—those planters and merchants whose fortunes swelled during the rice boom of the 1730s—jealously guarded their status by adopting a "graceful" body as a precondition for access to their commercial and social networks. This code of deportment and decorum found its most condensed expression in the polite balls that were held in Charles Town's most fashionable assembly rooms and in the ballrooms that were built into Ashley River mansions. Charles Town elites hired itinerant

¹ <http://www.draytonhall.org/> Accessed February 20, 2014.

dancing masters to teach them the steps and styles of fashionable European dances, such as the minuet. Social dancing was thus a functional performance, one which cemented imperial authority, naturalized a local social hierarchy, and imbued geographically obscure Britons with a sense of global belonging.

But white elites were not the only group in South Carolina who used dance to articulate identity. African slaves outnumbered whites in the colony and their labor sustained performances of whiteness. These slaves broke the earth and shaped the settled landscape, they cultivated the rice that powered the colonial economy, and they polished to a radiant luster the shining surfaces of tea trays, candlesticks, and other status symbols; they even played the fiddle at South Carolina's balls. Although whites saw black slaves as little more than stagehands in their own performance, slaves were constructing and defending their own identity through African-derived dances performed at all-night Lowcountry gatherings. Dance gave slaves from diverse ethnic backgrounds—Senegambian, Kongoles, Biafran, etc.—an opportunity to syncretize their performance traditions into a shared “African” body, one that delimited the body's relationship to the landscape, to the spirit world, and to the social order.

In this dissertation, I put colonial Charles Town's “bodies” into conversation in order to highlight how bodily patterns and dispositions could organize power relations in the colonial context. I focus especially on dance as a resource for constructing these patterns and dispositions, since dance was considered by both black and white communities as a pedagogical tool for developing socially useful qualities. Elite whites turned to dancing masters not just to learn minuets, but also to perfect their bows, lift

their posture, and to “rub off...[their] country air.”² The graceful and urbane disposition that students learned from their dancing masters consolidated their local supremacy while interpellating them as imperial subjects. Meanwhile, black slaves drew on African dance styles that taught martial arts figures and helped slaves mediate with the spiritual world of their ancestors. These African dances conditioned a slave body that challenged the “graceful” body of elite whites both physically, through displays of immediate corporeal power, and metaphysically, by reiterating the slaves’ ontology as spiritual beings with deeply embodied connections to a sacred tradition. Dancing was thus a crucial front in South Carolina’s economy of symbolic power: white slave-owners sought to not only “master” their own bodies, but to master the bodies of their slaves, in part by monopolizing the authority to make meaning out of movement.

I am analyzing bodies in motion, which presents a challenge for the historian. While some of the rules that conditioned eighteenth-century movement survive in dancing manuals and other forms of conduct literature, the everyday execution of those rules and the negotiation of specific social situations were ephemeral performances which have forever vanished from the historical record. As with Charles Fraser’s painting of Ashley Hall, the historian must infer from the edges, using contextual clues to conjure colonial bodies back to locomotive life. Accordingly, I engage below with a variety of primary materials, including letters and diaries, book illustrations, architecture, archaeological remains, oil portraiture, prayer-books, legislation, and other fragments of South Carolina’s colonial experience. I attempt to draw these diverse sources together by subjecting them to a series of interrelated questions: How did eighteenth-century social

² Mrs. Cadwallader Colden to Mrs. John Hill, Sept 8, 1732, “Cadwallader Colden Papers,” New York Historical Society Collections (1934), 8:200

dancing translate itself into a “dance” that mapped bodies across urban and social spaces in colonial Charles Town, South Carolina? In what spaces did these “dances” take place and how were these spaces coded within the imperial landscape? By what resources could South Carolinians gain a practical mastery of social dance forms and the ideologies of the body that attended them? Through what avenues could dancers exhibit that practical mastery in a way that translated into social advantage? To what extent did the African dance forms being performed by slaves in the South Carolina Lowcountry unsettle the process through which the planter and merchant elites constructed their “dance”? Why did an anti-dancing rhetoric emerge mid-century and to what extent was this rhetoric a challenge to the dancers as well as the dance?

Carolina Gold

With its unpaved streets and oppressively humid summers, Charles Town would not have seemed the most likely of North America’s colonial cities to become so eminently urbane.³ But eighteenth-century visitors regularly commented upon Charles Town’s luxuries and elegance. While most visitors were charmed, many of the most detailed accounts came from pious New Englanders who abjured the city’s “luxury, dissipation, life, sentiments, and manners.”⁴ The refinement for which Charles Town became known was largely funded by the rice boom of the 1730s, but there were a few fixed characteristics of the colony that contributed to the Lowcountry’s social character.

³ The port was known as Charles Town until the American Revolution, at which point the city was renamed Charleston. Because my interest is in the 1730s and 1740s, I follow the convention of calling the city Charles Town. Many other authors have chosen otherwise. I am following this convention not only to maintain consistency with the primary documents, but also to underscore that the celebrated Charleston of a century later—the heart of the antebellum South—is not identical to the city I describe in this dissertation.

⁴ Josiah Quincy, qtd in Frederick P. Bowes, *The Culture of Early Charleston* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 1942), p. 10.

In the first place, Charles Town was intractably English.⁵ South Carolina had been founded in 1670 by proprietary investors, and by 1700 it was still a loosely-connected frontier patchwork of Englishmen, Barbadians, French Huguenots, and other settler groups. In the first decades of the eighteenth century, however, the colony became increasingly “English” in character as it became more tightly connected to the metropole’s political and economic activities. The Church Act of 1706 established the supremacy of the Anglican Church in South Carolina, opening a vital channel for the transmission of English culture into the province. Local factors began the profitable business of stocking England’s naval stores from the wooded bounty of Carolina’s hinterland. Most importantly, the colonists used the failures of the Yamasee War (1715) as a pretext to throw off the proprietary government. Carolinians petitioned the king to appoint a royal governor, which he did in 1729 after buying off the proprietary interests. When Parliament opened the door for Carolina’s rice trade the following year, the resulting boom was the consummation of a twenty-five year courtship between the colony’s rising power-elites and the London institutions which loaned those elites its infrastructures and its legitimacy.⁶

This courtship was not one-sided, however. Charles Town’s rise as a conduit for trade was concomitant with the rise to power of the modern Whig party in the British Parliament.⁷ Throughout the 1720s, factionalism inflamed Parliamentary debate as Henry

⁵ For a more extended argument about Charles Town’s English-ness, see Richard Waterhouse, *A New World Gentry: The Making of a Merchant and Planter Class, 1670-1770*. (Charleston: The History Press, 2005).

⁶ The story of Carolina’s rise from frontier outpost to successful colonial port has been told by many historians. The most accessible-yet-erudite tellings are to be found in Eugene Sirmans, *A Brief Political History of South Carolina*; Frederick P. Bowes, *The Culture of Early Charleston*, (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 1942); and Emma Hart, *Building Charleston: Town and Society in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World*. (Charlottesville: Virginia UP, 2010).

⁷ Basil Williams, *The Whig Supremacy, 1714-1760*. (London: Oxford, 1939).

St. John, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke, and his allies produced and circulated literature challenging the foreign and colonial policy decisions of Prime Minister Robert Walpole. David Armitage has explored how this oppositional literature was marked by aggressive nationalism and a new self-consciousness of the “British Empire” as a political community.⁸ As the political leaders in London were articulating a mercantilist and imperialist world-view, Charles Town’s growing prosperity emblemized the model by which this new mercantile empire would work.⁹

In the second place, urban and rural worlds overlapped in South Carolina to a greater degree than they did in other areas. Many South Carolina elites split their time between Charles Town and the rural Lowcountry. Lord Adam Gordon noted during his 1764 visit that nearly every prominent family maintained a country and a city home.¹⁰ Even for non-elites, the network of rivers that laced through the Carolina backcountry made travel between city and country an easier and more regular feature of Lowcountry life. Up and down the Ashley, the Cooper, the Edisto, the Stono, and the countless capillary waterways that feathered out from these rivers, ferries and pettiaugers shuttled commodities and people to town and back.¹¹ Although they are not precisely equivalent terms, it is impossible to socially distinguish Charles Town from the surrounding Lowcountry during the eighteenth century. Charles Town was merely the urban hub of a social network that criss-crossed the South Carolina countryside.¹²

⁸ David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).

⁹ That powerful men both in the colony and the metropole recognized this new model and its possibilities is borne out in the letters that were written back and forth between colonial offices in London and the royal governor’s administration in Charleston. See P.C. Weston, ed. *Documents Connected with the History of South Carolina* (London, 1856).

¹⁰ qtd in Bowes, p.10.

¹¹ Most of the skilled boatmen on these waters were slaves, hired out by their masters.

¹² There was little significant settlement in upcountry South Carolina at this time. Irish immigration expanded into that area just before the French and Indian War, but in the earlier part of the century, it was

Third, in Charles Town during the eighteenth century, “private rather than public social events dominated.”¹³ As a result, access to the Lowcountry’s social networks were especially important. In order to navigate an increasingly complex and heterogeneous port city, many Charlestonians banded together into either formal or informal networks of association. One of the formal networks in question was the St. George’s Society—a gentleman’s club devoted to the propagation of English culture in Charles Town.¹⁴ However, there was an even wider informal network of social associations through which Charles Town merchants and planters kept ties of loyalty and commercial interest braided together. This network can be seen in gentlemen’s money ledgers; debt receipts show that social networks often doubled as credit networks.¹⁵ Finally, as Carl Bridenbaugh has pointed out, many successful merchants in Charleston during the 1730s did not advertise their wares. Merchants such as Gabriel Manigault relied instead on a “face-to-face” network of wealthy and steady customers.¹⁶

For all these reasons, English gentility patterns became powerful components of life among the Lowcountry elite. Genteel practices such as dancing held together networks of social, political, and economic power as they spun overlapping webs across the Lowcountry. In other colonial cities such as Philadelphia, business networks were often sustained through public acts such as advertising in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*; in

still mostly frontier from the English point of view. So, throughout this study, when I speak variously of “Charles Town,” “the Lowcountry,” and “South Carolina,” I am merely speaking in three different registers about a roughly co-terminous system of power.

¹³ Richard Waterhouse, qtd in Judith Cobau, “The Precarious Life of Thomas Pike, A Colonial Dancing Master in Charleston and Philadelphia,” *Dance Chronicle* 17, no. 3 (1994), pp. 229-262.

¹⁴ David S. Shields. *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters in British America*. (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia by University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 283.

¹⁵ Emma Hart has used some of these inventories to illustrate a related point about credit extended between the planter and merchant elites; see Emma Hart, 2010, pp. 95-98.

¹⁶ Carl Bridenbaugh. *Cities in Revolt* p.77. For more on Manigault, see Chapter One of this work.

Charles Town, however, deals were more often brokered and alliances more commonly formed over private dinners in Ashley River mansions, many of them followed by an evening of dancing. Mastering the habits of genteel comportment was crucial to accessing networks of power and commerce. Transactions along these networks were not only “face-to-face,” but “body-to-body,” as Lowcountry elites experienced posture, manners, and bearing as watermarks of their class and looked for those qualities among their associates as emblems of authenticity. This relationship between the body and class authenticity, in which bodies served as both visual symbols for marking identity and experiential vehicles for internalizing those identities, is one of my central concerns.

Phenomenal Bodies

I am telling a story of bodies transformed. Through the habituation of dance forms, residents of a small agricultural colony were transformed into members of the imagined communities that were spreading around the Atlantic Basin in the eighteenth century. This transformation was internal as well as external; the movement dynamics of various dance forms internalized the national and ethnic identities with which the dances were associated. Even as dances transformed individual bodies into national and ethnic subjects, the process of social differentiation through the body altered the character of the communities in which that process took place, contributing to a growing discourse of race that located difference in bodily characteristics. In order to untangle these transformations, I speak of bodies in various registers: of corporeal bodies, of corporate

bodies, and of phenomenal bodies; I pause here to explain these various “bodies” and how they work together.¹⁷

Corporeal bodies are exactly what they sound like: the slabs of matter that we each inhabit for the duration of our biological lives. Corporeal bodies are fragile vessels, subject to breakage, rupture, infection, and untold other evils. They are also capable of sensation, both excruciating and ecstatic, and every gradient in between. The range of activities we can do to or through our corporeal bodies (and to or through the corporeal bodies of others) account for the whole set of human behaviors, and our every experience passes through the medium of the corporeal body. Corporeal bodies are, in short, the irreducible material reality of human existence.

Corporate bodies, by contrast, are intangible. A corporate body is a community of subjects understood as a concrete whole through the metaphor of a body. While corporeal bodies are material realities, corporate bodies are social realities, and are as such categorically abstract. The “body” of the church is a common example in Christian theology, describing the community of believers as an organic unit.¹⁸ European political theory extended that metaphor to statecraft as early as the fifteenth century, describing the state as a non-visible body in which the king was the head and the three estates comprised the trunk and limbs.¹⁹ English and French kings both claimed their authority as

¹⁷ These registers are not intended to be exhaustive. There are countless ways to parse a discussion of the relationship between bodies as matter and bodies as ideas.

¹⁸ Theologians often cite 1 Corinthians 12:12—“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.” The body of the church is sometimes spoken of as being in a matrimonial union with the body of Christ, which has, since its release from corporeal reality following the crucifixion, also been a mystical entity.

¹⁹ For a compelling look at how this view of statecraft intersected with acting theory across the eighteenth century, leading to new forms of representation both onstage and in political assemblies, see Paul Friedland’s *Political Actors: Representative Bodies and Theatricality in the Age of the French Revolution* (Cornell UP, 2002). Friedland’s argument engages with the notion of the *corpus mysticum*, or mystical

emerging from the body politic (*corps-état*), an entity “that cannot be seen or handled” which manifested itself in the corporeal body of the monarch.²⁰ But the rise of Parliamentary authority in England by the end of the seventeenth century troubled the legitimacy of the king’s body as sacrosanct vessel of the body politic. A new relationship between sovereignty and representative “bodies” was being negotiated. The project of empire further complicated the body politic as geographical borders expanded and more “bodies” came to be included under the crown’s authority. Over the course of the eighteenth century a profusion of communal identities—of race, nationality, ethnicity, religious faith, political affiliation, etc.—were increasingly articulated through bodily representation. Print media and theatrical representation were vital technologies in buttressing the abstractions of social identity with the representation of discrete bodies, particularly through strategies of caricature, impersonation, and political cartoons.²¹ These representations constituted a vocabulary of corporate bodies, outlining the values of an emerging imperial fantasy in a metaphorically anatomic idiom.

The *phenomenal body* is the point at which these two terms meet: corporeal bodies experiencing themselves as instances of corporate bodies.²² Following from the

body, and the modes of representation through which actors and political leaders embodied that intangible reality.

²⁰ Edmund Plowden, 1550, qtd in Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957). p. 9.

²¹ Two recent studies offer compelling explorations of how theatrical representation on the eighteenth-century English stage fed the ideological construction of British identity. Louise H. Marshall’s *National Myth and Imperial Fantasy: Representations of Britishness on the Early Eighteenth-Century Stage* (London: Palgrave, 2008) explores the English stage’s use of historical figures as representative subjects to instigate and sustain political debate while asserting the empire’s stability and continuity. Michael Ragussis’s *Theatrical Nation: Jews and Other Outlandish Englishmen in Georgian Britain* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 2010) analyzes the new theatrical forms that emerged in the late eighteenth century by emphasizing the caricature of Irish, Scottish, and Jewish identities in the interest of fabricating a distinct “British” identity.

²² I do not suggest that this term describes a wholly original intervention in the seemingly boundless literatures of critical theory, performance studies, phenomenology, or histories of the body. I am not setting

intellectual tradition of phenomenology, which seeks to systematically understand the relationship of consciousness to phenomena, my notion of the phenomenal body emphasizes the experiential dimension of discursive bodily practices.²³ I am concerned mainly with dance and its related practices—posture, bearing, manners, etc. In emphasizing the experiential dimension, I am asking not just how these practices *express* identity, but how they *impress* identity. For instance, a minuet brings a dancer into direct sensory contact with a complex of otherwise noumenal objects—Britishness, cosmopolitanism, whiteness, etc.²⁴ The sensory impact of the dance anchors these elusive categories to the dancer’s experience of his or her own corporeal body, thus naturalizing the ideological framework of these categories. Through repetition, the categories themselves are internalized, and identity is instantiated. For Africans and Europeans in America during the eighteenth century—particularly those displaced by empire’s web of commerce and migration—the training in and practice of dance forms was a tether between the material reality of an unfamiliar landscape and the ineffable phantoms of global identity.

By reading dancing as a phenomenal experience, I hope to draw attention to its capacity to structure a dancer’s orientation to the world. In this regard, I see dance as a discursive act, an act that contains implicit knowledge which shapes the way a dancer understands and acts within the world. Michel Foucault famously claimed that the body is discursively constructed, but there is no consensus among his readers as to whether

out to re-invent the wheel. I am merely trying to articulate an accurate frame of reference for the ideas I put into conversation herein.

²³ By contrast, there also exists a significant *spectatorial* dimension to discursive bodily practices. The tactics that individuated subjects deploy to instantiate themselves within or challenge social regimes of the body have been the subject of a vast field of literature, particularly within the discipline of performance studies.

²⁴ “Noumenon” is a term used by philosophers of the mind to describe an object that is known without the use of the senses.

Foucault understood “discursive” in its strict linguistic sense, as a particular form of language produced and sustained as a technology of power, or in the broader sense of a specialized system of knowledge that makes the world perceivable in certain ways. In taking the latter view, I treat dance and its related practices as specific physicalities that conditioned one’s perception of the world by conditioning how one moved within it. In doing so, I propose that the spread of social partner dancing in North America partially accounts for the dissemination of imperial identity outside of the linguistic constructs on offer in the books, newspapers, pamphlets, and other print media circulating around the North Atlantic.²⁵

By examining an extra-linguistic vehicle for framing a subject’s orientation to imperial power, my work engages with a growing body of work on the ideological history of the senses. Historians such as Mark M. Smith have considered sensory experience not just as historically situated, but as an important site for perpetuating ideological regimes.²⁶ However, this work is limited by only considering five senses. Sense categories are cultural constructions and scientists specializing in perception have now built a paradigm for study that uses at least nine senses, including balance, proprioception, and kinesthesia. Kinesthesia refers to the qualitative dimensions of movement, such as timing, flow, and balance, particularly as they are experienced by the

²⁵ Benedict Anderson defined the nation as an “imagined political community” and proposed that the rise of national political power was ushered in by the innovations of the novel and the newspaper as new forms of imagining. My thesis here does not contradict Anderson, but it does trouble his reliance on print forms as the exclusive vehicles of imagined community.

²⁶ See, in particular, Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: California UP, 2007). Much of the best-received work in this vein has been on sound, including Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded* (Cornell, 2005); Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the 19th-Century French Countryside*. trans. Martin Thom. (New York: Columbia UP, 1998); James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: California UP, 1995).

agent moving. Treating kinesthesia as a “sense”—i.e. a mechanism for apprehending sensory experience—is key to the analysis that I offer here. The kinesthetic sense is the channel through which the phenomenal body is experienced, keeping corporeal and corporate bodies in transit into and out of one another.²⁷

I am taking up a small corner of a larger intellectual project: how culture shapes and is shaped by the repertoire of things that people do with their bodies. I am indebted to the pioneering work of thinkers such as Marcel Mauss, Norbert Elias, Michel de Certeau, Pierre Bourdieu, Erving Goffman, and Michel Foucault.²⁸ These social theorists each sought in their way to overcome the division between totalizing theories of structure and positivist theories of agency by focusing their work on the body and its techniques as a site of traction between material and social realities. For this, they are sometimes referred to as theorists of “practice.” Pierre Bourdieu, who is arguably the name most closely associated with practice, defined it as the dialectic between “the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality,” that is, the dialectic between “incorporation and objectification.”²⁹ Bourdieu also noted that dance was “one of the areas where the problem of the relations between theory and practice, and also between language and body, is posed with maximum acuteness.”³⁰

²⁷ Phenomenologists often divide mental events into the *intentional* and the *phenomenal*. Intentionality is consciousness of an idea through mental representation, while a phenomenal state is “the lived-through experience of qualitative content,” which includes sensation. My notion of the *phenomenal body* generates from this distinction, as it directs intentionality toward the qualitative content of the structured physical activity underway. (quote from Dale Jacquette, “Sensation and Intentionality,” *Philosophical Studies*, Vol 47, No 3: May 1985, p. 429).

²⁸ I have also found a valuable model for my analysis in the work of Susan Brownell. Brownell’s *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People’s Republic* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1995) offers a sophisticated but clear ethnographic study of Brownell’s own experience as an athlete in China.

Brownell analyzes China’s sports culture as a series of bodily practices that interpellate Chinese athletes as ideological subjects.

²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* transl. Richard Nice (Cambridge UP, 1977)

³⁰ qtd in Susan Brownell, p. 12.

I have followed one of the central precepts of practice theorists in my work by understanding bodily culture as *organizing*, not *determining*, the actions of the individual. In his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau uses the New York cityscape as a metaphor for the organized structures of power and the channels for activity that they allow; however, the individual at street level may navigate the city in an infinite number of ways that are variously tactical, transgressive, and resistant. So, too, does the individual within a cultural system have the freedom to maneuver within a pre-organized set of relations. For dancers in colonial Charles Town, the steeply stratified social structure and the language of gesture and posture that reinforced it might seem at a historical distance to impose a totalizing unity on Lowcountry life. But lives emerge from the archive messy and partial. While laying out my argument, I offer short biographical sketches, not as anecdotal illustration, but for the sake of de Certeau's "street-level" historiography. In order to develop a richer understanding of dance as a strategy of social articulation in the colonial Lowcountry, I shuttle back and forth between the wide-angle "cityscape" view, by which abstract social realities such as "identity" appear to have the solidity of a building edifice, and the messy, "street-level" view, where the behaviors of individual humans are irrational and based on partial understandings.

Methods and Sources

This history is located in the South, and that fact is not irrelevant to its telling. In particular, the unique history of the South—and its enduring themes of pride, misfortune,

and insularity—has depleted the archive of many would-be valuable resources.³¹ As early as the colonial period, fewer public institutions meant fewer public records, and even the records of semi-public institutions—such as the social clubs and charities—often fell into private hands.³² A series of fires, hurricanes, and other disasters also took their toll: for instance, all the early records of the Huguenot Church were destroyed in the fire of 1740.³³ The most devastating cataclysm to hit South Carolina’s archives, of course, was the Civil War. After the attack on Fort Sumter, many valuable documents were moved from Charleston (which, as Charles Town, had been the seat of government in the colonial era) to the state capital in Columbia, only to see those documents burned up during Sherman’s March at the end of the war.³⁴ The devastation of the war was not all at Union hands, of course; Ashley Hall was one of several historic Southern homes that were destroyed by their owners rather than have them fall into “Union hands.” One can only imagine what family-owned treasures were destroyed with them. Other family-owned resources—letters, diaries, ledgers—have been jealously guarded in the years since the war by descendants who likely (and perhaps understandably) do not delight in the idea of sharing their family’s slaveholding past with nosy academics. These documentary problems are compounded when seeking information on South Carolina’s

³¹ As a Southerner myself, I do not mean to move from generalization to stereotype by implying that *Southerners* are prideful, insular, or down-on-their-luck...only that these themes describe recurring circumstances in the South’s history.

³² Throughout the eighteenth century, there are several *South Carolina Gazette* notices that advertise for missing vestry minutes, church registers, membership lists, etc.

³³ For more on this fire, see my final chapter. The records of the Huguenot Church between 1740 and the Civil War were destroyed during the war at Cheraw, South Carolina, when an accidental explosion of gunpowder started a fire that burned down the county courthouse.

³⁴ Among the documents known to have perished in Columbia are the early records of the St. Cecilia Society (a music society and subscription concert series), the records of Temple Beth Elohim (South Carolina’s oldest Jewish congregation and the fourth oldest in the U.S.), and the records of First Baptist Church (est. 1682). Columbia may have also been the end for many documents whose whereabouts are unknown, such as all of the tax records for the colonial period.

non-elite population, and particularly forbidding when searching for information about slave life.³⁵

For all of these challenges, there are yet rich stories to be told from the materials that remain.³⁶ *The South Carolina Gazette* is an extraordinary resource, chronicling diverse elements of South Carolina life from its inception in 1732 until the Timothy family stopped production in 1775. I have used the *Gazette* as a kind of backbone for my study, especially the notices and advertisements that filled out the bulk of each week's issue. In these paid notices, subscribers advertised their businesses, announced social occasions, demanded the settlement of debts, described the features of runaway slaves and servants, and proclaimed their intentions to leave town. I have used these advertisements wherever possible to map out the overlapping social and commercial worlds of Charles Town's planter-merchant and trade classes. I have supplemented my readings of the *Gazette* with selected manuscript sources that add personal contexts to those social worlds. I have found especially evocative material in the private papers of the Manigault family.³⁷ George Whitefield's diary, which has been published in several

³⁵ Of course, I do not mean to demean the value of South Carolina's archival repositories or the richly sourced work that has been produced by scholars working in those repositories. Problems instead arise in works of regional synthesis, where scholars set evidentiary criteria for their studies of the British colonies that categorically marginalize South Carolina. I have often flipped to the index of a work on Colonial America to discover many references to Boston, New York, or Philadelphia, but few or no references to Charleston (or Charles Town). Worse than no coverage at all are those studies that use fragments of South Carolina sources with little understanding of their regional context as a way of folding South Carolina into a historical narrative they have fundamentally built on sources from farther north. For instance, Brendan McConville's otherwise excellent *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 2006) extends his argument to South Carolina by analyzing an essay that appeared in the *South Carolina Gazette*...even though the essay was a reprint from the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and was written by Benjamin Franklin.

³⁶ And it hardly need be said that there are materials yet to be found, yet to be catalogued, yet to be incorporated into our picture of this period.

³⁷ The Manigault papers are housed at the South Carolina Historical Society, although many of the documents therein have been transcribed in the *South Carolina Historical Magazine*.

recent editions, has also offered a colorful—if biased—account of Charles Town in the mid-eighteenth century.³⁸

In order to understand dancing as practice, however, I have gone beyond the social networks of South Carolina life and studied dance as a transatlantic activity in the eighteenth century. My greatest aid in doing so has been the dancing manuals I discuss in Chapter One, which provide not only instructions for the dances themselves, but also illustrations of ideal dancers and explanations of proper social behavior. My understanding of eighteenth-century dance styles is beholden to the work of two distinct, sometimes contentious, traditions of dance scholarship. On the one hand, historical reconstructionists such as Julia Sutton and Ingrid Brainard have used careful archival research and musicological training to reconstruct historical dance practices as a living tradition, often curating these dances through teaching and performance. Kate van Winkle Keller, Moira Goff, and Jennifer Thorp exemplify the best of this tradition and their work has helped considerably in shaping this study. On a similar note, I have also benefitted greatly from the careful archival work of scholars who reconstructed the social world of dance in this period, such as Lynn Matluck Brooks and Judith Cobau. The other tradition to which I refer is the category of “dance studies” which emerged as a category of humanistic inquiry in the 1980s. Driven largely by young scholars who were also dancers, such as Mark Franko, Susan Leigh Foster, Randy Martin, and Susan

³⁸ A number of excellent secondary sources have appeared in recent years that map out the overlap of Charles Town’s social and cultural worlds, and I have used these works to my advantage wherever I could. Foremost among them are Nicholas Michael Butler’s *Votaries of Apollo: The St. Cecilia Society and the Patronage of Concert Music in Charleston, South Carolina, 1766-1820* (Columbia: South Carolina UP, 2007); James Raven’s *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748-1811* (Columbia: South Carolina UP, 2002); Louis P. Nelson’s *The Beauty of Holiness: Anglicanism and Architecture in Colonial South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 2008); and Lorri Glover’s *All Our Relations: Blood Ties and Emotional Bonds among the Early South Carolina Gentry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2000).

Manning, this new body of work called into question the “pretense to authenticity” of previous scholarship and instead interrogated dance as a culturally-embedded object, drawing on the intellectual traditions of de Certeau, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, and other post- structuralist thinkers.³⁹ While these two different approaches to dance—reconstructionist and deconstructionist—have at times vexed one another, they both inform my understanding of dance as a practice that unites corporeal and corporate bodies.

In illustrating the role of dancing in slave life, I ran into another set of problems. There are so few records that illustrate slave life in the Lowcountry that the same sources are referenced and quoted in most histories of the subject. As Robert Olwell asked in a 2003 book review, “Who can write about slave society in eighteenth-century Charleston without referring at length to the anonymous “Stranger's Letters” that appeared in the newspaper in 1772?”⁴⁰ The same might be said for many of the sources I cite here: Sir Hans Sloane’s account of Jamaican dancing, the runaway ad for “famous pushing and dancing master” Thomas Butler, the painting known as *The Old Plantation*, the documentary accounts of the Stono Rebellion. All of these anecdotes have been marshalled into the service of numerous historiographies. As Alex Bontemps observed, “the lived experience of blacks in the colonial South ... [is] not likely to be found in newly discovered or even unused or underutilized sources.”⁴¹ What I offer is a fresh way of reading these sources for what they say about bodies—how bodies moved, how bodies

³⁹ For a personal history of how these ideas converged in the 1980s (and the internecine battles that arose), see Mark Franko’s contribution to *Dance Research’s* “Approaches to Dance” series in *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 28:1 (Summer 2010), pp.1-6.

⁴⁰ Review of *The Punished Self* by Alex Bontemps. *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (Feb., 2003), pp. 143-144.

⁴¹ Alex Bontemps, *The Punished Self*, p. 181. This is the work that Olwell was reviewing in the quotation above. Olwell agreed with this portion of Bontemp’s argument.

were seen, and what bodies meant, both within the slave community and to the eyes of white South Carolina.

Chapter Outline

My project links dance practices to kinesthetic identity by exploring a number of interrelated themes, including social differentiation through cultural practices, self-presentation in everyday social settings, embodied strategies of resistance and accommodation, and the power to transform bodies through performative action. I have laid out my argument topically, framing each chapter around linkages between these themes. Each chapter presents the efforts of a different “group” of Charles Town’s population as they sought to articulate a relation to the world through a set of bodily practices.

My first chapter, “The ‘Genteel Science,’” considers European courtly dance forms as a strategy for inculcating an ineffable sense of “grace” among Charles Town’s emerging elite. I begin this chapter by mapping out the commercial conditions of Charles Town’s rice trade market and suggesting how this market structure provided an ideal environment for dance to become a marker of privilege. As the rice trade brought money into the colony, the colony’s urban social landscape built up around the rice market, conditioned by the need to foster and support sociability in a commercial mode. I analyze dance’s role as an opportunity for social connection and genteel display within South Carolina and throughout the British Empire. I then explore eighteenth-century practices of dance and gentility through a close reading of the dancing manuals from the period, drawing out the vocabulary of behaviors that located Charles Town elites in a chain of deference and consent that extended back across the Atlantic Ocean to London.

The final portion of this chapter narrates the overseas experience of Peter Manigault, the scion of a wealthy South Carolina family, as he pursued his education in London and tried to navigate the imperatives of London's social scene.

In my second chapter, “The Manners-Making Crew,” I consider the lives and careers of Charles Town's dancing masters. Even though European dance styles were venerated in Charles Town, the men who made a profession out of teaching these styles often lived marginal and contingent lives. Although previous scholarship has claimed that dancing masters flourished in the colonies, court records and other documentary fragments reveal peripatetic lives plagued by debt and dissolvency. They were also targets of suspicion and scorn, as when New York's governor issued a warning in the *New York Gazette* that dancing masters might foster revolt among the young. Dancing masters had occupational ties to France and Italy, which made them targets for anti-Catholic sentiment.

This chapter unravels some threads of this antipathy and dancing masters' occupational paradox: they guarded the borders of a class to which they did not—and could not—belong. Although they claimed authority over the deportment and disposition of genteel society, they were themselves tradesmen. A 1722 satirical poem published in London (*The Dancing Master: A Satyr*) offers a window into some of the anxieties these dancing masters inspired throughout the British Atlantic. In particular, the poem fixates on the fact that many dancing masters were Irish- or Scottish-born and were therefore unfit to educate Englishmen. I use this poem as a jumping-off point in considering the lives and careers of Charles Town's dancing masters, which I have reconstructed as far as possible using notices in the *South Carolina Gazette* and other fragments of

documentation (court records, land purchases, wills and inventories). Most of these men and women have not been scrutinized by modern historians, and their lives reveal several strong currents of anxiety regarding dance and identity in Charles Town's increasingly stratified social structure.

My next chapter, "Pushing and Dancing" addresses African dancing in Charles Town and the Lowcountry. By syncretizing performance traditions from different cultures of the West-Central African coast, slaves created a shared kinesthetic disposition, one that delimited the body's relationship to the landscape, to the spirit world, and to the social order. This chapter seeks to illuminate the process through which that disposition was constituted and sustained in the years of rice slavery in South Carolina. For Charles Town's black population, dancing was a multivalent practice. As Africans (Senegambian, Kongolese, Biafran, etc.), they used dance as an essential tool in maintaining contact with the spirit and ancestral world; as slaves, they used dance as an expression of self-mastery that challenged the authority of the white masters who would control their bodies. Together, these overlapping contexts positioned black dancing as a conduit for producing an early strand of an identity that, while not yet properly African-American, maneuvered within the tension between those two terms.

I draw on a wide variety of sources in reconstructing dance culture among the slaves. A number of eyewitness accounts exist from the eighteenth century, including a thoroughly detailed narrative from Jamaica in the hand of Sir Hans Sloane. In this chapter, I blend sources from the West Indies with sources from the Lowcountry because the two colonies were closely connected, both culturally and materially, and because of the close demographic parallels in the slave communities of Jamaica and

South Carolina. I also make use of recent archaeological finds that give insight into the cultural lives of Lowcountry slaves, and I bring these insights to bear on a close reading of the watercolor now known as *The Old Plantation*, which depicts slaves dancing on a Lowcountry plantation. I also offer a discussion of Kongolesse martial arts and the evidence of those practices in the South Carolina Lowcountry. African martial arts had strong connections to dance, which acted as a vehicle for pedagogy and display in martial cultures throughout Central Africa. By synthesizing these sources, I point towards an “Africanized” body that was kinesthetically dissimilar to European dance styles in nearly every respect: it was more athletic and percussive, with a strong sense of weightiness and physical power.

The final chapter, “A New Grace,” addresses the public critics who questioned the suitability of dance as a marker of status. In *South Carolina Gazette* editorials and personal letters, two distinct and interrelated strains of anti-dance rhetoric emerged. The first was the theological argument posed by George Whitefield, Josiah Smith, Sophia Hume, and other religious figures. This view argued for a very different kind of “grace”: the “Mystery of Godliness” that the “new lights” experienced during the Great Awakening. The second strain was more subtle, but found its most direct expression in the mid-century writings of Benjamin Franklin (who was notably anti-dance and whose essays to that end sometimes ran in the *South Carolina Gazette*). This view sought to replace the outward definition of gentility, marked by physical grace and elite dance styles, with an inward definition of gentility, distinguished by compassion and benevolence. Both of these anti-dance worldviews rejected kinesthetic schemes of status performance in favor of an essentialized inner sincerity.

I conclude this work with an epilogue, “Gabriel Transformed,” which suggests the dissolution of the graceful body in the crucible of the American Revolution. Growing anti-British sentiment brought about a new imperative to replace the aristocratic comportment of the mid-eighteenth century with an “Americanized” body. The Americanized body, however, was not a whole-cloth invention, as its articulation was embedded in the discourses and practices of the mid-eighteenth century, the discourses and practices that I outline below: the “meaning” in the “movement.”

Chapter One

The “Genteel Science”:

Social Dancing and “Grace”

An eighteenth-century visitor would have been struck with awe after passing through the front gate of Drayton Hall. John Drayton had conceived the gardens surrounding his Ashley River-side mansion as being at one with the house itself, and by 1758 a real estate ad for a property across the river touted a pleasing view of Drayton’s “palace and gardens.” To the twenty-first century visitor, these grounds embody all of the emblematic trappings of the Old South: live oaks planted with a drowsy spray of Spanish moss, azaleas blooming under a canopy of tall trees that protect the delicate blooms from the South Carolina heat, and a salty breeze rising from the Ashley River.¹ The house itself could be drawn directly from the sixteenth-century notebooks of Andrea Palladio, were it not for the twin columns of West Indies-style stairs leading up to the portico. These staircases are an echo of the Drayton family’s own Barbados roots, and a hallmark of the thick web of cultural and commercial ties that bound the West Indies to the South Carolina Lowcountry. The portico is laid out in chessboard squares of limestone and sandstone, with stately pediments rising up the three-story brick façade.

¹ This landscape is much as it was in the mid-eighteenth century, owing to the painstaking preservation efforts of seven generations of the Drayton family and the Heritage Landscape Project. As Drayton Hall’s website notes on its splash page, Drayton is “A House Preserved. Not Restored. Not Refurbished. Not Redone.” The Drayton family for many years kept the house and grounds in near-original condition, only very sparingly adding elements such as a Victorian reflecting pool and garden mound. The website also boasts a quote from landscape historian Suzanne Turner that Drayton’s is “the most significant, undisturbed historic landscape in America.” (<http://www.draytonhall.org/research/landscape/> Accessed November 19, 2013).



FIGURE C: Drayton Hall, photo by Brandon Coffey

Proud and monumental, this baronial Georgian estate both stands out from and harmonizes with the marshy Lowcountry that surrounds it.

Imagine for a moment arriving by carriage at this estate for an evening ball. The carriage puts you out at the foot of the limestone stairs and you climb nearly a story to the vermillion double-leaf door. On the other side of the door, you are in the monumental stair hall, twenty-seven feet high and richly decorated with mahogany balustrades, their brackets carved into the sibilant curves of lotus and squash blossoms. Your host is likely here to greet you, looking taller and more imposing in the forced perspective of this high and shallow space. You climb one of the twin staircases that wrap symmetrically around the walls of the hall, and on the second floor, you enter a ballroom full of Carolina gentlemen and ladies, each of them bestrewn with frosty wigs and vibrant India calicoes. The ballroom itself is draped in the haze of soft candlelight, which delicately flickers



FIGURE D: Drayton Hall, photo by Brandon Coffey.

against the cerulean walls, giving the whole affair a sense of grace and calm. The sweet, high tones of a violin swell up from the corner of the room, where a small group of musicians prepare the atmosphere for a night of minuets, gavottes, and hornpipes. The door on the far wall stands open to the second-story porch and the briny air of the river cools off the steam of dancing bodies as they bound and skip across the floor. All is polished; all is charming.

The whole scene is such an appealing spectacle that one might almost believe it. One might believe that one was in the company of an urbane elite and not in a small, marshy outpost of the British Empire. One might look past the humidity, the palm trees, or the rust-colored clay and sand that covered every gentlemen's boots from Charles Town's muddy streets. One might not even heed that the violinist in the corner was not a London-born



FIGURE E: Drayton Hall Ballroom, Historical Survey of American Buildings, Library of Congress.

tradesman, but an African slave dressed down in a roughly-textured Osnaburg shirt, perhaps with the facial scars that marked Senegambians, such as a cross on the forehead or three perpendicular lines down the cheeks.² The exoticism, the discomfort, and the daily peril of life in the colonial Lowcountry diminished or disappeared in the ballrooms of country plantations. South Carolina's ascendant wealthy class—so many of whom were burnt-out West Indies planters, French or Dutch refugees, or the younger sons of English barons—were able to imagine themselves as a rising aristocracy, suave and cultured barons at the center—not the margins—of the British imperial enterprise.

Drayton Hall offers an illustrative model for thinking about the process of identity formation among South Carolina's rising elite. Just as John Drayton envisioned a Georgian home that would both distinguish itself against and harmonize with the marshy landscape of the Lowcountry, Drayton and other South Carolina elites sought to harmonize English patterns of gentility with a strange and very un-English landscape of bodies, land, and agriculture. They also sought to distinguish themselves from that landscape, to display the cosmopolitan habits of an urbane elite and thus avoid the trap of "going native."³ This process of adjusting cosmopolitan identities to the Lowcountry landscape, of marrying 'suave' and 'swamp,' was an embodied process. Even though self-fashioning happened among the context of imported goods and imperial rhetoric, the crucial component in 'naturalizing' the ideology of empire in this new setting was the embodiment of that ideology in a specific regime of physical movements and

² These "country marks" are the titular object of study in Michael Gomez's *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*. (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 1998). See especially p. 39.

³ The menace of "going native" in the English empire reached a fever-pitch in the middle of eighteenth century with the fall from grace and subsequent suicide of Robert Clive, a colonial administrator in India who was recalled by Parliament. See Maya Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire: Lives, Culture, and Conquest in the East, 1750-1850* (New York: Vintage, 2005).

dispositions. That is, imperial gentility required grace.

In the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, the art of moving gracefully was an integral feature of daily life. Among the upper classes and the emerging middle class, grace of movement was both an emblem of one's status and a strategy for defending it. Moreover, it was a crucial tool in navigating the British Empire's growing port cities, around which the British colonies were quickly expanding. Cities such as Philadelphia and Charles Town were becoming chaotic retail centers, where a displaced Briton had access to the latest wigs, mantuas, India calicoes, and other showy goods. These heterogeneous retail centers were arenas in which all walks of life could promenade under each other's gazes, even as they went about procuring the props that were essential to their performances. This "promenade" was a performance of identity, one that established one's place and sense of belonging in a great social chain that extended back across the Atlantic Ocean. Once such a performance was so deeply internalized as to appear relaxed even in its formality, it began to take on the character of grace.

This sense of grace was more than just an artificial strut; it somatically internalized a sense of refinement that allowed one to perform class status without betraying the artificiality of the performance. This process of internalization was performative in the Butlerian sense: "an identity, instituted through a stylized repetition of acts."⁴ In short, grace was not just a story told by the body for the benefit of others; grace was a story the body told to itself: a story of belonging and identity.

The most direct path to this ineffable sense of grace was through dance

⁴ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" *Theatre Journal* 40, No. 4 (December 1988), pp. 519-531.

instruction. Dancing skills were highly prized and admired throughout the British Empire. If a Briton were to master the steps, styles, and ceremonials of the eighteenth-century ball, then he or she would likely build the kinesthetic qualities of eighteenth-century dance: a lightness in one's bearing, a lilting tempo in one's step, the circular mis-direction of one's gestures, etc. These kinesthetic qualities were carried over into all public or semi-public points of contact, as moneyed Britons both at home and in the colonies put themselves on display in theatres, coffeehouses, parks, and other public features of the newly urbanized Atlantic world.

Courtly dancing, then, was the “Church Latin” of imperial habitus; it was a heightened distillation of the graceful style and it gave definition to the more vernacular physicality of everyday life. Dances such as the minuet were direct, sensory engagements with British imperial identity. Moreover, social dance in the eighteenth century was a technology of power, and it still bore the residue of its origins in the French court of Louis XIV. To master the principles of courtly dance was to gain access to the networks of what Daniel Defoe called “commercial friendship” that buttressed the Atlantic mercantile world. As an emblem of this membership, colonists who received dance training were able to exhibit a graceful physicality in all of their dealings.

Although avenues of social advancement were opening up throughout Anglo-European provincial towns such as Bath and Edinburgh, the absence of any hereditary nobility in the New World made the American colonies a particularly promising setting for anyone looking to re-cast themselves as local gentry. In addition, Charles Town was by the 1730s the newest and most pliable social landscape in the American colonies. While Boston, Williamsburg, Providence, and Philadelphia had developed slowly over

the course of the seventeenth century from small settlements to bustling cities, Charles Town had expanded rapidly in just a few years following its founding in 1690.⁵ After the overthrow of proprietary authority in 1720, there were few families that had been in the area for more than a generation, and even fewer that had consolidated any power. In the context of Britain's early empire, this implicated dancing skills as a crucial competency: the greater the local opportunity for social advancement, the higher the stakes of a solid minuet.

The goal of this chapter is to analyze the role that social dance played in constructing and articulating elite ("white") identities during Charles Town's rice boom. Although dancing, theatre, and other social entertainments persisted and even thrived in other colonial centers such as Philadelphia and New York, visitors to Charles Town consistently commented on the city's uniquely refined air and reputation for gaiety throughout the eighteenth century. Meanwhile, the city's mercantile activity continued to expand beyond the reach of its sister cities. This collusion of circumstances invites reflection: did the coordination of bodies in social dancing overlap and reinforce the coordination of interests into the networks of trust and information that were vital to Charles Town's growing imperial market?

"Coordination" is a central concept in my analysis. The word is useful not only for its connotation of "harmonious combination," but also for its transitive definition, which the *OED* defines as "to place or class in the same order, rank, or, division." I am using coordination here to describe the alignment of interests, both economic and interpersonal, that lay behind the elaboration of Charles Town's commercial and social

⁵ For a nuanced and detailed exploration of this expansion, see Emma Hart, *Building Charleston: Town and Society in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic World* (Charlottesville: Virginia UP, 2010).

worlds. But I am also using coordination to underscore the consolidation of social factions into identity categories through inter-subjective kinesthetic schemes--that is, how elite colonists learned to "walk the walk" and to embody their class identity in each other's presence. When Charles Town dancers exhibited a fluency in transatlantic dance styles, they were bringing their bodies into a defined order that marked them as imperial and cosmopolitan subjects. Just as markets coordinate commerce by defining a horizon of channels for exchange, social dancing coordinated identity formation in colonial Charles Town by defining a horizon of embodied practices.

Below, I draw out this homology between market structure and dance genre more fully. I begin by mapping out the commercial conditions of Charles Town's rice trade market. This market structure grew out of the unique conditions of Charles Town's agriculture and trade provisions. As the rice trade brought money into the colony, the colony's urban social landscape built up around the rice market, conditioned by the need to foster and support sociability in a commercial mode. I then pivot towards a study of eighteenth-century social dance, both as a transatlantic genre and as a local activity in Charles Town. Based on newspaper accounts of local balls, I consider the spectrum of Charles Town's dance events and how these various events channeled social capital into the grasp of the South Carolina elite. However, social dance was not just an opportunity for social connection and genteel display, and I devote the next part of this chapter to an exploration of eighteenth-century dance as a kinesthetic practice that inculcated imperial schemes of belonging and reciprocity. I maintain in this section that dance provided a vocabulary of behaviors that reasserted community solidarity and transatlantic connectedness.

Charles Town's Market Culture

Sociability was a crucial element in Charles Town's rice trade. Social relationships among planters and between the planters and local merchants enabled components vital to any market economy: the flow of information, the maintenance of reputation, the consolidation of interests and risks, etc. However, Charles Town's rice trade offered unique challenges and opportunities to its participants, and the calendar of social events provided an outlet for resolving and exploiting the contours of this market. In order to fully address the relationship between Charles Town's rice boom and the rise of its social world, it is first necessary to put Charles Town's rice trade in conversation with the organization of trade throughout the British Atlantic. What were the structural features and commercial circumstances of the rice trade in Charles Town? How was Charles Town's situation unique from the rest of the colonies? What part did Charles Town's social world (and its calendar of balls, meetings, and theatrical entertainments) play in supporting those structural features?

Although overseas trade was a fundamental component of local economies throughout the British Empire, each colony's trade market bore unique characteristics. The northern port cities had by the early eighteenth century come to be run by native-born merchant communities who exerted strong control over both import and export markets. These merchants brought into the colony manufactured goods which they had procured on credit from overseas correspondents and they channeled the export market in northern staples such as grain, fish, and lumber.⁶ In the Chesapeake, by contrast, local

⁶ For a fuller consideration of how trade economies developed in these northern cities, consult the work of Jacob M. Price, especially "Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns in the

merchants were mostly squeezed out by the other players in the tobacco economy.

Wealthy planters usually shipped their products on their own accounts, trading directly in British ports (often through a commission agent). Lesser planters more often sold their crops to local networks that were operated by British and Scottish merchants.⁷ There were few native-born merchants in the Chesapeake region with either the venture capital or the appetite for risk necessary to become a successful merchant. This condition was strongly correlated with Virginia's lacking the opportunities for either market consolidation or social activity offered by a major urban center.⁸

Until the 1720s, Charles Town operated as a hybrid of the other systems. Wealthy planters sold their goods at British ports through commission agents while lesser planters sold their goods through the local merchant community. Rice, which at this time neither produced high yields nor drew high prices, was regularly traded for dry goods at shops, and shopkeepers sold the rice on to outgoing merchants. Over the course of the 1720s, however, Charles Town's rice production began to swell and an open market developed between the planters and the merchants. This open market of exchange was to the benefit of all parties, as it allowed the planters to withhold crops and drive up prices, while allowing merchants to build stockpiles in advance of arriving ships. The most important

Eighteenth Century." (*Perspectives in American History* 8, 1974) and "What Did Merchants Do? Reflections on British Overseas Trade, 1660-1790" (*The Journal of Economic History*, 49:2, 1989).

⁷ For a fuller consideration of the character of the Chesapeake economy, see Charles G. Steffen, "The Rise of the Independent Merchant in the Chesapeake: Baltimore, Maryland, 1660-1769" (*Journal of American History* 76, 1989) and Richard Pares, *Merchants and Planters* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1960).

⁸ It is worth pointing out that the character of the commodities sold in these regions were a considerable factor in this division as well. The staples of the northern economy were not producible in the large quantities that were so characteristic of Southern plantations. Northern agriculturalists were therefore unable to produce enough crops to hedge the risks of overseas trade. It would have been sounder business practice to sell locally, and then the merchant who accumulates the products of several local producers is in a better position to take on the risk of transporting goods overseas. A Chesapeake planter with a large haul of tobacco, on the other hand, would be mad to sell locally what he could draw a higher price for in British ports and would be in a position to assume the risks attendant upon such a transaction.

result of this transformation, in terms of Charles Town's social world, was that it located the "point of sale" in Charles Town itself. Planters now had a high interest in bringing their crops to Charles Town personally and negotiating directly with the agents of British merchants.

In 1730, Parliament passed a statute which allowed Carolina merchants to sell directly to all ports south of Cape Finisterre (Spain's Northwestern tip).⁹ Rice had never had a considerable market in England itself; the bulk of Britain's rice imports were resold to continental ports. Once Charles Town merchants were able to sell directly to those continental ports, they were able to amass greater profits and incur fewer risks. At the same time, the urgency of foreign markets gave planters more leverage in negotiating terms with merchants. Empty ships cost considerable money as they sat languishing in port. Furthermore, the splintered character of the global rice market had a determining effect on the character of Charles Town's rice market. Selling to so many ports necessitated some expertise in international freight and commodity markets. Carolina planters had neither the time nor the inclination to build that kind of expertise. The lack of any significant value gradation in rice also gave the planters less leeway in negotiating prices, which stabilized the commodity's resale value and reduced planters' involvement in overseas sales. The crux of the rice market, then, lay in transaction cost, and planters and merchants were able to reduce such costs for each other by trading directly.

The commercial conditions of South Carolina's rice trade were thus instrumental in differentiating Charles Town's character from other colonial urban centers. Northern port cities--such as New York and Philadelphia--consolidated local products in order to

⁹ Peter A. Coclanis. "Rice Prices in the 1720s and the Evolution of the South Carolina Economy." *The Journal of Southern History*, 48:4. (Nov, 1982). p.532.

sell them to a single market: London. This consolidation drove up prices by allowing small-scale agriculturalists a channel through which to gain leverage for their products. In the Chesapeake and West Indies, wealthy planters sidestepped urban centralization and sold directly to London. By selling in London, they were able to "shop around," negotiating their products with the widest array of buyers. In effect, this lack of consolidation drove up prices, thus making urban consolidation unnecessary. In South Carolina, however, numerous Low Country planters produced commodities destined for numerous continental destination ports. Charles Town became the critical site of consolidation in this market, a funnel through which the bounty of lowcountry swamps poured into a fleet of Europe-bound British ships.



This image has been redacted in respect to the holder(s) of the image's license.

Figure F: An Exact Prospect of Charles Town, 1739.
Gibbes Museum of Art/Carolina Art Association

Charles Town's cityscape grew in ways that responded directly to these commercial conditions and to the singular market structure of Charles Town's rice trade. From the earliest days of the rice boom to the eve of the Revolution, Charles Town's streets swelled with tradesmen and shopkeepers, as the port city gradually transformed into an emporium designed to meet planters' and merchants' needs. Taverns and coffeehouses offered settings for business negotiations. When planters came into the city, they required the work of tradesmen to renovate and repair their coaches, perukemakers

to fashion their wigs, and tailors to mold European fabrics into wearable articles. Meanwhile, ships bearing English goods had to be re-outfitted before they could sail back to England. An ample network of tradespeople cropped up to maintain this fleet: shipwrights made new masts, clothiers provided new sails, blockmakers outfitted new pulley systems, and butchers laid in food for the voyage.

As Charles Town's cityscape grew out of its market structure, so, too, did its social world. The broadest development to come out of the rice trade was the timing of Charles Town's social "season." During Charles Town's Season, planters came en masse from the Low Country and in the process of conducting their "city business," they partook in the calendar of balls, meetings, and other social entertainments that were compressed into this time window. The season was already a characteristic of London society by the end of the seventeenth century. In London, the season commenced in late April, at the end of the hunting season, and continued until August 12. In Charles Town, however, the season began in late winter and lasted through May. This calendar was congruent to the agricultural calendar involved in rice production. Rice was planted in the early summer and harvested in the late fall. After the rice underwent some processing, it was ready for market by January. Charles Town's season picked up as rice planters came into town with their wares and ended in time for them to return to their plantations and oversee the next planting.

The overlap between social and commercial worlds was permeating the British Empire in the eighteenth century. Particularly important to the newly expanded transatlantic market was what Daniel Defoe called "commercial friendship," a new kind of social relation between market participants that merged formal obligation with

friendly intimacy.¹⁰ Defoe's 1726 manual for market success, the *Complete English Tradesman*, marked the earliest phases of a transition in the philosophical construction of friendship. While earlier writers had idealized friendship as ideologically separate from cold market rationality, Enlightenment thinkers came to see friendship as a necessary component of successful market relationships. David Hume wrote in 1749 that "self-interested commerce...does not abolish the more generous and noble intercourse of friendship and good offices."¹¹ Ten years later, Adam Smith wrote the most well-known work on the social psychology of eighteenth-century markets, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in which he observed, "The necessity or conveniency of mutual accommodation very frequently produces a friendship not unlike that which takes place among those who are born to live in the same family."¹² Alliances based on class solidarity and codes of honor grew more problematic as rational self-interest drove individuals to seek profit without deference or entanglement. Defoe warned his readers against "striking hands with a stranger," lest they fall victim to the "frequent ruin" of commercial society.¹³ In this commercial society, maintaining ties of friendship and fellowship among market participants was not just an overlay that blanketed mercantile relationships; it was a strategic necessity for maintaining networks of trust.¹⁴

Friendship was not the only type of social intimacy that was becoming

¹⁰ Daniel Defoe, *The Complete English Tradesman* (London, 1726).

¹¹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London, 1739), p. 262.

¹² Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London, 1759).

¹³ Defoe, *English Tradesman*.

¹⁴ For a careful and historically-grounded sociological study of transformations in friendship and commercial relations, see Benjamin Nelson, *The Idea of Usury: From Tribal Brotherhood to Universal Otherhood*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). For a more focused argument considering the transformative effect of the Scottish Enlightenment on notions of friendship and commerce, see Allan Silver, "Friendship in Commercial Society: Eighteenth-Century Social Theory and Modern Sociology." (*American Journal of Sociology*, 95:6 (May, 1990), pp. 1474-1504).

“commercialized” in the eighteenth century. Throughout the British world, the Georgian era was marked by the expanding possibilities for "marrying well." The anxieties of courtship in a society of quickly rising and falling class memberships were well-documented by later novelists such as Frances Burney and Jane Austen. Much of the world that their novels so wittily expressed was already in place by the 1730s. The following mock advertisement from *Gentleman's Magazine* satirically explores the relationship between courtship and commerce at the start of London's 1733 season:

Be it known to all Men by these Presents, That next Summer at Scarborough will be a vast Collection of fair Hands, brilliant Eyes, rosy Cheeks, nimble Tongues, ivory Teeth, ruby Lips, dimpled Chins, high Fronts, and long Necks; snowy Breasts, handsome Legs, with other valuable Commodities, which will be conceal'd till the Merchandizes before mention'd are disposed of: Also large Quantities of kind Glances, studied Courtsies, languishing Looks, Sighs, Sneers, Ogles, Smiles, Airs of all sorts, as well as those of Quality, as several invitatory ones from old Maids, and awkward Country Girls: Also some innocent Frowns, stolen Kisses, which may be purchased with a Whisper: Together with several large boxes of right native Blushes, surpassing Carmine, Cochineal or Spanish Wool... There will likewise be some second-hand Faces, Stale Reputations, and Broken Constitutions, for the Use of Batter'd Beaus, maimed Debauchees, and old Batchelors... This Grand Sale to begin in May next, and continue above four Months. In the Long Room in the Town aforesaid, Attendance will be given, and the Goods display'd to the best Advantage, every day, Sunday not excepted from 7 till 10 in the Evening.¹⁵

This passage not only portrays a cartoonish view of young women as auctioning themselves off to potential husbands, it also underscores the role that material goods played in this "performance." Marriageable young women costumed themselves in clothing and makeup that called attention not only to their sexuality, but to their suitability as upper-class wives. The stakes for executing this performance well can be

¹⁵ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, December 2, 1732.

inferred by the spectre of punishment for imperfection: "There will likewise be some second-hand Faces, Stale Reputations, and Broken Constitutions, for the Use of Batter'd Beaus, maimed Debauchees, and old Batchelors."

While the blurring of lines between the commercial world and the intimate sphere happened throughout the British colonies, it held particular importance in Charles Town. The commercial circumstances of Charles Town's urban market in the 1730s were as sophisticated as any throughout Britain's provincial towns, and the relationships among buyers and sellers that formed in response to these circumstances were thoroughly modern. However, Charles Town lacked the generations of established order that characterized cities such as Philadelphia or Boston. Furthermore, the relative heterogeneity of Charles Town as a port city gave the city a dangerous fluidity, allowing individuals from distant ports to manufacture false identities and capitalize on the possibilities for deception. Concatenating business relationships with intimate familiarity, then, performed a vital function in Charles Town's economy: social networks exerted a centralizing force against the diffuse pull of mutable identities.

Mastering the principles of courtly dance was an adroit way to gain access to the networks of "commercial friendship" that buttressed the Atlantic mercantile world. Social dance in the eighteenth century was a technology of power. It distinguished elites from everyone else while allowing them a pretense to strengthen the bonds that held together their social web. Dance in Charles Town was an extension of a social practice that was growing in popularity throughout Europe and its colonies. But dance in Charles Town also articulated local power balances. Dance's capacity to blend transatlantic schemes of identity formation with the fusing of an elite local community is crucial to understanding its role in the construction of a genteel body.

Global Dances, Local Balls

Social dancing was growing into a crucial component of elite and aristocratic lifestyles all over the British empire in the early part of the eighteenth century. It had already established itself in courts across Europe and there are works by and letters about dancing masters going back as far as the 16th century.¹⁶ But by the first decades of the eighteenth century, scholar-dancers like John Essex and a man known simply as Mr. Isaac were codifying dance and dispersing it among a wider, increasingly bourgeois public. Social dancing was becoming less of a court-based activity and more of a function of the commercial elite in urban centers. There was a boom in public dances and assemblies in the 1720s and 1730s. These dances and assemblies were not only a feature of London, but they also extended into newly-forming provincial urban centers, such as Bath, Edinburgh, Dublin, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Charles Town. The people who were going to these balls were not only the aristocrats who had been dancing at court a century earlier. They were merchants and planters, the ascendant commercial elites of the early 1700s. Unlike earlier courtly dancers, they were not using their dancing skills to ingratiate their way into courtly circles. Instead, they were using dancing to cement commercial relationships with one another not only through the display of comportment and physical self-mastery, but also through the reciprocal character of ball patterns. The balls and dancing assemblies of provincial England, then, can be seen as a hybridized social ritual; the social dances of the eighteenth century established and

¹⁶ For more on the early dancing masters of Renaissance Europe, see Jennifer Nevile, *The Eloquent Body: Dance and Humanist Culture in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2004).

articulated hierarchical distinctions even as they conjoined a more laterally-organized mercantile community.

Integral to the spread of elite dance styles across the British Atlantic were the publication of a number of dance manuals in the early eighteenth century. These manuals began in the seventeenth century as a more academic enterprise that aimed to build a system for notating the dances danced at court. Louis XIV commissioned his personal dancing instructor, Pierre Beauchamps, to record the dances danced in the Sun King's court. The system of notation that Beauchamps created to meet this challenge was taken up by Raoul-Anger Feuillet, who published this system as *Chorégraphie, ou l'art de décrire la danse par caractères* in 1700. Feuillet's book catalogued numerous steps and body positions, as well as pairing choreographed dances with their corresponding pieces of music. His notational system, which broke down steps into sections that corresponded to musical bars and then mapped them across the floor pattern of the dancer's path, can be seen in **Figure G**. Feuillet's book was reprinted in France three times in the next thirteen years. Meanwhile, it was translated and printed extensively abroad, making it the ur-text through which French courtly dance was translated into a pan-European style of social dance. Among Feuillet's translators and adaptors were John Weaver (English, 1706), Gottfried Taubert (German, 1717), Giovanni Battista Dufort (Italian, 1728), Pablo Minguet é Irol (Spanish, 1758), and Natal Jacome Bonem (Portugal, 1767).¹⁷

¹⁷ John Weaver, *Orchesography*; Gottfried Taubert, *Rechtschaffener Tanz-Meister*; Giovanni Battista Dufort, *Trattato del ballo nobile...*; Pablo Minguet é Irol, *Arte de danzar a la francesa*; Natal Jacome Bonem, *Tratado dos principaes fundamentos*. Only the first two of these titles presented translation of Feuillet's work as a whole. Other versions used significant portions of Feuillet's text and maintained his notation style.

Feuillet's book set the precedent for a windfall of dancing manuals in the early eighteenth century. The only other author to approach his international reputation was Pierre Rameau, whose 1725 treatise, *Le maître à danser*, became a *vade mecum* for dancing masters throughout Europe. Rameau's book was translated into English by renowned dancer and teacher John Essex in 1728.¹⁸ Meanwhile, English scholars of dance had begun producing their own manuals using Feuillet's system of notation. The most prominent

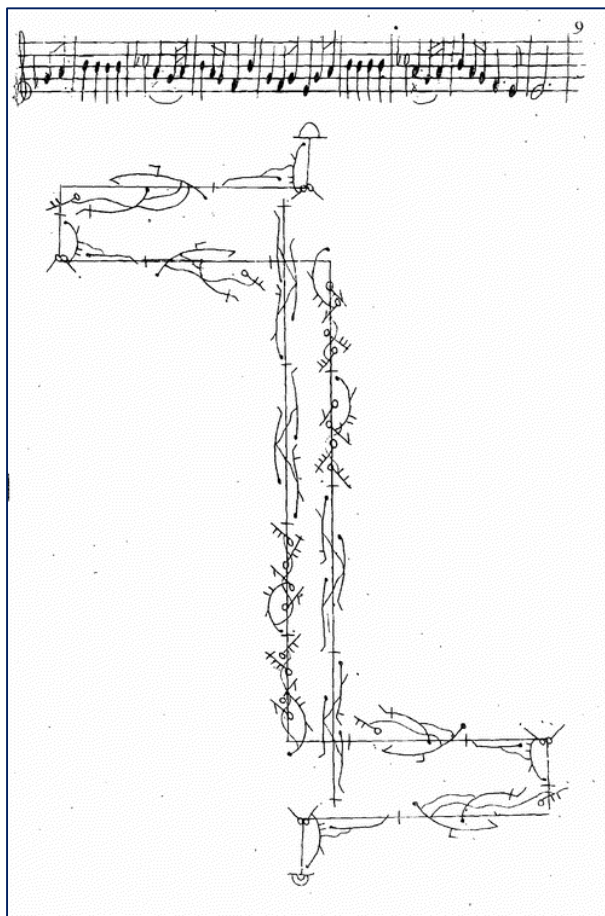


Figure G: Feuillet Notation. Library of Congress, Music Division

dancing master in London during the first quarter of the century was a man known widely as Mr. Isaac, and he commissioned the notation of his dances by scholars such as John Weaver, Charles Delagarde, and Edmund Pemberton.¹⁹ The most thorough English

¹⁸ John Essex is often confused with John Essex Jr., another well-known dancing master of the period (and almost certainly the elder Essex's son). The subscription list for the English version of this book lists both individuals as subscribers, proving that they were indeed separate individuals. Henry Holt, who was so integral to the opening of Charles Town's first theatre, was a student of the younger, not the elder.

¹⁹ Mr. Isaac is a tantalizingly mysterious character who held a prominent place in the landscape of Baroque English dance. His first name is recorded variously as Edward and Edmund, but he was almost universally referred to as Mr. Isaac. It is worth pointing out that he came from a large and prominent family of musicians and dancers, and there could have been more than one individual who went by Mr. Isaac. This theory is further supported by the various birthdates (ranging from prior to 1631 to 1675) and conflicting dates of death (he is listed in Musgrave's Obituaries as having died in 1740, but John Essex described him as "the late Mr. Isaac" in 1728). His career seems to have begun as part of a network of Catholic dancers and musicians in the court of Charles II and was still creating celebration dances at the court of George I. Essex described him as "the prime Master in England for forty years together."

treatise on dancing was Kellom Tomlinson's *The Art of Dancing*, originally written in 1724. The book was so rigorously illustrated, and the illustrative plates so expensive, that the book was not published until 1735, as it took Tomlinson eleven years to raise the money. His subscription list, however, offers a wide-angle view onto the social composition of a prominent dancing master's supporters. The list includes thirty-three peers, one hundred and seven members of the gentry, and twenty-two fellow dancing masters.²⁰

English dancing manuals (and English translations of French dancing manuals) helped to make social dance an integral part of Georgian culture. In November of 1709, Richard Steele wrote a humorous essay in *The Tatler* wherein he learned (upon being roused from his bed by a violent shaking of the house) that his neighbor was a dancing-master. He discovers the neighbor focusing intently on a book and making wild leaps into the air. When Steele asks to see the book, the neighbor obliges:

I believed him in a lucid interval, and desired he would please to let me see his book. He did so, smiling. I could not make anything of it, and therefore asked in what language it was writ. He said, "It was one he studied with great application; but it was his profession to teach it, and could not communicate his knowledge without a consideration." I answered, "That I hoped he would hereafter keep his thoughts to himself; for his meditation this morning had cost me three coffee

(Jennifer Thorp, "Mr. Isaac," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*)

²⁰ Jennifer Thorp, "Kenelm [Kellom] Tomlinson," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.



Figure H:
A page from Kellom Tomlinson's *The Art of Dancing*, 1735.
Library of
Congress, Music
Division

dishes, and a clean pipe."²¹

Steele's anecdote locates the dancing master and his cherished dancing manual as new members of the British urban landscape, another clamorous element in the hubbub of city life. He also illustrates the co-dependency of master and manual. The manual gives the master an encyclopedic reserve and authenticates the master's teaching by anchoring the dances to a seemingly objective chronicle of the dances danced at the French court. Meanwhile, the master possesses the necessary skills to interpret the notations found in the manual. A manual was useless without a master to translate its squiggles into danceable actions, just as a master was diminished without the credentialing authority of a dancing manual. This symbiosis between master and manual was also reflected in the plaintive advertisement of a Charles Town dancing master: "Whoever had borrowed or taken out of the subscriber's house, a book of high dances, of use to none but the advertiser...is desired to return the same to Nicholas Scanlan."²²

The evidentiary record of balls in colonial Charles Town—though far from complete—offers enough of a cross-section of the new city's dancing culture to make some strong generalizations about some of the roles dancing played in articulating and defending the contours of an emergent social structure. There are three main types of balls that appear in the evidentiary record: public balls offered for the benefit of local or itinerant professionals (usually dancers or musicians), ceremonial balls that marked important events in the imperial calendar (such as the king's or queen's birthday), and locally-produced balls that expressed the affiliations of local private citizens. Public

²¹ Steele, *The Tatler*, no. 88.

²² *SCG*, December 6, 1751.

benefit balls appeared only sporadically, and not without reason: public balls required a hefty investment. The public balls advertised in the *South Carolina Gazette* only show the tip of the iceberg of Charles Town's dancing scene. Sporadic anecdotes from the letters and journals of both Carolinians and visitors suggest that there were many balls which were so exclusive as to have avoided public mention.

The most common state-sponsored dance events were the annual balls the Royal Governor sponsored to celebrate the king's birthday.²³ These balls served as a crucial reminder that Royal Governors embodied the King's authority within the colony. These reminders would have been a necessary tool for Governors, who stood in the hot spot between metropolitan and colonial governing authorities. Governors were royally appointed and had the authority to call Assemblies and exercise veto power over their legislation. They also delegated many functions of the Board of Trade, the Secretary of State, and the Treasury. In practice, however, gubernatorial power was often not as far-reaching as it looked on paper. In the first place, most Royal Governors had no Royal troops to command, which made their duties as Commander-in-Chief only hypothetical. The Royal Governor's powers over the local admiralty proved to be mainly judicial, and their precarious position as the appointees of specific administrations—who could just as quickly be recalled by subsequent administrations—made them particularly susceptible to the factionalism of British politics. This instability in royal appointments made it difficult for Royal governors to build the coalitions they needed to administer their directives.²⁴

²³ e.g. *SCG*, October 31, 1741.

²⁴ See Ian K. Steele, "The Anointed, the Appointed, and the Elected: Governance of the British Empire, 1689-1784" in *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. P.J. Marshall, *The Oxford History of the British Empire* (Oxford UP, 1998).

Events such as the King's "birthday balls" allowed the governor to associate directly and in a semi-recreational context with the men who held local power, thus "greasing the wheels" for governors to build coalitions. In this sense, the "balls of state" were important events in the colony's political health. Avatars of both local and imperial power came together in a ceremony of solidarity. Although the Royal Governor underwrote the material extravagances of this ceremony—refreshments, service, etc.—his doing so would have only partially obscured what Marcel Mauss called "a polite fiction...and social deceit."²⁵ The Governor's outward magnanimity concealed a network of obligation and interdependency coursing through Charles Town's legislative class. The interdependent nature of these relationships would have been all the more important in British colonial society, where legal matters rested more often in contractual obligation than in any existing written constitution.

The Governor's state-sponsored balls not only promoted the face-to-face obligations of sociability; they also anchored the social activity of the colony's power-class to an imperial calendar. In the early eighteenth century, many European populations were still in the process of converting the historically Catholic calendar year--marked by Saint's days and other feasts that were legitimated through Catholic liturgy--into a secular calendar that structured the flow of time around the authority of the state rather than the church. The King's birthday celebration was one such "secular holy-day," a knot in the temporal web that gave pattern and shape to ordinary time through contradistinction. These celebrations took on added importance as they were practiced in Britain's expanding colonial empire; by coordinating the rhythms of social life across the Atlantic

²⁵ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* transl. W. D. Halls (New York: Norton, 1990, orig. 1950), p.3

and beyond, these celebrations enfranchised even the most far-flung Britons as royal subjects.

The process of imperial identity-consolidation that these state-sponsored balls facilitated provided a durable scheme which more local social organizations throughout the Empire echoed in their own social gatherings. Groups such as the Freemasons held public balls as a part of their annual meetings; the Masons celebrated every December after their founding in 1736 with a solemn parade through the streets, followed by a closed-door meeting to elect officers and attend to other maintenance business. After the meeting was over, the Masons opened their otherwise homosocial ranks to the company of women, and a ball took place.

At the lowest end of Charles Town's hierarchical social scale were the balls and other dance events on offer at the local fairs. Fairs were established along the Ashley and Cooper Rivers as early as 1723. These local fairs may have been downscale entertainments, but they represented vital brachial connections in the arteries of South Carolina trade. The merchant oligarchy that was rising to power in Charles Town drew its profitable stores from a network of rivers that laced through the Carolina backcountry; up the Ashley, the Cooper, the Edisto, the Stono, and the countless capillary waterways that feathered out from these rivers, lay the rice fields of the Low Country, the pine forests necessary for shipbuilding and tar-smelting, and the wildlife whose skins and furs could be sold abroad. Charles Town's merchants established and defended their access to these resources by sponsoring storekeepers at ferry crossings and other navigational points.²⁶ The storekeepers took in the marketable products of the hinterland while selling

²⁶George C. Rogers, Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* (Norman: Oklahoma UP, 1969), p. 12.

vital goods to the provincial settlers. While a wealthy planter with large tracts of land might come into Charles Town and do business for himself (or in rare cases—such as Eliza Lucas Pinckney—herself), smaller landholders, who often lived farther from Charles Town itself, were reliant on this network of storekeepers and waterways, and the symbiosis of this system enshrined Charles Town's cultural dominance of the Carolina backcountry.

And yet, there was another layer to the benefit balls. More than the state-sponsored or associational balls, the public balls were youth-centered. State-sponsored balls put middle age at the center; most guests would have achieved the level of social rank and accomplishment that comes in middle age. The balls sponsored by local associations were probably mixed in their age range; groups such as the masons included both young and old colonists. But the public balls would have been an important social outlet for the colony's youth. Balls allowed the younger members of the elite class to put their bodies on display for one another, even sanctioning physical familiarity between young bodies in the guise of partner dances. These opportunities not only opened channels for the physical pleasures of coupling, they also laid the groundwork for alliances between families. As the children of Charles Town's newly wealthy elites allied themselves with one another and eventually married off together, the wealth and power of the new colony consolidated itself within a new elite class. In this sense, the public balls were just as essential to the articulation and perpetuation of a new social structure as the state-sponsored balls were; instead of bringing the colony's middle-aged power base into the orbit of the king's gubernatorial representative, these balls eased the way for the colony's pubescent cohort to perpetuate this style of class performance into the next

generation. If state balls conferred and expressed power, the public and private balls of Charles Town's dancing masters transformed power into dynasties.

Eighteenth-Century Dance Style

I have suggested heretofore the extent to which dance events played a vital role in South Carolina's burgeoning social and economic economies, but I have not yet considered the social politics of the dance itself. The dances themselves offered potent opportunities for colonial subjects to experience their transatlantic identities in a kinesthetically grounded manner. The qualitative aspects of genteel dance allowed Charles Town's elites to secure their participation in the corporate bodies of larger identity communities by anchoring these shared codes of belonging in their own material bodies.²⁷

The most popularly transcribed dance found in eighteenth-century dancing manuals was the minuet.²⁸ The minuet was a couple dance in triple time. Six musical beats comprised one choreographic phrase.²⁹ The dancing couple began by stepping toward one another and taking hands, then progressing through four separate figures, each cutting a unique movement pattern across the floor. In **Figures I-M**, you can see the figures as G. Bickham, Jr. illustrated them for Essex's translation of Rameau. The most distinctive figure, a recognizable characteristic of the minuet, is the parallel Z-

²⁷ This process of identity formation was not a simple aping of English habits, nor was English gentility an identity that could be comprehensively performed. Instead, English-ness—as with a diverse range of other ethnic identities to be found in the colony—was a relational signpost against which Charlestonians could navigate the ongoing process of identity formation.

²⁸ The minuet appears in Rameau, Tomlinson, and Taubert, among many others.

²⁹ The distinctive rhythm figure associated with the minuet was used extensively by composers such as Lully, Handel, Bach, Haydn, and Mozart.

pattern that the man and woman make from opposite ends of the floor (**Figure L**). The steps associated with the minuet were less complex than many popular dances of the period, such as the *sarabande*, the *courante*, or the *gigue*. There was accordingly a greater emphasis on the dancer's bearing, assurance, and control.

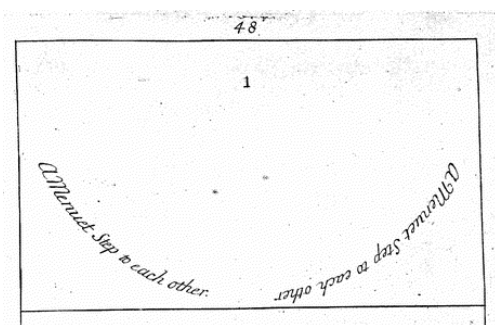


Figure I

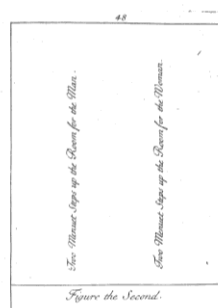


Figure J

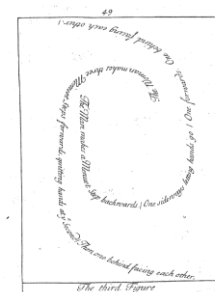


Figure K

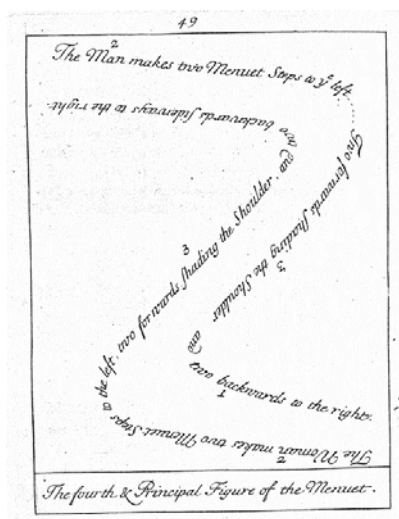


Figure L

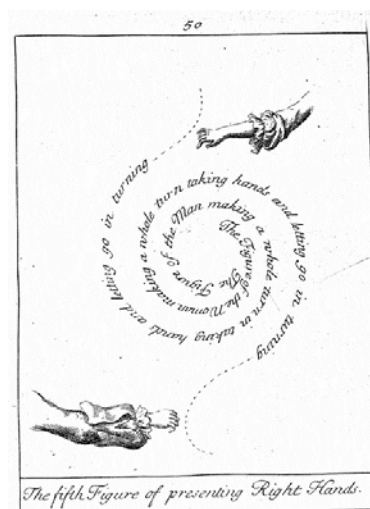


Figure M

As with most couple dances of the period, minuet dancers were intermittently taking and releasing hands. The taking of hands was a carefully formalized moment of public physical contact between the sexes. The gentleman was to raise and present his right hand, at which time the lady was to put her left hand on top (**Figure N**). By keeping his hand underneath the lady's, the gentleman was in a position to support her

and prevent her stumbling. This same formation was common whenever a man took a woman on his arm in polite company. Taubert, who was rigidly orthodox in many aspects of the minuet, allowed for the man's hand to be either on top or below: "When not dancing, in conducting a lady from one place to another, it is much

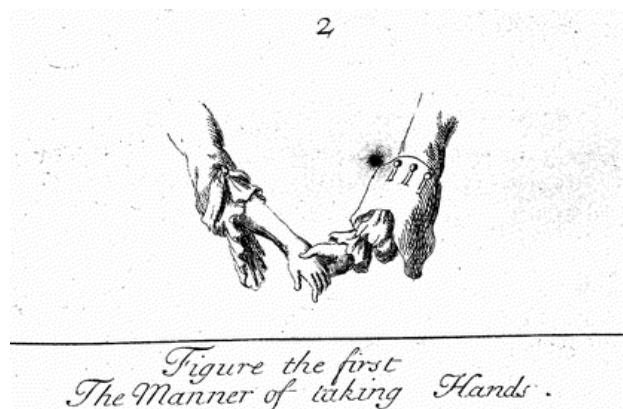


Figure N:
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more considerate to hold her with your right hand beneath her left hand or arm, in order to support her with a subtle and gentle effort and guard her from falling or tripping; but in dancing, and especially here in the minuet, the cavalier may hold the lady's hand either from above or below."³⁰ The mini-ceremony of taking hands also conferred an implicit consent on the lady's part and deference on the gentleman's. The gracious gentleman would not have wanted to appear as if he were imposing his will upon his dance partner. By repeatedly offering his hand to the lady, he theoretically allowed her the opportunity to cut the dance short. Thus, the length of the dance was to be, in Taubert's words, "an expression of [the lady's] free will."³¹

The principal model for all formal balls was the King's Grand Ball, and the ceremonial obligations at a royal event were to be replicated in any private ball.³² The

³⁰ qtd. in Tilden A. Russell, "The Minuet According to Taubert." (*Dance Research*, 24:2, Winter 2006) p.146.

³¹ *ibid.*, p145. One must remember that the minuet was a largely improvisational dance, and that it might easily be cut short by executing fewer of the floor-pattern figures. In any event, the *performance* of consent was a more crucial issue here.

³² Rameau says as much explicitly in *Le maître à danser*, and he provides a chapter-long description of the ceremony of the Grand Ball.

ceremonies of the Grand Ball revolved around the royal couple, so in colonial balls, a "first couple" needed to be established. This couple would "open" the ball by performing a dance duet while the rest of the assembly looked on. Other couples would begin their dances with a "reverence," i.e. a bow to the first couple in their position at the "head" of the room. In this way, the first couple anchored the room, offering the *locus* that gave the dance floor its legitimacy as a *platea*.³³ But the first couple also anchored the room's activities to a web of transatlantic and imperial meanings. The first couple surrogated the presence of imperial authority (the king) and located the dancers as culturally--if not geographically--European cosmopolitans.

Of all the ceremonial gestures on display at a ball, the most fundamental was the bow. Dancing manuals of the time classified bows into three types: the bow forwards, the passing bow, and the bow backwards. Each bow was proper to a given occasion. The bow forwards, in which a gentleman advanced a foot toward the individual he was honoring while shifting his weight to the posterior foot, was typically the bow used to greet one's dancing partner. The passing bow, which was similar to the bow forwards but executed at a diagonal, was a bow made while walking and was proper to greeting an acquaintance in the streets or at a promenade. The bow backwards, in which a gentleman retreated a step before bending at the waist, was the most ceremonial of bows and was proper when entering or executing a room. Ladies' courtesies maintained the same three categories, but mostly differed from one another only in tempo. Gentlemen and ladies

³³ The concepts of *locus* and *platea*, well-known in performance theory, were conceptualized by Robert Weimann as a way to explain carryovers in spatial dynamics between late medieval and Elizabethan theatre. The *locus* and *platea* are more than just historically specific staging spaces, though; they represent two different-yet-interdependent ways of conceptualizing and using space. A *locus* is a fixed, symbolic location that stabilizes the horizon of representations within a performance events, while the *platea* is the more general, unlocalized space in which performance participation takes place. For more, see Robert Weimann, *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition: Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function*, ed. Robert Schwartz (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978).

both pitched the degree of inclination to the status of the person they were saluting.

When saluting someone of significantly higher status, it was proper to bow more deeply.

Mastering the vocabulary of bows was a crucial skill for anyone navigating proper society, both on and off of the dance floor. Rameau explains why this mastery was so indispensable: "In the first place, it excites admiration in others for us, and brings further advantages in its train. It inclines a person to show us consideration by regarding us as persons who have known how to profit from the education we have received."³⁴ In this passage, Rameau put his finger on two genteel qualities that a proper bow put on display: the means to procure a proper education and the judgment to assess the situation at hand. Anyone bowing backwards during a mundane exchange might be thought of as a self-important fop, while anyone bowing forwards during an exchange that called for more gravitas might be seen as frivolous. However, properly executed bows did more than just display one's judgment and education; they also reinforced the hierarchical structure of polite society.³⁵ Bowing gentlemen (and ladies) reinforced their own social status every time they honored another ball-goer, whether that ball-goer was up or down the hierarchical scale. Furthermore, the repetition of honors throughout the evening's activities reinforced--in the same manner as the taking of hands--a dialectic of deference and consent that was dispersed throughout the assembly. Before and after each dance, dancers deferred to one another and to the head of the room (the lead couple), and it was

³⁴ Rameau, pp. 13-16.

³⁵ This idea is widely distributed, but C. Dallett Hemphill has offered a particularly keen reading of bowing and other mannerly customs in colonial America as mini-rituals that allowed colonists to manage the variables of a heterogeneous society, especially age, gender, and class. (C. Dallett Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America, 1620-1860*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999.)

through implied consent that the evening's activities continued. Ultimately, the chain of deference and consent pointed beyond the lead couple to the sovereign overseas...the final cause of polite gentility.

The vocabulary of bows was just one way in which the practices of ball culture carried over into daily life. Gentlemen and ladies of the eighteenth century were expected to perform a “graceful body” during all public or semi-public points of contact. The stakes of this performance were most convincingly suggested by the fictional fates of those literary characters who performed it badly, and the pages of Restoration and eighteenth-century literature are teeming with such figures: Sir Fopling Flutter, Sparkish, Sir Novelty Fashion, Lord Foppington, Count Bellair, etc.³⁶ As this list makes clear, such literary figures often had titles; they were also often wealthy. Nevertheless, such characters almost invariably marry badly at the end of the play or novel, and do not usually reap any benefit from the plot's intrigues. They lack the requisite attributes to enter into either love or friendship as a commercial mode.

If a Charles Town resident were to master the steps, styles, and ceremonials of the eighteenth-century ball, then he or she would likely build the ineffable sense of “grace” that was so highly prized in elite circles. This sense of grace was a somatically internalized sense of refinement that allowed one to perform class status without betraying the artificiality of the performance. The kinesthetic qualities of eighteenth-century dance—the lightness of one's bearing, the lilting tempo of one's step, the circular mis-direction of one's gestures—converged into a harmonious assembly, a “body” that

³⁶ The characters listed are from the following plays: Sir Fopling Flutter from *The Man of Mode* by George Etherege, Sparkish from *The Country Wife* by William Wycherly, Sir Novelty Fashion and Lord Foppington both appear in *Love's Last Shift* by Colley Cibber, and John Vanbrugh's sequel, *The Relapse*, Count Bellair is from George Farquhar's *The Beaux Stratagem*.

appeared coherent and complete. This harmonious affect (grace) projected the confidence and swagger of a subject who had mastered its relation to its body. The corporeal body was unruly material, and projecting grace was projecting one's mastery of that material. Grace thus implicated imperial power in two directions at once: it interpellated colonial bodies as imperial subjects while also inscribing those bodies as wielding the power of "mastery" over themselves and others.

The graceful body emerged in the context of a larger-scale shift in Western European concepts of the body. In the eighteenth century, medical texts and other forms of public discourse about physiology were exchanging Galenic visions of the body as a mutable sack of humours for a hydraulic model of the body as a perfectible machine. Renaissance conceptions of the body were largely based the ancient Greek physician Galen's contention that the body was ruled by the balance of four fluids known as humours. These humours seeped in and out of the body's spongy regions, and when they fell out of equilibrium, the result was disease, emotional disturbance, even death. Renaissance medicine largely followed the imperative to appease these spasmodic humours and restore equilibrium. But by the eighteenth century, Galenic theory had been fatally challenged by the improvement of the microscope and the emerging field of microbiology.³⁷ Anatomists began to understand the role of the body's circulatory systems and the organs that powered them. A growing number of kinesiology texts appeared, advising readers to promote health through the proper physical training of the body.³⁸ A discourse of exercise and posture-training promoted the qualities of uprightness

³⁷ For more on the microscope's role in replacing the Galenic body, see Susan Leigh Foster, *Choreographing Empathy*, pp. 82-85.

³⁸ One of the earliest and most influential of these texts was Nicolas Andry's *Orthopaedia* in 1741. Andry believed that repetitious movements had a deforming effect, and suggested that the young body could be

and agility over the previous mantras of equilibrium and stasis. Upright postures began to replace the Renaissance contrapposto in paintings, sculpture, and fashion of the period. The new bodily regime of agile uprightness allowed the hydraulic force of the body's circulatory systems to work at maximum efficiency. Thus, the graceful body—like the well-run plantation or the profitable trade route—was an efficiently-managed system, an economy of energy unobstructed by the sclerotic effects of idleness.

New bodies danced new dances. The waning of Galenic notions of the body occurred in tandem with the waxing of more complex and athletic dance patterns, such as the minuet. Renaissance anatomists believed that fast-paced dances which included many turns could throw the body's fluids off-balance. The dancing manuals circulated at Renaissance courts describe dances that were stately and slow, emphasizing the compositional balance of bodies in space.³⁹ Dancers moved mainly in straight lines across the floor. In the social world of Baroque courts, more lively dances developed, such as the *gigue*. Couples spiraled around the center of the dance floor, and many dances steadily quickened tempo until the dancers were moving dizzily through space. By the time the minuet became ubiquitous in the eighteenth century, dance was being embraced for its capacity to perfect a more athleticized body. John Locke wrote at the end of the seventeenth century that dance instilled “graceful motions all the life, and above all Manliness.”⁴⁰

corrected in the same manner as young saplings were tied to straight posts. Andry's system was self-contradictory, of course; his 'corrections' for repetitious movements relied on repetition and habit to do their work. Later in the century, writers took up the corrective side of his argument by arguing for the role of repetitious movements--exercise--in perfecting posture and health.

³⁹ For more on the dancing manuals of Renaissance courts, the authoritative treatment is Jennifer Neville, *The Eloquent Body: Dance and Humanist Culture in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2004). The stately dances I allude to here refer specifically to the *ballo* and *bassadanza*, as described in Chapter One.

⁴⁰ Qtd in Foster, p. 95.

In the American colonies, the turn towards physical education adjoined neatly with the project of fitting English bodies into a foreign environment. Benjamin Franklin published in 1749 his *Proposals Relating to the Youth of Philadelphia*, in which he bade that the city's young "be frequently exercis'd in Running, Leaping, Wrestling, and Swimming."⁴¹ Franklin's proposal drew specifically on the work not only of Milton but also of George Turnbull, chaplain to the Prince of Wales, who wrote in his 1742 *Observations on Liberal Education, in All its Branches* that "corporal exercise invigorates the Soul as well as the Body."⁴² Other physical education manuals published in the colonies included Edward Blackwell's 1734 *A Compleat System on Fencing* and John Newbery's 1762 *A Little Pretty Pocket Book*, the latter being a description in verse of thirty-two physical games for children.⁴³ Francis Nicholson, governor of Virginia, proclaimed an annual field day in which contestants—"the better sort of Virginians only, who are bachelors"—competed in games of skill and strength.⁴⁴ Similar contests became common throughout the Chesapeake and middle colonies. Physical education developed more slowly in New England, where the Calvinist gospel of work precluded the leisure necessary for exercise culture. Calvinist doctrine presupposed a division between body and spirit and abjured play as frivolous; thus, the body's need for activity was just another earthly appetite to suppress. But in the South, the new physicality thrived. Elites in Maryland, Virginia, Georgia, and the Carolinas celebrated a longer temperate season with outdoor games, horse riding, and fox hunting. Gentlemen collected books on

⁴¹ Benjamin Franklin, *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania* (Philadelphia: 1749), p.10

⁴² Qtd in Franklin, 1749, p. 10.

⁴³ Newbery's book is best remembered today for including the first extant mention of "base-ball."

⁴⁴ John R. Betts, "Mind and Body in Early American Thought." *Journal of American History* (Vol 54, No 4, March 1968), p. 788.

hunting, fishing, and fencing.⁴⁵ Many of these activities not only cultivated a more physically active body, but also engaged that body with salient features of the New World environment—hunting in the woods, fishing in the lakes, games of bowls on the village green.

A central concern of this new physicality was articulating a wall between *labor* and *exercise*. The hierarchical structure of the social order held that elites had privileged access to the appointed avenues of refinement and self-betterment. And yet, slaves and laborers spent most of their day engaged in repetitive physical action. Eighteenth-century physiologists attempted to account for this discrepancy by drawing lines of distinction around “exercise” as an activity distinct from labor. Both activities were based on muscular action and both could “increase the force and frequency of the heart’s contraction, the velocity and momentum of the blood, the quickness of the breathing, and the heat, irritability, and transposition of the whole body.⁴⁶” But labor took such action to an unhealthy extreme. While moderate exercise promoted health and vigor, “when continued beyond a certain time, [physical activity] induces lassitude, debility, and languor.⁴⁷” Bernardino Ramazzini, who is often considered the “father of occupational medicine,” wrote *De Morbis Artificum Diatriba (Diseases of Workers)*, in which he outlined the health hazards of repetitive movements in fifty-two common occupations.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Betts, *ibid.*

⁴⁶ James Carmichael Smyth, *An Account of the Effects of Swinging*, (London, 1787), p. 17. Smyth offered one of the last grasps of the Galenic body on mainstream medicine by hypothesizing that it was the velocity with which a patient moved through the air that gave exercise its healthful effect. He thought that the “change of air” could re-balance the humours. He proposed a practice he called *aerostation*, by which a patient is conveyed through the air without expending the effort of exercise. In what almost seems *reductio ad absurdum*, he proposed that catapulting pulmonary patients through the air might be effective were it not for the expense. See Carol Houlihan Flynn, “Running Out of Matter: The Body Exercised in Eighteenth-Century Fiction,” in *The Language of Psyche: Mind and Body in Enlightenment Thought*, ed. George Sebastian Rousseau (California UP, 1990), pp. 147-185.

⁴⁷ Smyth, p. 18.

⁴⁸ Ramazzini published the original Latin text in 1700 and a revised edition in 1713. The book was translated into English in 1760.

Ramazzini paid particular attention to the deforming postures that afflicted carpenters, porters, cobblers, tailors, and other tradesmen who stooped over their work. Ramazzini explained that such tradesmen were destined to become stoop-shouldered over time, “because the dorsal vertebrae are constantly bent forward and become set in that position.⁴⁹” Ramazzini prescribed that such workers “should be advised to take exercise, at any rate on holidays” so that they might cultivate a more upright posture. Ramazzini’s prescription underlines one of the most crucial differences between labor and exercise: exercise cultivated an upright body, while labor left one stooped and bent.

The stooped body was only one symptom of physical labor’s overall effect: unstructured physical exertion deformed bodies by putting them out of harmony with themselves. The overuse of one faculty and the underuse of another left workers imbalanced. Lifting sacks of grain built muscles in the arms but left the lower back vulnerable to lumbago. Training the body through activities such as dance, on the other hand, promoted a harmoniously integrated body in which the vigor of all limbs developed in proportion to one another. Harmony and proportionality were key principles of eighteenth-century ideals of beauty. Lord Shaftesbury blended moral and aesthetic philosophy in asserting, “what is beautiful is harmonious and proportionable; what is harmonious and proportionable is true; and what is at once both beautiful and true is, of consequence, agreeable and good.⁵⁰” Shaftesbury saw the harmony of the body as a marker of physical and emotional health, and thus a prerequisite for virtue. Laborers were

⁴⁹ Ramazzini, trans. Wilmer Cave Wright (Chicago UP, 1940) in “Voices From the Past,” *American Journal of Public Health* (Vol. 91, No. 9, September 2001) p.1381.

⁵⁰ Shaftesbury, Misc, III, ii. Anthony Ashley-Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, was one of the most widely read and influential philosophers of the early eighteenth century. He was also the grandson of the first Earl of Shaftesbury, one of South Carolina’s proprietary founders, and was the pupil of John Locke, who wrote South Carolina’s founding charter.

unable to strike such a balance because their livelihood depended on repetitious movement. Leisure was thus a necessary condition for exercise.⁵¹

While labor might have the effect of *building* a body, exercise was a way of *constructing* a body. That is to say, exercise was a directed effort toward something like an architectural goal. The graceful body provided a blueprint for this construction, a transpersonal scheme that each individual went about fashioning to the material limits of his or her own corporeal body. Such a project was anchored in the emerging notion that the body was perfectible, no longer a chaotic bundle to be appeased, but a solid structure behooven to the same principles of order and balance as the edifice of a town home or civic building. This new paradigm of improvement had particular purchase on the British colonial imagination. As Patricia Seed has pointed out, the British imperial project was grounded in a rhetoric of improvement from its earliest days.⁵² In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the concept of improvement emerged from the enclosure of land. To improve land was to surround it with a fence, establishing the land as a private possession that might be used for personal profit. A now-archaic definition of the word improvement reflects the word's manifold meanings: "To improve, to make one's profit of, to avail oneself of by using to one's profit. Especially used of the lord's enclosing and bringing into cultivation of waste land."⁵³ All of these meanings still resonated in the improvement of the genteel body. A graceful body was an improved body: a body

⁵¹ Leisure was not only a necessary condition for exercise, some thinkers argued that it was the factor that made exercise necessary. Nicholas Robinson, the director of Bedlam Asylum, published a tract in 1729 that invoked God's "Sentence...against disobedient man, that in the sweat of his face, he should eat his bread" (qtd. in Flynn, p. 156). Reasoning that 'civilized' moderns did not need to toil because they had servants, Robinson blamed idleness for melancholia and other diseases of the temperament.

⁵² Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge UP, 1995).

⁵³ *OED*, qtd. in Seed, p. 25n.

brought into cultivation, emblematic of the power of its possessor, who stood to profit from its ordered and efficient use.

For colonists whose lives were increasingly woven into the texture of chaotic urban centers, the rhetoric of improvement provided a narrative that mitigated their absorption into the spectacle. For all its conveniences and amenities, the eighteenth-century city was also a nest of potential pitfalls and moral hazards. Besides the unambivalent temptations offered by prostitutes, gambling houses, and other squalid opportunities, urban life offered avenues to more indefinite dangers, such as vanity, decadence, and immoderation. Urban life was a spectacle, a glut for the senses. As such, it risked superficiality. The fine outward display of urban life could conceivably distract from the extravagant appetites and unchecked avidity that sustained that display. Both the flow of consumption that crammed the streets and the network of credit that sustained it invited catastrophe, when consumers lived beyond their means and well-off families fell into destitution. Urbanity, then, was not an unproblematic good. To cultivate a graceful body was to devote oneself to fine balls, fashion, and other markers of the consumption that threatened to swallow urbanites. By invoking a narrative of improvement, imbuing the genteel consumer's body with notions of harmony and balance, the graceful subject was able to re-cast excess as moderation.

But even for all of Charles Town's urbanity, it was still a small city. The city itself was just under three square miles, with no paved roads or street lamps. Although there were well-appointed coffeehouses, taverns, a theatre, and a racetrack, Charles Town's urban spectacle was modest as spectacles went. London, by contrast, was a megalopolis. With an over-teeming population and an obtuse web of streets and alleys,

London was large and complex enough in the eighteenth century to merit the printing of guidebooks and trade directories that ran into the hundreds of pages.⁵⁴ While South Carolina elites embraced the urban charms of Charles Town, many saw London's temptations as a bridge too far. Peter Manigault, the only son of Gabriel Manigault, one of South Carolina's wealthiest gentlemen, studied in London in the 1750s. His letters home reveal the balancing act necessary for a Charles Town scion abroad. He struggled to keep up with the ostentation of his class while still appearing modest and unfrivolous, particularly for the benefit of his parents back home. Below, I attend to those letters in more detail in order to illustrate both the uses and the limits of genteel comportment.

“The Pleasantest Place in the World”

The Manigaults were in many senses the exemplary South Carolina family. They had been early followers of Calvin in their native La Rochelle until Pierre and his older brother Gabriel fled France for England following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.⁵⁵ The Manigault brothers left England for South Carolina ten years later, and though Gabriel died from a fall in 1704, Pierre built a solid reputation and a small fortune as a wine and leather merchant.⁵⁶ As he rose in Charles Town's social hierarchy, he adopted a more anglicized identity: he joined the Anglican Church and publicly adopted the name Peter (though he still went by Pierre in his private papers and among his family). He named his only son Gabriel, after his brother, and left him one half of a

⁵⁴ See the London portion of *Bailey's Northern Directory* of 1781 or Rev. Dr. John Trusler's *London Advisor and Guide* of 1786, as examples.

⁵⁵ Many French Protestants fled to England and eventually North America during this time. They migrated in large numbers to South Carolina especially. See Bertrand van Ruymbeke, *From New Babylon to Eden: The Huguenots and their Migration to Colonial South Carolina*, (South Carolina UP, 2005), or Jon Butler, *The Huguenots in America: A Refugee People in New World Society* (Harvard UP, 1983).

⁵⁶ Maurice Crouse, “The Manigault Family of South Carolina, 1685-1783,” dissertation, Northwestern, 1965.

respectable estate when he died in 1729. Gabriel the younger was able to translate his father's respectable estate into one of the largest in the colony in a relatively short time. In 1732, he purchased a sloop, the *Neptune*, and used it to build a market between Jamaica and northern ports, trading rice, cocoanuts, pitch, and various forms of produce.⁵⁷ In 1735, he was elected public treasurer, an honor he could add to a growing list: he was already a member of the Commons House of Assembly, a vestryman of St. Philip's Parish, and a Justice of the Peace.⁵⁸

The Manigault family was so thoroughly anglicized by 1731 that when Gabriel decided to name his only child after his father he named him Peter, not Pierre. One year earlier, Gabriel had married Ann Ashby, daughter of one of South Carolina's original caciques and one of the most powerfully connected families in the colony.⁵⁹ As part-owner of one of the few locally-owned ships in Charles Town, Gabriel built close business and personal associations with local planters and merchants. Unlike most merchants of the age, he seldom advertised in the newspaper, which suggests that he had a strong web of steady customers and had no need to advertise for more. But Gabriel's assimilation into anglicized Charles Town life was not complete. Gabriel kept certain aspects of Charles Town life at arm's length. He never joined Charles Town's genteel

⁵⁷ Maurice Crouse, "Gabriel Manigault: Charleston Merchant," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, (Vol 68, No. 4, Oct 1967), pp. 220-231.

⁵⁸ Crouse, 1965, p. 20-21. Both Manigault's predecessor as Treasurer, Alexander Parris, and his successor in the same, Jacob Motte, were plagued by scandal. Manigault's tenure, from 1735 to 1743, was spotless. ⁵⁹ A cacique was a lesser form of nobility suggested in South Carolina's Fundamental Constitutions. The cacique and the landgrave were to form an intermediary between the lords and the commons. The system was abandoned by the eighteenth century. Ann Ashby was also closely related to Royal Governors Robert Johnson and Sir Nathaniel Johnson, as well as Lieutenant Governor Thomas Broughton.

social clubs, though many of his political and business associates did.⁶⁰ There is no evidence to suggest that he ever attended balls or the racetrack.⁶¹ And, while many of his contemporaries made their money through the slave trade, Manigault openly detested the business, going so far as to refuse to loan money to slave dealers.⁶² Gabriel may have inherited some of his family's longstanding Calvinism, for he was known as a stern and sober man.⁶³ He was so highly regarded by members of the middling class that during one election a company of tradesmen led a procession through the streets on their way to vote unanimously for him.

When it came time to educate his own son, Gabriel apprenticed Peter to one of the foremost lawyers in the region, Thomas Corbett. Corbett had studied law at the Inner Temple in London and was recognized by Governor Glen as one of the six principal men of the bench in the province.⁶⁴ Peter served as Corbett's clerk and star pupil. Soon, Corbett prevailed upon Gabriel to send his son to the Inns of Court in London, where he could receive proper training in the law. Gabriel and Corbett agreed that Peter would study at the Inner Temple and that Corbett would accompany him and direct his studies. Peter was at the time only the thirteenth person with any connection to South Carolina to study law at the Inns of Court. By the time of the Revolution, forty-nine of South

⁶⁰ The one exception is the Charleston Library Society, which he joined sometime before 1750. But the Charleston Library Society was a charity, not a social club; though the structure and membership were similar, the CLS did not have genteel entertainments such as balls. See James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748-1811*, (South Carolina UP, 2002).

⁶¹ That his son never received dance instruction until he went to England, and was at great pains to justify these lessons to his father, suggest that Gabriel may never have been a dancer.

⁶² Crouse, 1967, p. 221. Manigault did sell slaves on a few occasions—and he owned at least two hundred—but they were small sales and did not make up a significant portion of his wealth. This made him unique among South Carolina's wealthy—the other nine of South Carolina's top ten wealthiest merchants in the colonial period made their fortune through the slave trade.

⁶³ The Manigaults were among Calvin's first followers in France. (Crouse, 1965)

⁶⁴ The other five were James Wright (the Attorney General), Charles Pinckney, Andrew Rutledge, James Michie, and John Rattray (Crouse, 1965, p. 111).

Carolina's elite sons had done the same. London came to have such a sizable South Carolina community in the 1760s that new neighborhoods at what was then the western margin of the city—such as Mayfair and Marylebone—began to fill up with an insular clique of Carolina families.⁶⁵ But in 1750, when Peter arrived in London, he could still feel pangs of homesickness and isolation: “[I] should like England very well, if my friends, were here. I found it very lonesome at first for want of acquaintance. . . .”⁶⁶ Peter poured some of his need for companionship into the candid, touching, sometimes rambling letters he wrote to his parents.

Peter's letters home show a young man studying abroad in a light that many parents today would recognize: he regularly asks for money, insists that he is studying diligently despite his entertainment expenses, and periodically tells his mother not to concern herself with his romantic life. But the details of Peter's letters demonstrate some of the instabilities inherent in genteel performance and the graceful body. As a law clerk in Charles Town, Peter had surely mastered a certain level of grace in his public affect; he was often in the company of the colony's most powerful men, and he had acquitted himself well. But in London, Peter found that he had to redouble his efforts, as his provincial gentility was too humble for the big city. At the same time, genteel pursuits took money, and his money came from a stern father overseas. Peter took pains throughout his letters to argue that the pursuit of grace and gentility was not just high living; it could be useful.

⁶⁵ For more on the South Carolina families in these areas during the 1760s, see Julie Flavell, *When London was the Capital of America* (Yale UP, 2010) especially pp. 7-113.

⁶⁶ Peter Manigault to Ann Ashby Manigault, August 2, 1750. All of the letters I cite here are from “The Manigault family papers, 1745-1989.” (436.01.01) South Carolina Historical Society. They are also available as transcriptions by Mabel L. Webber appearing in *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 31:3 (July 1930), pp. 171-183 and 31:4 (October 1930), pp. 269-282.

self-managing, and mature. But the rhetorical performance buckles. He comes across as a young man who is by turns justifying himself and prostrating himself before a short-tempered father. Peter found a sympathetic mediator in Andrew Rutledge, another powerful South Carolina lawyer and a friend of Gabriel's.⁶⁸ Peter wrote to Rutledge when he needed someone to plead his case before his father; Rutledge often wrote back with gentle fatherly advice of his own. Meanwhile, Peter's actual father does not seem to have written his son very often. Peter often notes in his letters to Gabriel that "I hope to have a letter from you soon" and "have not had the pleasure of a line from you."

Peter's reticent tone in his letters to his father would not be noticeable were it not for the loquacious warmth of his letters to his mother. Peter's letters to Ann often run to multiple pages, with large blocks of text. Indeed, Peter sometimes rambles to his mother, a flaw he was aware of: "You must not expect in my letters, to find every thing written regularly, and ranged in its proper order, but as I have a great number of particulars to mention, take them, just as they occur to me."⁶⁹ While Peter told his father about ships that had come in and out of port, he told his mother what was unfolding in his social circle: who was sick, who was getting married, who drank too much, etc. While he always signed letters to his father "Your dutiful son," he often signed letters to his mother "your dutiful and affectionate son." And while he maintained to his father that he was diligent and taking every "opportunity" while he was abroad, he admitted to his mother that he was homesick: "though I am afraid to own it, not that I am ashamed to be called

⁶⁸ Crouse, 1965, p. 121.

⁶⁹ Peter Manigault to Ann Manigault, July 13, 1751.

Mama-sick, for that I think is rather commendable, than not so; but I am afraid of being thought, if not called, a fool.”⁷⁰

The dynamic between Peter’s easy rapport with his mother and the self-conscious tone he adopts with his father proves favorable for the historian: his letters document both the impulses he followed and the self-justifications he fabricated. I read these letters not just for anecdotes of an elite son’s life abroad, although Peter’s letters are rich with such telling details. I also consider Peter’s letters at an illocutionary level, as a series of tactics through which Peter sought to manage his relationship with his powerful parents. When Peter wrote to his mother, he was opening up to a woman with whom he enjoyed a genuinely warm bond, but he was also conscripting her into service as an intermediary between himself and his more forbidding father. As he wrote to his mother, Peter remained aware that his father would be reading over her shoulder—if not literally, then figuratively, in the sense that Ann would pass on the content of Peter’s letters, presumably with or without her sympathies. Ann was an ally, and Peter cultivated her as such.

Peter was not in London long before he began to take in the city’s exciting social life. In July of 1750, barely a month after he arrived, he attended the Investiture Ceremony for new Knights of the Garter at Windsor Palace. There was a ball that evening, at which “two or three hundred of the finest ladies in the kingdom were present.” Peter wrote his mother that it was “I think, the finest thing I have seen, since I have been in England.”⁷¹ Peter was unable to enjoy the spectacle fully, however, because he had never learned to dance. By the end of the summer, Peter had resolved to remedy

⁷⁰ Peter Manigault to Ann Manigault, November 1, 1750.

⁷¹ Peter Manigault to Ann Manigault, August 2, 1750.

that oversight, and had hired one of the best dancing masters in London. He wrote his mother on August 28: “I am, this day, to begin to learn to dance, of a master who has as good a name, as any in London, he has therefore, no doubt, as good a price; no less than two guineas entrance! & two guineas a month. However...there are masters who would teach for half the money, but both Mr. Corbett and myself, think, tis best to learn of the most expert.” Peter’s justification here is typical of a note he strikes throughout his letters: if he is to succeed in London society, his consumer choices must be the best choices, which are always also the most expensive choices. Here, as elsewhere, he appeals to Mr. Corbett’s judgment as a justification for his profligacy. In doing so, he is not only adding expert testimony to his case, but also drawing his parents’ attention back to the path they set him on in his youth, when they apprenticed him to the best lawyer in the colony. No use adopting half-measures this late in the game, he seems to say.

Although Peter was taking dance lessons in England with an English dancing master, he was still a proud son of South Carolina, and his letters are the only extant first- person account by a dancing student from that colony. He was candid in describing to his mother his timidity in the early stages of his lessons, but he also spoke of his determination: “I have learned to dance almost six months, & as I have a great inclination to be a good dancer, am resolved to continue learning a few months longer.”⁷² He attended public dances at Mileud through the winter and at Chelsea over the summer. He admitted: “The first time I danced a minuet in public, my knees trembled in such a manner, that I thought, I should not have been able to have gone through with it, however by taking all opportunities of dancing in public, I have got over that foolish

⁷² Peter Manigault to Ann Manigault, April 15, 1751.

bashfulness.”⁷³ Peter’s use of the word “opportunity” is telling; this is the same word Peter used so often with his father to justify his efficient use of time. Peter presents his dance training as something like an academic pursuit, and even calls dancing the “genteel science.” The narrative Peter spins about his growing confidence as a dancer reads more like a story of triumph over adversity than the itinerary of a young man’s social calendar. All he is telling his mother here is that he has been going to dances in the countryside and having a lovely time. But he does so in a way that acknowledges the need to couch his diversions in a rhetoric of self-improvement.

Peter carried that rhetoric into his description of London’s other entertainments.

In November, he wrote to his mother:

The plays are now come in, which makes London the pleasantest place in the world, and the resort of all people of fashion, the plays, I must confess are the only diversions I like as, for Vaux Hall & Renelaugh, they never took my fancy. I like the plays, because they please the eye and the ear at the same time; the pit at the play house is the place I generally sit in, though sometimes I go into the gallery, to save a shilling. As I reckon myself very moderate in my other expenses, I think I may (and I hope you’ll think so, too) indulge my self in plays, especially, when you consider, that if I make a right use of them, they may be of great advantage to me.⁷⁴

Here again we see Peter justifying his indulgence in London’s entertainment culture. He cites the “opportunity” inherent in playgoing by suggesting that they can be put to “right use.” This line of reasoning echoes throughout English theatre history, as many of drama’s apologists insisted that theatre could promote morality even as it entertained.⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Peter Manigault to Ann Manigault, November 1, 1750.

⁷⁵ Just a half-century before, a notable public feud had erupted after Jeremy Collier published a 300-page screed against contemporary playwrights (*Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, 1698). Among the most notable responses to Collier’s tract was John Dennis, whose work *The*

Peter was growing into a *bon vivant*, and this left him concerned about his reputation at home. He wrote in March that there might be “a certain gentleman, now with you, had said while he was here, that he saw me at all the public places, very often which was by no means true.”⁷⁶ He urged his parents not to countenance any rumors that made their way across the Atlantic: “I beg your tenderness for me, may not make you too apt, to receive bad impressions of me, from any one;” “I confess it wrong in me, to take upon myself to caution you, not to regard any thing that might be said to my disadvantage;” “I am sure you won’t suffer yourself to be led away with reports, and will not hearken to any thing of that sort, without good foundation. However, if any one is so malicious as to spread idle rumors, I’ll wrap myself up in my own innocence, and convince you by my actions, that they are entirely groundless.”

Peter knew all too well that what happened in London did not always stay in London. In his own letters to his mother, Peter had not spared his friends the service of a wagging tongue. He kept his mother abreast of courtships that rose and fell throughout the social season, often interjecting his opinion as to whether or not the young men involved were “agreeable.” He rarely had much to say about the young women, although upon meeting the Wragg family, he mocked the mother’s concern for protecting her daughters from “strapping Irishmen,” since the girls were, in his opinion, “very little, and not extremely handsome.”⁷⁷ He spent a lot of time with the Draytons (of Drayton Hall), who were in England during the same period and whose son Billy was close to

Usefulness of the Stage to the Happiness of Mankind, to Government, and to Religion argued that the stage had a valuable instrumental purpose in composing a harmonious and peaceful society. Dennis’s view was influential on his associates Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, who gave further articulation to these ideas in the essays that appeared in *The Spectator* and their other publications.

⁷⁶ Peter Manigault to Ann Manigault, March 20, 1750 [Old Style]

⁷⁷ Peter Manigault to Ann Manigault, July 12, 1754. He must have had a change of heart—he married one of those daughters less than a year later.

Peter's age. He described John Drayton as "a very odd mixture of a man; when he is sober, which is almost every day till eleven o'clock in the forenoon, he is in the hip."⁷⁸

He even told his mother about the Corbetts' apparent fertility problems: "There is no likelihood of an increase in Mr. Corbett's family; I wish there was, for I am sure it would give them

both great pleasure."⁷⁹ If we may presume that everyone in Peter's circle was even half as candid in their personal letters home, then the circuit of gossip that spread across the Atlantic was a strong one indeed.

Peter took special care, then, about his appearance. To gain access to the best social and professional opportunities in London, he needed to project a more modish image than he had in Carolina. But he also had to protect his image at home, and not reflect poorly on his much-respected parents. The following episode from Peter's first winter in London illustrates the delicate balance he had to strike:

You desire to know how I dress, I suppose you mean by that, how many laced coats I have had, I can easily satisfy you in this particular, by telling you I have had one, which I was in a manner forced to get, for I never went into public without lace, and was taken any notice of; they won't even give one a seat in church, without a good suit of clothes on, as I can witness; for one Sunday evening, I went with Billy Drayton to hear the celebrated Mr. Foster, I was dressed quite plain, my friend had a laced waistcoat and hat, he, or rather his laced waistcoat, was introduced into a pew, while I, that is, my plain clothes, were forced to stand up, during the whole time of divine service, in the aisle. This coat is a very decent, and in my opinion a very proper one, when I desired Mr. Corbett to let me have such a coat, he answered me, that he thought it was not at all improper, but that he was afraid my father might not altogether approve of it, but that however I might please myself; By pleasing myself, I hope I have not displeased you, for as to my dress in general, (If I do not neglect matters of greater moment), I am willing to believe, you would have me please myself, provided I am neither foppish nor extravagant.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ "In the hip" was a slang expression for being depressive and out of sorts, as a horse might be when suffering a hip injury. (Peter Manigault to Ann Manigault, November 1, 1750).

⁷⁹ Peter Manigault to Ann Manigault, July 13, 1751.

⁸⁰ Peter Manigault to Ann Manigault, February 20, 1750

In this passage, Peter has provided a pointed illustration of how crucial proper genteel display could be. Even attending a sermon by James Foster, a Baptist minister from rural Devon, the plainness of Peter's dress lands him standing-room status. A year or two earlier, back home in South Carolina, Billy and Peter would have been recognized anywhere they went as the sons of two of the colony's wealthiest and most powerful men. But in London, comportment was the best gauge of social worth for unknown teenagers, and Peter's fell short.⁸¹

Peter continued to build a graceful body during his first year in London. He supplemented his dancing lessons with fencing lessons. He wrote home asking for money to buy a watch and silver buttons for his coat.⁸² Most importantly, he convinced his parents to pay for the premier document of genteel status: an oil portrait. A portrait could record all the hallmarks of the graceful body: posture, adornment, expression. Peter first campaigned for a full-length treatment: "Mr. Corbett thinks I should stay the winter, before I have my picture drawn, he also thinks it had better be drawn at full length, and that twould be throwing away money, to have it drawn at half length."⁸³ Gabriel was unmoved, however, and would only pay for a half-length portrait. Unfortunately, the

⁸¹ Peter and Billy probably knew of each other back in Charles Town, but there is no evidence that their families were close. In Peter's letters, he speaks of the Draytons in a different tone than he speaks of family friends such as the Crockatts or the Abercrombies. He nevertheless grew close to Billy while abroad, and there is every reason to expect that their friendship continued when they returned to South Carolina. Billy became Justice of the Peace for Berkeley County and Peter sat in the Commons House, of which he eventually became Speaker.

⁸² Peter's note to his mother about the watch keenly illustrates how he subtly used her influence on his father: "P.S. In my last to my father I mentioned to him that I should be glad he would let me buy a watch if he should approve of it I beg you'll let me know..."

⁸³ [undated letter, Summer 1750]. Peter also reveals here that Mr. Corbett has advised him to wait through the winter before sitting for a portrait, possibly because Peter still needs refinement. Over the course of the winter, Peter received dance and fencing instruction, which suggests that the aristocratic bearing and self-confidence of the final image may owe something to Mr. Corbett's prudence.

painting has been lost, although a black-and-white photograph survives. Peter sent the painting back in April of 1751, accompanied by the following note:

This image has been redacted in respect to the holder(s) of the image's license.

Figure P: Peter Manigault, by Allen Ramsay
Gibbes Museum of Art

And now a few words concerning my picture, which comes by this opportunity. Tis done by one of the best hands in England, and is accounted by all judges here, not only an exceeding good likeness, but a very good piece of painting: the drapery is all taken from my own clothes, & the very flowers in the lace, upon the hat, are taken from a hat of my own; I desire Mr. Theus may see it, as soon as is convenient after it arrives. I was advised to have it drawn by one Keable, that drew Tom Smith, & several others that went over to Carolina, but upon seeing his paintings I found that though his likenesses, (which is the easiest part of doing a picture), were some of them very good, yet his paint seemed to be laid on with a trowel, and looked more like plastering than painting, you may guess at the difference between Ramsay and Keeble painting [sic] by the difference in their prices, What Ramsay demands four and twenty guineas for, t'other

humbly hopes, you'll allow him seven. As Theus will have an opportunity of seeing both, I'll be extremely obliged to you, if you'll let me know his judgment; You'll also tell me if you think any part of it too gay, the ruffles are done charmingly, and exactly like the ruffles I had on when I was drawn, you see my taste in dress by the picture, for every thing there, is what I have had the pleasure of wearing often. Mr. Corbett writes fully to my father about the picture, & therefore I will not trouble you with any more...⁸⁴

By now, it should be easy to recognize the recurring patterns in Peter's justifications: an appeal to Mr. Corbett's judgment, the solicitation of a neutral voice among his father's acquaintances back in Carolina, and the conviction that if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing in the most expensive manner possible. But it is also easy to recognize

⁸⁴ Peter Manigault to Ann Manigault, April 15, 1751.

Peter's recurring anxieties: wanting his parents to approve of his prudence, wanting to be praised for his taste, and not wanting to appear "too gay" back in his home colony.

The "Mr. Theus" to whom Peter referred was Jeremiah Theus, a Swiss-born portrait painter in Charles Town. Theus was one of the most successful "limners" in any of the colonies, supplementing his portrait- and landscape-painting by painting coaches and gilding ornamental sculptures, such as the globe on the top of the spire at St.

Michael's church.⁸⁵ Having a portrait done by Mr. Theus carried a great deal of social capital in South Carolina, and he later painted a portrait of Peter's wife meant as a pendant to the Ramsay painting. In soliciting Theus's

opinion, Peter anticipated that the painter would be able

to recognize how fine Ramsay's work was and justify

the expense to his father. Theus may have known

Ramsay by reputation; Ramsay already had the patronage of several ducal households and later went

on to be portraitist to the king. Theus may also have

recognized in Ramsay's portrait of Peter the emergence

of a more modern style: Peter's figure in the painting, relaxed

and elegant with a posture that is both upright and slightly curved, was more reflective of

the new rococo style coming out of France than of the more conservative Baroque

tradition of English portraiture.⁸⁶ In short, Peter relied on Theus to translate London's

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⁸⁵ Hennig Cohen, *South Carolina Gazette, 1732-1775* (South Carolina UP, 1953), pp. 49, 53.

⁸⁶ Art historian Alastair Smith has noted of Ramsay's identically-posed portrait of Thomas Lamb (1753) that it "marks a significant stage in Ramsay's development of a type of three-quarter-length male portrait in which the sitter is represented in an attitude expressive at once of elegance and a sort of nonchalant ease." Qtd in Angela D. Mack and J. Thomas Savage, "Reflections of Refinement: Portraits of Charlestonians at Home and Abroad." in *In Pursuit of Refinement: Charlestonians Abroad, 1740-1860*, ed. Maurie D. McInnis (South Carolina UP, for Gibbes Museum of Art, 1999), p. 26.

standards of genteel self-display to his authoritarian father. In doing so, he acknowledged the unique authority that men such as Theus wielded over the construction of taste.

Peter's gambit paid off in both directions: he thrived both socially and professionally in London while also prevailing on his father to allow him more financial independence. In October of 1752, after the expiration of his clerkship with Corbett, Peter moved into apartments of his own at the Inner Temple. His father allowed him the authority to manage his own affairs, including finances. When Peter was finally called to the bar on February 8, 1754, he paid out another hefty sum for his gown, wig, and bands, but he was able to recoup that money and more in his first month as a London barrister.⁸⁷ When Peter finally returned to South Carolina in 1754, he was soon elected to the Commons House of Assembly. According to historian David Ramsay, writing in 1808, "by his eloquence and attention to business [he] acquired in a short time a large share of influence."⁸⁸ Peter's rise to a position of local power went higher and faster even than his father's, and he did so largely on the strength of his charisma. While Gabriel was respected for his benevolence, Peter was loved for his charm. David Ramsay, who had many mutual acquaintances with the two men, praised Gabriel for his "integrity and benevolence" and memorialized Peter as "an elegant classical scholar, an eloquent public speaker, and possess[ing] an inexhaustible fund of wit. Many of his repartees and other effusions of a brilliant imagination, are still remembered and often quoted."⁸⁹ A friend of Peter's sketched a telling image of Peter and his friends gathered around empty bottles and a punch bowl late into the night in 1760. Gabriel Manigault had risen in the early part

⁸⁷ Crouse, 1965, p. 139.

⁸⁸ David Ramsay, *The History of South Carolina: From Its First Settlement in 1670, to the Year 1808*. p.504.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 501, 505.

of the eighteenth century as the sober and serious son of a French Huguenot; Peter rose as a London gentleman in Carolina.

But wealthy young men such as Peter Manigault did not attain gentility through solitary effort. They were abetted in their social climbing by an array of tailors, wig-makers, portraitists, and other tradesmen who took a part in “sculpting” the genteel body. In particular, dancing masters played an essential part in sculpting the genteel body, and they presented themselves as experts not just on minuets and gigues, but on all manners of refined comportment. And yet, dancing masters themselves were merely tradesmen.

While Peter Manigault’s teacher had “as good a name as any in London,” many colonial dancers had a more difficult time establishing a trustworthy reputation. Many colonial dancing masters were itinerants, “peddlers of gentility” who moved from one town to another and were thus easy targets of suspicion.⁹⁰ In the next chapter, I consider the dancing masters as an occupational sub-class whose social and economic positions within the British Empire were contingent and insecure. Even though aspiring elites depended on dancing masters to mold them into proper gentility, they also regarded them with fear and distrust.

⁹⁰ “Peddlers of gentility” is Serena Zabin’s term. For more on her work and how it abuts with my own, see note 61 in the next chapter. (Serena R. Zabin, *Dangerous Economies: Status and Commerce in Imperial New York*, Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 2009. p. 82.

Chapter Two

“The Manners-Making Crew”:

The Plight of Dancing Masters

in Eighteenth-Century Charles Town

On May 27, 1732, a dancing master named Robinson and his companion Michael Cavino entered a seedy tavern on the North Edisto River. Such “dram-shops and tippling- houses” littered the South Carolina coastal region in the eighteenth century; Charles Town alone had over one hundred licensed purveyors of liquor in a town of fewer than thirteen hundred households.¹ This one was considerably low-end, likely no more than a clapboard shack in the middle of the blackwater swamp of the Edisto watershed. The nearest township was Orangeburg, an Indian trading post that had just been incorporated by the General Assembly a year earlier and was composed mostly of Swiss, German, and Dutch immigrants. Robinson and Cavino had come lately from Cape Fear, another swampy sinkhole in the Carolina territories. Why they came to Orangeburg is unclear, but they may have been hoping to find passage upriver to Charles Town. Whatever their goal, their pockets had run thin by the time they reached the tavern at Edisto. The tavern- keeper, Christopher Dennis, may have been friendly when the two arrived, but when he discovered that they didn’t have any more money to pay for their drinks, he cut them off. The two strangers grew irate and demanded to be served more liquor. When Dennis continued to refuse them, Robinson resorted to violence. He struck

¹ In 1772, the *Gazette* published the presentments of the South Carolina Grand Jury that Charles Town licensed too great a number of “dram-shops and tippling houses.” (*SCG*, February 4, 1772). A letter to the *Gazette* the following month suggests that this was an annual complaint (*SCG*, March 3, 1772).

Dennis in the head with his gun, knocking him to the floor. Once Dennis was on the ground, Robinson kicked him hard in the stomach. As Robinson and Cavino stumbled out of the tavern and back into the dark, wooded swamp, Christopher Dennis lay crumpled in pain on the tavern floor, his insides ruptured and bleeding. He died four hours later.²

Although Robinson's crime appears to be unique among colonial American dancing masters, it powerfully illustrates the vulnerability to circumstance that attended most colonial dancing masters' lives. In order to thrive, dancing masters had to curry favor among colonial elites. They needed to project a class status that few of them had and none of them started with. They were class transients, people who lived in the midst of wealth while only partially being able to share in it. As a result their lives were often marked by debt, dependency, and a nomadic lifestyle.

If dance and grace were so highly venerated in Charles Town and other colonies, why did the dancing masters lead such contingent lives? This question may seem facile at first—surely the small population and the lack of patronage systems in the colonies could be said to account for some of the disparity. But if that were the whole case, one might expect to see more stability later in the century, when the population had grown and wealthy families had matured into dynasties. On the contrary, the only two Charles Town dancing masters who might properly be called “success stories” (Henry Campbell and George Brownell, see below) were among the earliest generation of dancing masters in the colony. While the dance styles themselves continued to be popular until the eve of the Revolution, dancing masters had by that time reduced the fund-raising balls they used to throw for their own benefit and several had resorted to teaching in the evening, trying

²From an account that ran in various Boston and Philadelphia papers, June 30, 1732.

to attract the custom of day-laborers. The financial insecurity of the dancing masters and the abatement of the benefit balls attest to a growing indifference and even antipathy towards colonial dancing masters over the course of the eighteenth century. At the same time, dancing itself secured an ever-more-firm footing in the colonies with the rise of dancing assemblies and other institutional opportunities for social dance. At times, dancing masters found themselves flush with business, opening new schools and even forging partnerships among one another to accommodate the ranks of students. And yet, these periods left as unexpectedly as they had come. Dancing masters were indispensable, yet shunned; they lived their lives teetering on the edge of the public's affection and contempt.

This chapter seeks to unravel that paradox by unraveling the lives themselves—the biographical details of Charles Town's dancing masters that remain in the documentary record. There were scarcely more than ten dancing masters who worked in Charles Town during the colonial period, and most of them were only in the region for a short time. Only four dancing masters worked in Charles Town for more than five years: Henry Campbell (at least twelve years and probably more, 1732-1744), Nicholas Valois (a seven-year span, 1759-1766, although he took a trip to England of indeterminate length in 1763), Andrew Rutledge (at least fourteen years, 1759-1773), and Thomas Pike (ten years, 1764-1774).³ Two other Charles Town dancing masters, George Brownell and

³ I have put these career dates together mostly by collating these men's advertisements for balls and lessons in the *Gazette*. Some dates are firmer than others. Pike definitely arrived from England in 1764 and definitely left for Philadelphia in 1774. Rutledge was teaching in the country before 1759, when he moved to the city, where most of his clientele lived (*SCG*, December 29, 1759). Campbell appears to have been a popular dancing master already when the *Gazette* began publication in 1732, and it is impossible to say when his career in the city began. His last advertisement was in 1744; he was buried on May 11, 1748 (Register of St. Philip's Parish). Valois and his mother (who owned a school for ladies) certainly arrived in 1759, but his trail simply fizzles after 1766.

William Dering, had successful itinerant careers, but spent little time in Charles Town.⁴ Henry Holt and Nicholas Scanlan both taught in the colony for a period of less than five years (Holt, 1734-1737; Scanlan, late 1750-early 1755), and both left abruptly. The remaining names that appear in the historical record—William Brawn, George Logan, Peter Lyons, someone named Mr. Chevalier—only appear as scraps, with little clue as to their circumstances.

Most of what can be discerned about these lives comes from the notices in the *South Carolina Gazette*. The newspaper was the dancing master's mouthpiece as he announced his arrival in town, advertised his lessons and benefits, and ultimately tried to sell what he could before leaving town again. The *Gazette* marks several such story arcs, most of them compressed into fewer than five years. But in order to render these provisional careers legible, it is necessary to subject them to a series of questions that locate them in a broader context. What sort of crisis did the mutability of status in colonial cities create for a newly-wealthy class looking to solidify its own elitism? What dangers might lie behind the façade of a status “poser” and what were the stakes of a sincere performance? How did the dancing masters themselves—who were locked in fierce competition for scarce clientele—signal the “authenticity” of their class status in newspaper advertisements?

“Borrowed Grandeur and Affected Grace”

⁴ Dering arrived in Charles Town in late 1749, after teaching in Philadelphia during the 1730s until moving to Williamsburg in 1737. George Brownell, who was Benjamin Franklin's first math teacher, had a long and peripatetic career: He began his career at Goose Creek near Charles Town in 1703, but he was teaching dance in Boston as early as 1712. He opened a school in Boston in 1716, a school in Philadelphia in 1728, and a school in New York in 1731. He circulated between the three colonies until his wife's death in 1738, after which he moved back to Charles Town. He was teaching dance there in 1744, but it is not clear how long he attended to it, as he also taught many other subjects. He died in Charles Town in 1751.

Dancing masters suffered from an occupational paradox: they guarded the borders of a class to which they did not belong. Although they claimed authority over the deportment and disposition of genteel society, they were themselves tradesmen. Nevertheless, they were tradesmen who by dint of their trade were compelled to keep up the appearance of gentility, both in their person and their effects.⁵ For instance, many dancing masters held lessons in their own living quarters; no purveyor of elegance and refinement would be taken seriously if he lived in squalor. A dancing master had to present an air of affluence even when he teetered on the edge of penury. Henry Holt, before leaving the colony for New York, put up for sale a costly four-wheel chaise and two geldings.⁶ As a mode of transport, a four-wheel chaise was absurdly ostentatious for a bachelor, especially for a man renting rooms from a widow.⁷ But for Holt, it was a component in his self-presentation as a cosmopolitan sophisticate. No mere Galloway nag would do.

The rise of the dancing master as an occupation occurred in the midst of what recent historians have described as a consumer revolution.⁸ The abundance of English goods flooding colonial markets and the economic growth in the colonies themselves

⁵ Serena Zabin has compared colonial dancing masters to colonial confidence men, suggesting that they both felt the crush of “keeping up appearances.” Her argument focuses on New York, where the tenor of political antagonism and the ethnic composition of the population created a very different cultural atmosphere from Charles Town. However, some of her work corroborates my own conclusions about the rise of an anti-dancing faction and their implicit mistrust of dancing masters. (Serena R. Zabin, *Dangerous Economies: Status and Commerce in Imperial New York* Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 2009, esp pp. 100-105).

⁶ *SCG*, March 5, 1737.

⁷ See *SCG*, Nov 16, 1734.

⁸ Of particular interest on this subject: T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (Oxford, 2004); Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds. *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: Virginia UP, 1994); Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1992), T. H. Breen, “‘Baubles of Britain’: The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century.” *Past and Present* 119 (1988): 73-104, also collected in Carson, et al. The character of my own scholarship owes a great debt to the work of Bushman, Breen, and Carson. Bushman, in particular, produced groundbreaking work on the connection between dancing manuals and the daily life of the colonial elite. While I cannot offer consensus with his work in every respect, I acknowledge the depth of his influence on my own thinking.

made it increasingly feasible for colonists to attain the trappings of English gentry. Indeed, the glutting of colonial markets effectively abolished the category of “colonist,” granting once-provisional settlers full membership into the category of “Briton.” Colonial dancing masters were in thrall to this boom in consumer markets, as it was through these markets that they gained access to the upper-class trappings necessary to their occupational role-playing. The latest fashions and fabrics, cut to their figures, could give them the semblance of an *au courant* Londoner, and add emphasis to the claims they made in the name of fashionable society.

But even as this consumer revolution consolidated the colonial economy, it disrupted the class hierarchy that pervaded British life. Before the boom in consumerism, status came with a stable index in material attainment. As the tide of material attainment rose, however, a crisis of inference ensued. How could one tell if the man sporting the brass-knobbed cane and handsome peri-wig were indeed the “real deal” and not an impostor? If anyone with a fistful of ready cash could attain the markers of status, were they not also buying their way into the status itself?

Dancing masters lived in the crosshairs of this anxiety over status performance. They were in the first place conspirators in the fabrication of a newly-gentrified elite class. They were thus complicit in the diffusion of social distinctions and the disruption of class hierarchy. But dancing masters were also class outlaws themselves. While their clients had money and aspired to gentility, the dancing master had the habits and dispositions of gentility and aspired to money. Dancing masters were tradesmen, but could not afford to become overly familiar with the tradesmen class. Their social networks, and their class affect, were by necessity among the elites whose custom they

sought. They were, in effect, members of a parasitical class, made up of professions locked in a symbiotic relationship with the elite class.⁹

Like most tradesmen in the colonial economy, dance instructors had upfront expenses that had to be financed—often through personal loans—before they could make a serious attempt at making money. Other tradesmen may have had the more obvious expenses of raw materials—wood for cabinetmakers, metals for silversmiths, wax for candlemakers—but dancing masters’ needs were no less pressing. Even though the dancing masters’ raw materials could be said to be the young men and women they tutored, there were less tangible materials necessary.

Dancing masters needed space, for one thing. Most dancing masters taught lessons in their own living quarters, so questions of access and suitability were crucial. Some dancing masters, particularly in the early part of the century, lived on the plantations of wealthy gentlemen. One such boarder was William Brawn, whose death notice in 1732 identified him as “dancing master at a gentleman’s plantation in the country.”¹⁰ More often, however, dancing masters set up shop in the city itself. The advertisements they ran in the *South Carolina Gazette* give a sense of the relative humility of these accommodations. Henry Holt rented a room from the widow Lory in Church Street.¹¹ Andrew Rutledge rented out the long room in the back of Nathaniel Greene’s house, also in Church Street.¹² Nicholas Valois lived with his own mother and

⁹ Although this relationship was mutualistic, it was not necessarily equally beneficial. In the life sciences, members of an unequal mutualistic relationship are spoken of as *obligate*—being the party primarily dependent on the relationship—and *facultative*—being the party who benefits from the relationship but can survive without it. In the relationship between dancing master and patron, the dancing master clearly held the obligate position, since they depended on their customers, sometimes to the point of living with them. ¹⁰ *SCG*, August 8, 1732

¹¹ *SCG* November 16, 1734.

¹² *SCG* November 27, 1762.

offered classes there until he was able (after six years of business) to move in with a Nicholas Bouquet on Broad Street.¹³

Dancing masters also needed music, and that meant musicians. As in London, colonial dancing musicians were not concert musicians; they stood in a separate space, sometimes a loft, and they played a different repertoire of music. They were often slaves who were trained to play the instruments and repertoire necessary for English dancing styles. Henry Holt had a slave with him named Joe, whom he kept with him when he moved to New York and later to Jamaica.¹⁴ George Brownell had a slave named Noko, later Christianized to Noah, who was sold after his death and put to work as a carpenter and a butler, a situation from which he eventually ran away.¹⁵ Many runaway advertisements of the mid-eighteenth century note that the slave in question plays the violin or the fiddle and often carries one with him. Some masters capitalized on their slaves' abilities, such as Rev. Jonathan Todd of East Guilford, Connecticut, who owned "so expert a fiddler that on many occasions [he] invited the young people of the village to his house 'to hear Tom play on his fiddle.'"¹⁶ For a dancing master to keep and support one or more slave musicians would have meant a considerable expense on food, clothing, and other costs.

While lessons were the bedrock of a dancing master's income, the best opportunity for a windfall of money came from the benefit balls. Benefit events were a mainstay of eighteenth-century performing arts, whether in theatre, dance, or musical

¹³ SCG November 7, 1766.

¹⁴ Daniel Horsmanden says as much in his account of the New York Slave Conspiracy. See Jill Lepore, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan*. (New York: Knopf, 2005), p. 17.

¹⁵ Runaway ad signed Joseph Glover, *South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, July 7, 1767.

¹⁶ Qtd in Kate van Winkle Keller, *Dance and its Music in America, 1528-1789* (Pendragon Press, 2007), p.459.

concerts. For a benefitee with a large following, these events could finance a lavish lifestyle, but for those without the assurance of a following, these ventures could be risky. The funds invested in these events could be considerable; not only was there punch and other refreshments to be provided, but the promotional costs were high as well. Newspaper notices for public balls may have signaled the highpoints of dancing activity, when public support was high enough to justify the expense. Alternatively, they may have signaled the desperate straits of dancing masters locked in competition with one another; there were considerably more public balls in Charles Town during the periods when two or more dancing masters were plying their trade in town. Balls not only offered the dancing masters' students an opportunity to show off their progress, it also allowed the dancing masters themselves to advertise their services. In order for the bodily grace and fluency that a dancing master instilled to seem desirable to the Charleston public, there needed to be an opportunity to display these skills to a public beyond the insular world of those who were already students. Furthermore, dancing proficiency would be a useless skill if there were no balls at which to showcase that proficiency; it was important for dancing masters to create the impression that the gay festivities of the ball season were a perennial delight and not a temporary fad.

With all of these upfront costs to be borne, a dancing master needed considerable venture capital. The easiest way for a tradesmen to attain this kind of solvency was through credit. Credit held the colonial economy together, and there were three main avenues for a colonist who sought it. Credit was available from merchants who sold their wares through hire purchase or installment plan, credit was available from land banks and other intermediaries who used land titles as collateral in issuing a loan, and credit

was available through private loans.¹⁷ In Charles Town, the former and the latter were the most developed avenues of credit; because land titling did not begin in South Carolina until 1731, debtors had no titles to offer as collateral and land banks were slow to develop.¹⁸ Because land banks offered a more highly structured mechanism for the redress of unpaid debts, they were able to offer larger loans.¹⁹ Therefore, in a region such as South Carolina, where land banks were slow to develop, lines of credit remained small and a debtor might need to turn to more than one source to accumulate the necessary funds. Creditors relied on collection mechanisms such as promissory notes and bonds, which—although legally binding—often amounted to long, legal battles for collection. For instance, when the dancing master Nicholas Scanlan absconded from the colony in 1754, he held hefty debts to local merchants Benjamin Mathewes and Thomas Lloyd. Mathewes and Lloyd filed a declaration with the clerk of the Court of Common Pleas, prompting the provost-marshal, Rawlins Lowndes, to seize Scanlan’s property from the hands of his abandoned wife, Mary. The property was then held by the court for a year and a day, allowing time for Scanlan to re-appear and enter a plea.²⁰ Only after a year went by were the two men able to collect on debts that were already in arrears when they filed their declarations.

Dancing masters’ reliance on credit positioned them in a chain of credit relations that extended back across the ocean to London’s finance moguls. This system was an

¹⁷ See John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 1985), pp. 334-337. Also see Michael Woods, “The Culture of Credit in Colonial Charleston.” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* (Vol 99, No. 4: Oct 1998).

¹⁸ On the Land Act of 1731 and its effect on the colonial economy, see Peter A. Coclanis, *The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country, 1670-1920*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1989), pp. 102-103.

¹⁹ McCusker and Menard, p. 336.

²⁰ SCG April 17, 1755.

essential component of the imperial project, as the relative shortage of circulating specie made credit a valuable tool in fostering economic growth. Nevertheless, the obstruction of any part of this circulatory system was a constant hazard to the empire's economic health. Debtors reneged, disappeared, or died, leaving their creditors unable to fulfill the obligations of their own debts. Legal collections were slow, and losses were high.²¹

Credit fatigue set in among some merchants and artisans, who refused to sell for anything less than cash in hand. One can hear the encroaching weariness in the *South Carolina Gazette* advertisements of Charles Town merchant Thomas Gates:

JUST Imported from London, in Captain Baker, and to be sold by Thomas Gates in Thomas Elliott's Allev. A choice Parcel of Red Herrings. (May 12, 1733)

... and several other Goods very reasonable, but all for ready money, the which I hope you'll not forget to bring along with you, or else the Bargain is void. (March 15, 1735)

...and several other goods very reasonable, but for ready money, which I hope you will not forget to bring along with you, for else you'll either make me sick or hard hearing. (December 20, 1735)

... fine Tea and many other Goods, also choice drams to cure the belly ake, all for ready money, which I desire to bring along with you, else you'll give me the Gripes, and put me to the trouble of writing and slating them up to the former Price. (July 24, 1736)

... and several other goods very reasonable but all for ready money, which I hope you will not forget to bring along with you, to save me the trouble of writing for then I must be paid for keeping book, which will raise the Price (March 19, 1737)

... but all for ready Money, the which I hope you'll not forget to bring with you, for they'll move but slowly with a fair Gale of Wind, till the ready Money comes to freshen their Way, then they'll move briskly. (May 21, 1737)

Gates's continued impatience attests not only to the onset of credit fatigue, but to the futility of trying to avoid extending credit in the first place. One might imagine that

²¹ Carl Bridenbaugh cites a Philadelphia watchmaker for whom bad debts comprised thirty-seven percent of his sales. Carl Bridenbaugh, *The Colonial Craftsman* (New York UP, 1950), p. 154.

Gates's protests hide a business practice that proved more bluster than principle. Shortly before his death in late 1741, Gates issued his strongest terms yet, asking for "ready Money, without which the Game is up, etc. I Play no more. I am weary."²²

Because the circumstances of Charles Town's credit landscape made it difficult for creditors to recover loans in a timely fashion, they were less likely to extend credit to debtors they did not know. Therefore, social networks were especially vital to Charles Town's economic health. The wealth that flooded into the economy came into the hands of a limited few and was parceled out as loans to a small, tightly-knit circle of debtors who could be vouched for. Most of the creditors were merchants—sixty-seven percent of the plaintiffs listed in the records of the Court of Common Pleas between 1704 and 1769 were merchants—and many of the debtors were planters—forty percent of the defendants over the same period.²³ A small group of plaintiffs shared a particularly high proportion of Charles Town's debt. Ten plaintiffs appear in more than five case records; of these ten, all but one were merchants.²⁴ At the top of the list, the most frequent litigants were the Wraggs, the Laurenses, and the Crockatts—all of them slavers and all of them with strong ties to London finance firms.

For dancing masters who needed credit to maintain the trappings of a lifestyle they did not have the means to afford, it was imperative to stay in the good graces of Charles Town's affluent elite. The elite class was not only a stable of potential clients for a dancing master, they were also a market of potential lines of credit. There were a

²² The last quote is from Bridenbaugh, *Craftsman*, p. 154. All of the other quotes may be found in the *South Carolina Gazette* on the date indicated.

²³ Michael Woods, Table II, p.61.

²⁴ Michael Woods, Table III, p.62. The single exception was Robert Hume, who appeared in only one-third as many cases as the Wraggs (eight cases to their twenty-four), but prosecuted for nearly as much money (15,541 pounds to the Wraggs' 16,220 pounds).

number of avenues available to forge and strengthen the social connections a dancing master needed to gain entry into moneyed circles. One was to join the burgeoning social clubs of Charles Town: Holt was a Freemason, Campbell joined the South Carolina Society. But even as dancing masters climbed the social ladder, their trustworthiness may have been compromised by the aggregate effect of their own financial troubles. Campbell was in court for debt three times, Scanlan defaulted on his debts when he left his wife and split town, Pike and Holt both left town suddenly in apparent financial defeat. As these disasters accumulated, dancing masters may have accreted to themselves an unsavory reputation. But finance was not the only realm in which dancing masters acquired a dubious pall. In London as well as the colonies, the vocation of dancing master was transforming into a profession in an atmosphere of suspicion.

“A Wretched, Worthless Crew...”

In 1722, a small canto was printed “near St. Paul’s” in London. The twenty-page volume was titled *The Dancing Master: A Satyr*, and it was a scathing condemnation of English dancing masters, calling out several by (implied) name.²⁵ The doggerel poem, which I have transcribed in full as an appendix to this work, is more sincere attack than rhetorical art, although there is a spirit of self-satisfied cleverness in its snarling heroic couplets. It begins, “Of all the plagues with which poor England’s cursed,/Or ever was, the Dancing Tribe’s the worst,” and goes on to compare dancing masters to the worst devastations of ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome; in each case, the dancing masters are found to be the worse offence. The poem continues to lay out its case in vitriol and

²⁵ Following the custom of the eighteenth century, the author avoided spelling the names out explicitly and instead used first and last letters with a dash between. This was a common tactic to avoid libel charges.

hyperbole (“Their education’s vile and so’s their birth,/And they the Dregs and scum of all the Earth”), prosecute them with ridicule (“Strip off their peacock finery, deface /Their borrowed grandeur and affected grace,/Draw them at length, and in their proper shapes,/Monkeys, baboons, and horrid grinning apes”), and condemn them utterly (“Blast them, kind Heav’n, and drive them from the world,/And let thy angry thunderbolt be hurl’d/Right down upon them, save us from the worst/Of punishments that ever nation cursed.”)

The poem is clearly an unreliable source for biographical detail, but it is a rich documentary fragment of the process through which public opinion reckoned with the growing commercialization of dance. Furthermore, the poem can be read against other documentary fragments as a way of drawing out some general patterns among the English dance instructors. The most important source for delineating networks among the dance instructors are the subscription lists attached to the dance literature that was published throughout the early part of the century. A number of practical and theoretical works concerning dance were published between 1700 and 1740, six of which include detailed subscriber lists. Some works also provide biographical detail in prefaces and dedications. The result is nearly one hundred and fifty names we know to have been linked into a professional and perhaps personal network. This network was the “top of the heap” among British dancing masters, marked by their social proximity to the authors and translators of the most important dancing texts: John Weaver, Anthony L’Abbe, John Essex, etc.²⁶ The patterns of these men’s lives and careers, therefore, should be seen not

²⁶ The logic of this argument is based on the concept of the “Erdős number.” Paul Erdős was a mathematician who wrote many influential papers in his field, most of them in collaboration with other scholars. The Erdős number began as a tongue-in-cheek way of quantifying a scholar’s prominence by measuring his or her “collaborative distance” from Erdős. Paul Erdős had an Erdős number of zero, each of

as definitive but as narratives that set the horizon of expectations for both provincial dancing masters and their provincial clientele.²⁷ By reading these fragmentary patterns against the recriminations of the anonymous poem, I am gesturing towards those unstable features of an emerging social type that marked dancing masters as potential menaces to society.

The 1722 satire sets up an “origin myth” of the archetypal dancing master. The author impugns the dancing master’s ignoble origins, rendering him an orphan bastard raised on weak beer and cabbage and suckled at the teat of a gin-besotted parish nurse:

In a Dark Cellar first the Rat is born,
Of Father, Mother, and of help forlorn;
‘Tis spew’d into the world, the Parish nurse,
Fosters it up, and makes it ten times worse:
Small Beer and Cabbage is the Infant’s food,
And Nurse’s milk by Royal Bob made good;

The satirist is undercutting the dancing master’s “authenticity” as a monitor of genteel standards. The portrait painted here is of a low-born cretin driven by venality more than gentility, one who is master of “the arts to rise and thrive” rather than the arts of grace

his collaborators had an Erdős number of 1, each person those collaborators collaborated with had an Erdős number of two, and so on. The concept is now a crucial tool in network theory, as it allows analysts to take a quantitative measure of the relative social distance between members in a human network. For a general introduction, see Albert-Laszlo Barabasi, *Linked: How Everything is Connected to Everything Else* (Plume, 2003).

²⁷ Recent work by Moira Goff and Jennifer Thorp has been invaluable in understanding the lives and careers of these men. See especially Goff’s “The Testament and Last Will of Jerome Francis Gahory” (*Early Music*, Vol. 38, No. 4, November 2010), “Edmund Pemberton, Dancing-Master and Publisher,” (*Dance Research*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Spring 1993), or her book *The Incomparable Hester Santlow: A Dancer-Actress on the Georgian Stage* (Ashgate, 2007); or Thorp’s “Mr. Isaac, Dancing-Master” (*Dance Research*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Winter 2006) or “P. Siris: An Early Eighteenth-Century Dancing Master,” (*Dance Research*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Autumn 1992). Also indispensable for this research are two older dissertations: Jennifer Martin’s “The English Dancing Master, 1660-1728: His Role in Court, in Society, and on the Public Stage,” (University of Michigan, 1977); and Carol Marsh’s “French Court Dance in England, 1706- 1740: A Study of the Sources,” (CUNY, 1985).

and decorum. The obscurity of one's birth circumstances was a rising hazard in the increasingly urbanized society of the British Empire. The social order of Georgian society was still deeply invested in keeping to one's "station," but social and financial mobility were disrupting that order. A system of nobility based on being born into ancient riches was giving way to one in which, as Defoe noted, "Wealth however got in England makes/Lords of mechanics, gentlemen of rakes." Samuel Johnson lamented the subsequent break-down in deference: "Subordination is sadly broken down in this age...there are many causes, the chief of which is the great increase of money."²⁸

The satirist launches a more explicit charge of social climbing against "the faggot L—l," perhaps the dancing master surnamed "Lovel" that Dudley Ryder wrote about in his diary in March of 1716.²⁹ Lovel here rejects what should have been his prescribed calling:

The Joiner's business was his father's trade,
A joiner, too, the booby should be made;
But other thoughts filled his capacious crown,
And turned his intellects quite upside down.

Convinced that he can become a gentleman, Lovel becomes a dancing-master, despite being "splay-footed and ungenteel." Among the dancing masters lampooned in the poem, Lovel gets off lightly: he is portrayed as merely ridiculous, not malicious. His error is one of misplaced ambition, an error that marred a large segment of London.

Class is not the only possibility for murky origins the poem addresses. The satirist fixates on the Irish and Scottish backgrounds of some of England's dancing masters:

²⁸ qtd in Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*, 2nd ed., (New York: Penguin, 1990), p. 49.

²⁹ Dudley Ryder diary, March 23, 1716.

“Others from Bogs, and Fens, and Highlands come,/And on their heels and impudence presume.” He calls out Thomas Caverley for having risen from an Irish lackey (“An Irish skip kennel he lately was,/And now a haughty, supercilious ass.”). Caverley, who subscribed to Edward Pemberton’s *An Essay for the Further Improvement of Dancing* and all three editions of John Weaver’s *Orchesography*, kept a boarding school in Queens Square. Four books on dance from the period are dedicated to him.³⁰ Pemberton called him “the most eminent of our profession.”³¹ But the satirist holds Caverley in especial contempt, charging him with the exploitation of women’s insecurities. Probably referring to Caverley’s academy in Queens Square, the satirist cites a mirror as Caverley’s weapon, claiming that he charges women just to see their own reflection. When a young woman refuses Caverley’s head games, he becomes “chok’d with his passion...spluttering nonsense” in a manner so egregious that it should offend “ev’n his Irish modesty.” The poet also mocks the Irish background of a dancer named Gery: “From Irish bog, see Master G—y trot,/His art and movement he from thence has got.” This was another prominent and well-connected practitioner, whose name appears (alternately as Gery, Geary, or Geare) on the subscription lists of Weaver’s first two editions, as well as Pemberton’s *Essay* and Anthony L’Abbe’s *A Collection of Ball and Stage Dances* in 1725.³² To the satirist, he is a tempo-challenged oaf: “Measure nor time the blundering blockhead keeps,/Yet through the dance with wond’rous ease he trips.”

³⁰ Pemberton’s *Essay*, Weaver’s *History of Dancing* (1712) and *Anatomical and Mechanical Lectures* (1721), and a dance Kellom Tomlinson transcribed in 1715.

³¹ Pemberton, *Essay*.

³² “G—y” could also refer to Jerome Gahory, sometimes spelled Goree, who served as Royal dancing master, but as he died in 1703, it seems unlikely he would still be the target of such ridicule.

The author of *The Dancing Master: A Satyr* was not the only writer in London taking potshots at the dancing masters. Tomas Brown in his series *Letters from the dead to the Living* had this to say: “Dancing Masters are also as numerous in every street as posts in Cheapside, there is no walking, but we stumble upon them; they are held here but in very slight esteem, for the gentry call the leg-levelers, and the mob, from their mighty number and their nimbleness, call them the devil’s grasshoppers.”³³ John Locke extolled the virtues of good dancing masters, but warned against those who were not up to snuff: “. . .you must have a good teacher that knows, and can teach, what is graceful and becoming, and what gives a freedom and easiness to all the motions of the body. One that teaches not this, is worse than none at all; natural unfashionable-ness being better than apish, affected postures; and I think it much more passable, to put off the hat and make a leg, like an honest country gentleman, than an ill-fashioned dancing master.”³⁴

In the colonies, dancing masters faced even more backlash, especially by mid-century. In June of 1741, General James Oglethorpe of South Carolina sent a letter to George Clarke, the lieutenant governor of New York, warning of “a villainous Design.”³⁵ Oglethorpe described a plot by the Spanish to infiltrate British North American cities and burn down magazines and other supply warehouses as a way of starving out the West Indies fleet. Oglethorpe warned that the Spanish spies would come disguised as “Physicians, Dancing Masters, and other such Kinds of Occupations; and under that Pretence to get Admittance and Confidence in families.”³⁶ Clarke may have ignored Oglethorpe’s warning for a time, but the alleged slave conspiracy that rocked New York

³³ Tomas Brown, 1707. p. 161.

³⁴ John Locke, “Of Education” p.91.

³⁵ qtd in Jill Lepore, p.176.

³⁶ Ibid.

in 1741—and its supposed Catholic connections, must have changed his mind. He ordered the militia to search the city house to house in search of suspicious persons who may possibly be planning a “popish” attack. He issued a proclamation in the newspaper the next day to avoid “popish emissaries” that might be in disguise as “DANCING MASTERS, SCHOOL MASTERS, PHISICIANS, and the like.” Clarke’s main concern was that a dancing master “might easily gain admittance into families.” Similar fears are echoed in the London satire. In *The Dancing Master*, the danger is not that the dancing master will incite the young to Catholic revolt, but that he will make them too worldly:

To know the world they’ll direct your hopeful son,
 But thro’ a course of lewdness lead him on,
 ‘Till by the pox, and whores, and bites he is undone.

The danger for daughters may be even more dire:

Your daughters , taught by virtue’s strictest rules,
 Curse the remembrance of their Dancing Schools.
 Lost to their friends, they mourn the loss of fame,
 The loss of honor, innocence, and shame.
 Abandon’d to the world, they range for bread,
 Turn prostitutes, are pox’d, and quickly dead.

The unique access that dancing masters had to young women and their private spaces made his potential lasciviousness a particularly keen threat. William Wycherley treated this danger to comic effect in his comedy *The Gentleman Dancing Master* (1673), in which a young beau poses as a dancing master in order to find time alone with his

beloved and avoid her strict father.³⁷ Wycherley and his works (e.g. *The Country Wife*, *The Plain Dealer*) had come under heavy censure by the early eighteenth century, as their plots often turned on elaborate ruses to sustain sexual affairs. *The Gentleman Dancing-Master* lost its drollery as transient dancing masters provoked a more immediate sense of anxiety.

In the colonies, the link between dancing masters and Catholicism was a particular source of suspicion. Dancing masters maintained important cultural and often commercial ties to France and Italy, two of the most important Catholic nations in the Atlantic World. These connections might have made dancing masters' positions all the more vulnerable. Britons were not only afraid of Catholicism itself; they were at near-constant war with Catholic countries throughout the century. The British Empire had woven a net of laws and Parliamentary Acts that excluded Catholics from public life. In 1700, Parliament passed "An Act for the Further Preventing the Growth of Popery," a piece of legislation that sharpened the blade of anti-Catholic oppression by, among other measures, offering a bounty of £100 to anyone who apprehended a "Popish Bishop, Priest, or Jesuit." This law, which was only repealed in 1846, also warned that if any Catholic were to "take upon themselves the Education or Government or Boarding of Youth" then he would be liable to "perpetual imprisonment" for the crime. For dancing masters, who occupied most of their time with the education of youth, the charge of Catholicism could be a serious one indeed.

³⁷ This play, although of a different generation than the one I study here, is a particular rich document of the changing relationship between identity and appearance during the long eighteenth century, especially how those changes intersected with questions of nationality and gender. The play pits our dancing-master-impersonator against a father with Spanish pretensions and a suitor with French pretensions. For an extended discussion of the play in the context of national identity, see Cynthia Lowenthal's *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2003), pp. 92-103.

In Charles Town, Catholics would not just be seen as agents of a remote European menace. Catholic Florida was just two hundred miles down the coast and was a regular source for military conflict in the first half of the eighteenth century. Carla Gardina Pestana has called Spanish Florida South Carolina's "awkward neighbor," parallel to New England's relationship with French Quebec.³⁸ While Quebecois Catholics converted many of the Indians with whom New Englanders were at war, Spanish Florida offered a haven to runaway slaves, many of whom had already been converted to Catholicism by Portuguese missionaries in the Kongo.³⁹ Slaves who escaped to Florida often took up arms in support of their newly adopted Catholic allegiance, some even forming all-black militias.⁴⁰ While other colonies such as Maryland and Pennsylvania were beginning to carve out a space of tolerance for Catholic congregations, South Carolina would not open a canonical Catholic church until 1820.⁴¹ At that time, the Irish priest John England was declared bishop of South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia. He wrote in a letter of 1831 about the "ancient" prejudice he faced when he arrived:

The Pope was the beast of the apocalypse, the church was the harlot who made the nations of the earth drunk with the cup of her abominations, Rome was the great custom-house of sin, at which a stipulated tariff was to be paid, for leave to commit with impunity, every crime by which man could be stained or God could be offended; incest, sodomy, murder, parricide...Every crime which was perpetrated under the semblance of religion, every political machination in which a Catholic was concerned, every suffering of a Protestant in a Catholic nation, for what crime soever, all were attributed to the ravaging of this monster for human

³⁸ Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Pennsylvania UP, 2010), p. 122.

³⁹ Catholicism may have even played a part in the Stono Rebellion. Mark M. Smith has argued as much in his article, "Remembering Mary, Shaping Revolt: Reconsidering the Stono Rebellion." *The Journal of Southern History* LXVII:3 (August 2001) pp. 513-534.

⁴⁰ Gardina Pestana, p. 175.

⁴¹ While Catholic roots in Maryland go back to the mid-seventeenth century, Pennsylvania's first Catholic church was erected in 1733. Most other colonies did not erect Catholic churches until after the Revolution, such as Virginia (1795), New York (1786), and Massachusetts (1803).

blood; real cruelties were aggravated, and imaginary atrocities were conjured up, and this revolting aggregate of everything vile and villainous was styled the religion of Roman Catholics!!!⁴²

The prejudice that John England faced in the 1820s was a residue of the Empire-wide anti-Catholic fervor of the eighteenth century, which was itself both a residue of the English sectarian conflicts of the seventeenth century and a by-product of imperial tensions with Spain and France.⁴³

The poor reputation that hounded dancing masters in the colonies had a decidedly imperial dimension. The social positioning of a dancing master was a crossroads for imperial problems such as credit debt, status fluidity, and anti-Catholic hatred. But the dancing masters themselves were individuals, navigating between these and other imperial signposts. The lives and careers they carved out were idiosyncratic. One South Carolina dancing master who grappled with these and other challenges was Henry Holt, and his story illustrates the contingencies that haunted the life and career of a British dancing master more powerfully than aggregated data could.

The Illustrious Henry Holt

As the instruction manuals and dance styles of London's dancing masters filtered into the corners of empire, there were on occasion individuals who transplanted themselves directly from the London inner circle to the makeshift ballrooms of the

⁴² *Works of the Right Reverend James England, First Bishop of Charleston*. Vol IV. ed. Ignatius Aloysius Reynolds. p. 32.

⁴³ Arguably the softening of British and American attitudes towards Catholicism was brought about by the emigration of persecuted Catholics during the French Revolution. Many French Catholics emigrated to Britain and to the American South, where, as John England wrote, they "improved upon acquaintance, were found useful to the country, exceedingly virtuous in their conduct, and affectionate to their neighbors." (England, p.33).

colonies. Henry Holt was one such transplant. When Holt came to North America, he had performed for five years on the London stage. He had studied under John Essex, Jr., one of the dancing masters who appears on the subscription lists and the son of the eminent John Essex, translator of Feuillet and Rameau.⁴⁴ Holt was a key performer in the early harlequinades, English adaptations of Italian comic pantomime. Henry Holt was unquestionably a member of the coterie at the cutting edge of English dance. When he came to South Carolina in 1734, he brought with him a whiff of cosmopolitanism unequalled by any other Charles Town dancing master in the eighteenth century. His ultimate failure to thrive in the colony reveals a cleavage between how South Carolinians regarded the urbane practices of London society and the worldly outsiders who brought them.

Holt's London career was both ambitious and restless. He first appeared on the London stage at the Haymarket Theatre in 1729 in Samuel Johnson's *Hurlothrumbo*—a nonsense play in which performers recited verses and played fiddles while dancing on stilts.⁴⁵ In the words of one critic, "A more curious or a more insane production has seldom issued from human pen."⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the play was the most successful production of that season, and Holt soon graduated from a supporting role into one of the leads. The piece ridiculed the standards of good taste and sense and also poked less-than-gentle fun at the conventions of the stage. The author, Samuel Johnson, was a dancing-master from Manchester who went on to write *The Merry-Thought, or Glass Window and*

⁴⁴ For more on the Essexes, see Chapter One, 59n.

⁴⁵ On Holt's London career, I have worked closely the biographical sketch offered in *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800*, Volume 7, by Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1982), pp. 396-397. Samuel Johnson, a dancing-master and playwright in Manchester, should not be confused with Dr. Samuel Johnson, the more venerated lexicographer and essayist.

⁴⁶ Frederick Lawrence, *The Life of Henry Fielding with Notices of His Writings, His Times, and His Contemporaries* (London: Arthur Hall, 1855) p. 22.

Bog-House Miscellany. The latter volume purported to be a collection of poetry transcribed from bathroom walls, tavern tables, and in dirty windows. James Bramston used the book, commonly called the *Bog-House Miscellany*, as an explicit example of bad taste in his 1733 book, *The Man of Taste*. As a writer, Johnson gained a reputation for his wit and was a commercial success; however, as a dancing master, his job was to uphold and instruct in the patterns of good taste, not to deride them with anarchic burlesque. That may be why Johnson refused to mount *Hurlothrumbo* in Manchester, where he made his living as a guardian of genteel taste.⁴⁷ His London performances undoubtedly inflated the clout he enjoyed in Manchester, and probably allowed him to attract more business and charge higher fees. Perhaps Holt took notice of Johnson's strategy, for there are elements of Johnson's story that would repeat in Holt's own: a cutting-edge *artiste* using an impressive London resumé as leverage in a provincial market.

Holt's career continued to climb as he returned to the London stage in a variety of roles during subsequent seasons. In May of 1732, he played Aegon in *Damon and Phillida* at the Great Booth on Windmill Hill.⁴⁸ That summer, Holt was dancing at the Theatre Royal at Drury Lane, in pieces such as *The Midsummer Whim* and a "Scotch Dance." As venues went, Drury Lane was the pinnacle of an eighteenth-century actor's resumé and Holt's career seems to have gained some momentum after this summer. For the next theatrical season (1732-33), he was playing at Mr. Giffard's Goodman's Fields

⁴⁷ Johnson walked this narrow line well. Though he maintained a London career as a performer and author, he remained permanently in Manchester, where he was eulogized as "an excellent Comedian, a famous Dancing Master, a masterly player on the Violin, an extraordinary Singer" (*Manchester Mercury*, 25 May 1773).

⁴⁸ The "Great Booth" was likely a permanent structure in the fashion of the temporary stages that were built for seasonal fairs such as the Southwark Fair or Bartholomew Fair.

playhouse in *The Amorous Sportsman* and a piece called *Masquerade*. Around this time, Holt had his first brush with management when he graduated to choreographer and lead dancer at Goodman's Fields. In May of 1733, he and a "Miss Wherrit" danced for his own benefit Holt's first fully independent composition, *The North Country Maggot*.⁴⁹ A benefit performance for Holt was held on May 4.

Holt's *Maggot* was not a success, however, and Giffard replaced him in the company with John Thurmond. Thurmond had been the choreographer at Drury Lane, where he had composed numerous *ballets d'action* that met with wide acclaim.⁵⁰ Frustrated with the management, Thurmond had taken advantage of the free market London entertainers enjoyed before the Licensing Act of 1737 bound them more tightly to specific theatres. Holt took advantage of the same freedom and left Goodman's Fields after the end of the season, but before he left he might have benefitted from working with Thurmond. What we can glean about Holt from the sources suggests that he may have been somewhat reactive and resentful when he felt unappreciated, but the sources also suggest that Holt would not have passed up an opportunity to augment his social capital by rubbing elbows with a celebrity.

Holt was likely stung by his demotion; after leaving, he joined the rebel company at the Haymarket Theatre the following season. This company was led by Theophilus Cibber, son of the actor Colley Cibber, who had been the primary patent holder at Drury Lane until he stepped down in 1733. After his father's departure, Theophilus came into

⁴⁹ In the eighteenth century, "maggot" connoted whimsy and fancy. The word was more often used in this period as a synonym for magpie, or "maggoty-pie," as in Shakespeare's ominous "Maggot-pies and choughs and rooks" (*Macbeth*, II, 4). Maggot was a common term for country-inflected dances that had a seemingly spontaneous or flighty character to them.

⁵⁰ The *ballets d'action* were narrative dances heavily influenced by the work of French choreographers working in England, such as Marie Salle. See Arthur Scouten, p.clvi.

conflict with the new patent holder, John Highmore. The younger Cibber led a rogue band of disaffected actors in leaving the Theatre Royal and setting up a new company at the Haymarket. It was at the Haymarket that Holt met and studied under John Essex, Jr. one of the most prominent dance authorities in London at that time.

Holt picked up another cosmopolitan influence during his tenure at the Haymarket. It was here that he began dancing the Pierrot character in the commedia-style pantomimes that were aggressively gaining popularity on London stages. Dance was a regular feature of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English stage, usually light pastoral or romantic idylls danced between the acts or at the end of a play. These dances typically did not have any plot, focusing more on character type and movement. In the early years of the century, however, London was host to a number of popular French *forain* troupes.⁵¹ These *forain* troupes had been strongly influenced by Italian dance forms, particularly those character-type-driven, quasi-improvisational forms theatre historians lump together as *commedia dell'arte*. They brought the repertoire of characters and style of movement to English audiences in their performances during the first decades of the eighteenth century, inspiring a craze for stories told through dancing and action only.

In 1734, the Haymarket season was disrupted by an internal dispute and many dancers fled back to the Drury Lane company. Henry Holt resurfaced instead in Charles Town, where he began advertising in the local paper for his new Dancing Room on Church Street:

⁵¹ The French word *forain*, which best translates to “showman” and was applied to members of theatrical and acrobatic families in the eighteenth century, comes from the same root as the English word “foreign.” In an age of traveling players, being a performer and being from out-of-town were closely linked ideas.

Mr. Henry Holt , lately arrived in this Province, takes leave to inform the public, that on Monday next he intends to open his Dancing Room at Mrs. Lory's in Church Street (the house belonging to the late Mr. Lloyd) where his constant-attendance and utmost application on Mondays and Thursdays may be depended upon by those who shall be pleased to encourage him: the said Henry Holt is, he hopes sufficiently qualified to teach having served his Time under Mr. Essex Jun. the most celebrated Master in England, and danced a considerable Time at both the Play-Houses. NB. The Hours of Attendance are from 9 to 12 o'clock in the forenoon and from 2 to 5 in the afternoon.

As this advertisement makes clear, Holt used his London experience as leverage with potential Charles Town customers, crowing specifically about his training under Essex. Holt clearly imagined that his potential clientele would be familiar enough with London dancing masters for this to make an impact. He also gambled that his association with the London stage was a selling point.

When Holt arrived in Charles Town, the dancing master Henry Campbell was riding high in the city's upper circles. There had been several dancing masters in and out of Charles Town before 1734, including William Brawn, George Brownell, and the disgraced Robinson, but Campbell was the only one to advertise a benefit ball in the *South Carolina Gazette*.⁵² Because a benefit ball was an expensive gamble, Campbell likely had a strong base of customer support when he announced a benefit concert and ball in July of 1732. Although Campbell used the *Gazette* as a forum to advertise some of his public balls, he never advertised lessons in the paper; he doubtless enjoyed a thickly connected face-to-face network of past and potential students. This network may have been a natural outgrowth of Campbell's participation in other Charles Town social networks, such as the South Carolina Society, which he joined in its first year. But the

⁵² *SCG*, June 24, 1732

membership that may have mattered most was his membership in the Anglican Church. Campbell's burial in 1748 was recorded in the St. Philip's Register, which means he was an active member of the largest (and wealthiest) parish in the colony. If his clients knew him as a churchgoer, that may have abated his questionable status as a dancing master.

When Holt arrived, a showdown between the two Henrys was inevitable.

Although Charles Town had a great deal of wealth by the 1730s, that wealth was not spread as widely as in other colonial cities, and there were not enough permanent residents of ample means to support two dancing masters; this condition would remain so until after the French and Indian War. Campbell's advantages were manifold: he had deep roots in the community through his church membership and an existing clientele. He also had another asset that Holt lacked: a wife. Sarah Campbell was an accomplished dancer herself, who went on to teach lessons in Charles Town until at least 1751. She and Campbell opened their balls themselves as the "first couple," and the stability of a married couple was likely an advantage for a dancing master. Holt, meanwhile, turned to newspaper advertisements to trade on his key advantage over Campbell: his London training and stage career.

In practice, the dances the two men taught were probably not all that different, but the dissimilarity in how each man presented his expertise reveals Charles Town's changing tastes. Before Holt's arrival, Campbell advertised "country dances" at his ball, which bespoke a more traditional and less academic approach than Holt, who boasted of having studied with a leader of Europe's dancing avant-garde. English country dances were typically danced by sets of two, three, or four couples, all moving in a group formation. John Playford's *The English Dancing Master* of 1651 notated 105 such

dances; the book's popularity into the eighteenth century made ubiquitous the "long-ways sets" that developed in oblong English country dancing halls. These sets involved two rows facing each other, each dancer facing their partner as the rows moved in a coordinated fashion.⁵³ Although English country dancing had an unquestionable influence on French court dance, the French style was markedly different. French court dancing usually consisted of couples as atomistic units conveying themselves across a floor that was typically square. The French court style—especially the new 'minuet'—represented a style of dancing that was more modern and cosmopolitan, one which gained currency from being danced in ballrooms across Europe. After Holt arrived in Charles Town, "country dancing" was not mentioned in the *Gazette* again until the arrival of Nicholas Valois in 1760. The decade that began with Henry Campbell offering "country dances for diversion of the ladies" ended with Eliza Lucas Pinckney boasting of dancing a minuet with her father's friend Captain Brodrick.⁵⁴

Within two months of Holt's arrival, preparations were underway for the presentation of a full-length play, likely the first in Charles Town's history. The play was Thomas Otway's *The Orphan*, a perennial hit of the London stage since its premiere in 1680. The production was mounted at Charles Shephard's tavern at the corner of Meeting and Broad. Shephard had just recently acquired the building from Henry Gignilliat, who had outfitted the upstairs room as a public assembly chamber.⁵⁵ Both civic and private organizations continued to meet at the tavern, including the Commons

⁵³ English country dancing, which came to be called "Playford dancing," had influence on a number of folk dance traditions in the English speaking world. The pattern of two rows facing one another can still be seen in dances such as The Virginia Reel.

⁵⁴ *SCG* July 1 1732; Letter, Eliza Lucas Pinckney to George Lucas, November 11, 1741.

⁵⁵ On Gignilliat, see *SCG* March 25, 1732 (or May 13, September 2, October 28, November 18, or December 16 of the same year); On Shephard taking over, see *SCG* March 9 1734.

House of Assembly and the Court of Common Pleas, as well as the St. Andrew's Club and the St. George's Society.⁵⁶ In 1753, the tavern would be replaced by the South Carolina capitol, later rebuilt by James Hoban as the Charleston County Courthouse.⁵⁷ Shephard's tavern in the 1730s was a multi-faceted commercial complex, offering entertainment, lodging, the Georgia Coffeehouse, a season of plays, books and the *Gazette* for sale, private clubs, a jail, a courthouse, and a fighting cock named Bougre de Sot.⁵⁸ Charles Town's first theatrical season unfolded in a space located at the nexus of the city's overlapping commercial, legal, and sociable networks.

The play was a success and it was re-mounted four days later. By the third performance, which occurred in the first week of February, Henry Holt was certainly involved, for that performance was followed by an afterpiece, "a new Pantomimic Entertainment in Grotesque Characters, called, the Adventures of Harlequin and Scaramouch, with the Burgo-master, trick'd."⁵⁹ Later that month, the players presented *Flora, or, Hob in the Well*, the first English opera known to be presented in North America; *Flora* featured the "Dance of the Two Pierrots" and was likewise followed by *The Adventures of Harlequin and Scaramouch*.⁶⁰ These harlequinades were presumably danced by Henry Holt, who, as I have shown, had made a brief career of such entertainments on the London stage. Perhaps Holt was involved with the earlier performances of *The Orphan* as well.

⁵⁶ St. Andrew's: *SCG* November 29, 1735; St. George's: April 20, 1734

⁵⁷ That this site has, in one form or another, dominated the Charleston cityscape for centuries reveals a great deal about the city's civic character. In contrast to a city like Williamsburg, whose cityscape was anchored by the Governor's mansion, Charles Town—and later Charleston—was anchored around a space that was both civic and private, marked by sociability and commerce. The intersection of Meeting and Broad is now colloquially known as the "Four Corners of the Law" and includes St. Michael's Church (built 1752-1761), Charleston City Hall (built circa 1800), the Charleston County Courthouse, and the U. S. Post Office and Federal Courthouse (built in 1896).

⁵⁸ Publications and Georgia Coffee-House: *SCG* May 18, 1734; Bougre de Sot: *SCG* November 29, 1735.

⁵⁹ *SCG* February 1, 1735.

⁶⁰ *SCG* February 22, 1735.

Julia Curtis has proposed that Holt was the impresario behind Charles Town's first theatrical season and the subsequent erection of the Queen Street Theatre.⁶¹ He may indeed have been a leader in the organization and programming of the new theatre, but it is unlikely that he could have done so without collaborators. Dr. Thomas Dale, who composed an epilogue for the new theater, wrote in a letter to Reverend Thomas Birch that the theater was being built by "Mr. Foster and Dr. Martyn."⁶² No further clues have surfaced suggesting the identities of Foster or Martyn, but they were likely men of higher standing and with thicker local ties than the recently-arrived Holt. The effort necessary to mount a theatre season and raise support for building a theater suggest a small network of well-placed individuals, with local as well as trans-Atlantic contacts.

Holt's participation in the plays at Shepherd's tavern can only have served to more starkly define his "brand" as distinct from his competitor, Henry Campbell. Holt's showpiece dancing advertised not only his own skill, but his cosmopolitan connection to the London stage. Holt had performed in *The Burgo-master Trick'd* in London one year previously.⁶³ The piece itself was most likely the comic scene composed by John Weaver for *Perseus and Andromeda* at Drury Lane in 1728.⁶⁴ Here again, Holt was using his connection to cutting-edge London choreographers as a marketing tool to further his

⁶¹ Julia Curtis, "A Note on Henry Holt," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* (Vol. 79, No. 1, Jan 1978), pp. 1-5. This notion is carried even further by Odai Johnson and William Burling, who speak of the theater as "Holt's company" (*The Colonial American Stage, 1660-1774: A Documentary Calendar*, Madison: Farleigh Dickinson UP, 2002.) My work here stands on the shoulders of these scholars' work; their collective documentation of Holt's career makes possible my more speculative illustration of his personality.

⁶² Letter from Dr. Thomas Dale to Revd. Thomas Birch, dated February 29, 1735 (presumably old-style). I am grateful to Gary Jay Williams for discussing with me his own research on Dale's writing for a forthcoming book project.

⁶³ Highfill, 7:396.

⁶⁴ Holt played another version of this piece in New York in 1739, and this time called it *The Adventures of Harlequin and Scaramouch, or, The Spaniard Trick'd*. The new title ties the piece to a performance in Derby in 1739, titled *The Tricks of Harlequin, or the Spaniard Outwitted, a Pantomime Entertainment as it is Performed by Mr. River's Company of Comedians, being the Comic Part of the celebrated Entertainment of Perseus and Andromeda*. See Anne Dhu Shapiro, "Action Music in American Pantomime and Melodrama, 1730-1913," *American Music* (Vol 2, No 4, Winter 1984) for a discussion of this piece.

interests in South Carolina. These pieces were also likely an opportunity for his students to show their newly-gained merit. The piece included a number of dancing characters, including a servant, a constable, and some shepherds.⁶⁵ There were also two more leading roles to be danced, as the story hinged on Harlequin's love for Columbina, the daughter of a local patrician (burgomaster).⁶⁶ However many performers in the piece were professionals or amateurs, Holt was the living memory of the Drury Lane production and would have taught the parts to everyone. All of the dancing on stage reflected well on him as a teacher.

By the end of the theatrical season in late March, Henry Holt's business appears to have been growing. The theatre season had been a success and a notice in the *Gazette* advertised subscriptions for building a theater before the following winter.⁶⁷ "Any persons that are desirous of having a share in the performance thereof" were bidden to apply to Charles Shepheard. Holt himself was in sufficient standing to attempt a benefit ball the following December, again at Shepheard's tavern.⁶⁸ This ball was evidently a success, as it was the first of four benefits Holt staged in his brief time in South Carolina. By February of 1736, the new Queen Street Theater was completed and it opened with a production of *The Recruiting Officer* on February 12, following closely with a reprise of *The Orphan* on the 23rd. Subscribers were warned "to send to the stage-

⁶⁵ Shapiro, p.50.

⁶⁶ Columbina may have been danced by a local female student, but it seems more likely that such a demanding role would have been played by the professional actress who played Monimia in *The Orphan*. We know this actress to have been a professional because the last performance of the season was a benefit "for the sake of Monimia." It would have been improper for a local woman of good standing to have taken money for a theatrical performance. On the social and occupational pressures of female stage dancers during this period, see Moira Goff, *The Incomparable Hester Santlow*.

⁶⁷ *SCG*, April 26, 1735.

⁶⁸ *SCG*, November 22, 1735.

door in the forenoon to bespeak places, otherwise it will be too late.”⁶⁹ Either the productions were popular or the managers were overly optimistic. They may indeed have been optimistic in charging thirty shillings for a box seat and twenty shillings for the pit, but by March, they had split the difference: twenty-five shillings for pit or box.⁷⁰ The season introduced three new plays to Charles Town on six separate evenings. Holt concluded the season with another benefit ball at the theater on April 15.⁷¹ By that time, his lessons had become sufficiently popular for him to take up another teacher, a drawing instructor named Bishop Roberts.⁷²

However involved with the opening of the Queen Street Theatre Henry Holt may have been, the theater and its success were clearly a boon to Holt’s business. It must have been galling, therefore, when notice appeared less than a month after Holt’s onsite ball announcing that the theater and all its effects would be auctioned off:

TO BE SOLD to the best Bidder on Wednesday next the 12th Instant at the Theatre in Queen street, one Half (or the whole) of the said Theatre with the Ground thereunto belonging, containing Front in Church-street 57 Feet, Depth 119 Feet, with all the Scenes, Cloathing, &c. N.B. The Conditions of the Sale to be seen at the Theatre upon the Day of Sale.⁷³

The theater was sold as planned the following week. An anonymous poem appeared in the *Gazette*, suggesting that there were some hard feelings over the sale:

⁶⁹ *SCG*, January 31, 1736.

⁷⁰ *SCG*, January 31, 1736; March 6, 1736; the latter price stuck for the duration of the theatre’s tenure.

⁷¹ *SCG*, April 3, 1736.

⁷² *SCG*, April 10, 1736; The advertisement reads: “WHEREAS several Gentlemen and Ladies are desirous of having their Children taught to draw: This is to inform all such Persons, that their Children will be diligently attended on their Dancing Days, at Mr. Holt’s School, and carefully instructed in the Art of Drawing by B. Roberts.”

⁷³ *SCG*, May 8, 1736.

ON THE SALE OF THE THEATRE:
 How cruel Fortune, and how fickle too
 To crop the Method made for making you?
 Changes, tho' common, yet when great they prove,
 Make men distrust the care of mighty Jove.
 Half made in thought, (tho' not in fact) we find
 You bought and sold, but left poor H-- behind.
 P.S. Since so it is, ne'er mind the silly trick,
 The Pair will please when Pierrot makes you sick.

“H--” is clearly Holt, as his name fits both the circumstances of the sale and the scansion of the poem. If Holt was “left behind” by the sale, it is safe to assume that the sale was not to his advantage and may have contributed to his departure from the colony the following spring. His history as a dancer of Pierrot characters in commedia sketches further links him to the poem. “The Pair” are likely Campbell and his wife, Sarah—both of them taught dance in Charles Town. They “opened” balls by dancing together, and they were likely the most accomplished dancers in the room most of the time, and so it would not have been unusual to speak of them as a pleasing pair. And the Campbells resurfaced in Charles Town not long after the sale of the theatre. Beginning the next year, Campbell started sponsoring his public balls at the theatre, and he continued to do so until his death. Perhaps Holt enjoyed a close relationship with the theatre’s original owners, but was left out in the cold when those owners sold the theatre either to a close ally of the Campbells or even to the Campbells themselves.

If the Campbells are the “pair,” the poem suggests that their entertainments would offer more agreeable pleasure than Holt’s London-style harlequinades. If “Pierrot makes you sick,” perhaps Holt’s cosmopolitan performance style was not as well-received as he would have hoped. But if the Campbells succeeded in the colony while Holt failed, they had an incontestable advantage: roots. The Campbells were a Charles Town couple, with

ties to the Anglican church and a web of relationships built up over decades in the colony. Holt was an itinerant, and a pretentious one at that.

Whatever the circumstances of the theatre's sale were, Holt remained involved through the following season. Beginning in November, Charles Town's third theatrical season was timed differently than the previous two, although it was of similar length, offering seven performances over a span of two months. The only play new to Charles Town introduced in this final season was Addison's *Cato* (November 11 and 18, and December 17) which was popular throughout the colonies during the colonial period.⁷⁴ The only other plays offered during that season were *The Recruiting Officer* (December 1 and 7, and January 11, the last by request of "the Officers of the Troop and Foot Companies") and *Flora, or, Hob in the Well* (November 23, December 1 and 7). Because *Flora* included the "Dance of the Two Pierrots," it is logical to assume that Holt was still performing the role, and was therefore involved with the theatre after its sale.⁷⁵ Most conspicuously absent from the repertoire was *The Orphan*, which had made up half of the performances of the first two seasons.⁷⁶ As I mention above, the female lead in Otway's tragedy was almost certainly acted by a professional actress, and the easiest explanation for the play's absence in the final season is that the actress known in the papers as "Monimia" was simply not available to play the part. Since this same actress was known to have also played Dorinda in *The Recruiting Officer*, another substantial

⁷⁴ For a more sustained discussion of this play and its effect on colonial life, see Jason Shaffer, *Performing Patriotism: National Identity in the Colonial and Revolutionary American Theater* (Pennsylvania UP, 2007).

⁷⁵ Since Holt also held three more balls at the theatre this year, it is safe to assume that he was still happily involved with the new owners.

⁷⁶ *The Orphan* was performed four times in 1735 and twice in 1736, comprising six out of thirteen performances.

female role was left open in the 1736-7 season. A *Gazette* notice in January leaves a clue as to who may have filled that role:

This is to give Notice to all People in Charlestown or elsewhere, not to credit, harbor, nor entertain Mary Simmons, the Wife of Isaac Simmons, which has made an Elopement from her said Husband, especially for the said Master of the Play-house in Charlestown, to employ her, being entirely against the said Mr. Simmon's [*sic*] request. *Isaac Simmons*.⁷⁷

Was the “Master of the Play-house” Henry Holt?⁷⁸ Burling and Johnson think so, and suggest that an indiscretion with a married woman led to Holt’s abrupt departure later that spring. A scandal of that magnitude could also explain why the theatrical season ended so abruptly before the end of the social season in April. If Holt did have a dalliance with a married woman, it would only have coarsened the “image problem” that dancing masters seemed to face in Charles Town over the years.

Holt had at least three benefit balls during the 1736-7 season, which was an unprecedented number of balls for one year and would have demanded a considerable output of investment money.⁷⁹ Perhaps Holt’s unrestrained profligacy indicated that his business was a runaway success. On the other hand, it may indicate that he was in the throes of desperation, still floundering to gain a foothold during his third year in the colony. Henry Campbell held a ball at the theatre on February 3, breaking Holt’s monopoly on the use of the new theatre. Holt offered a ball of his own one week later, on the tenth, seemingly as a way of thumbing his nose at Campbell. The timing of these two

⁷⁷ *SCG* January 15, 1737.

⁷⁸ The gulf between theatre ownership and theatre management was widening during this decade, so it would not be unusual for Holt to serve as a kind of under-manager even if he did not have any part in the ownership of the theater.

⁷⁹ December 15, February 10, May 25

balls suggests that the competition between the two dancing masters was fierce and that Holt's February ball may have been motivated more by bile than by lucre. One week after the ball, Holt threw in the towel by placing the following notice in the *Gazette*:

HENRY HOLT intending to leave this Province, desires all Persons to whom he is indebted to send in their Accounts, and all Persons indebted to him are desired to discharge theirs by the first of May next. N.B. He has a light 4 Wheel Chaise and Harness to dispose of, with a Pair of large black Geldings.⁸⁰

Over the space of three weeks, Holt and Campbell had each thrown costly fund-raising balls and Holt had abruptly announced his intention to leave the colony. Read together, these events suggest that Holt left South Carolina with a bruised ego and a considerable feeling of pique.⁸¹ It also seems likely that Holt's ball did not sell as well as Campbell's. Perhaps the *Gazette* poet was right: Charles Town's dancing set were drawn to the charms and pleasures of the dancing itself, and maintained no sense of loyalty to the teacher who introduced them.

Henry Holt had won few friends in Charles Town. He had come to the colony touting a professional résumé and worldly connections, hopeful that he could win over the port city with his sophistication. Instead, he was leaving in disgrace, having been ignominiously replaced for the third time in four years. Perhaps he felt echoes of being dropped for John Thurmond at the Haymarket or stonewalled out of Goodman's Fields. While so many of his colleagues had relocated to Drury Lane, Holt had undertaken a great adventure, braving a six-week sea voyage and the infamous "seasoning" process

⁸⁰ *SCG*, February 19, 1737.

⁸¹ I offer this explanation as a more compelling reason for Holt's departure than Burling and Johnson's speculation that he left under the pall of a sex scandal. I should note, however, that the two need not be mutually exclusive.

that new arrivals were subjected to under the Carolina heat. Perhaps he sought a better chance at riches, perhaps he sought the approbation of being a big fish in a small pond, or perhaps he simply sought an escape from the failures that had hounded him across London; whatever Holt sought, he does not seem to have found it. He sold his fancy carriage and set out for New York.

In New York, Holt's troubles only worsened. He offered lessons as early as July, posting an advertisement in the *New York Weekly Journal* nearly identical to the first advertisement he posted in Charles Town: "The said Henry Holt hopes he is sufficiently qualified to teach, having served his time to Mr. Essex, jun. one of the most celebrated Masters in England, and danced a considerable time at the Theatre Royal at Drury Lane."⁸² He held a ball that month—his fourth in a year's time—and went to the further extreme of offering tickets for free. Holt was desperate to attract clients and win his way into the elite social networks of his new home. This may have worked for a time. In January of that year, Holt was elected Junior Warden of the local Freemason's lodge.⁸³ Before long, he was dipping his foot back into theatrical entertainment. In February of 1739, he presented *Harlequin and Scaramouch* for three performances. For New York audiences, Holt spoke a prologue and an epilogue to the piece, "address'd to the town."⁸⁴ Judging from outward appearances, Holt seemed to be back in his métier.

But Holt may have been involved in a seedier side of New York than just the ballroom set. During the Slave Conspiracy trials of 1741, an Irish-born soldier named

⁸² *New York Weekly Journal*, July 18, 1737

⁸³ Had Holt also been a freemason in South Carolina? The lodge was formed while he was there, and his immediate rise among the New York freemasons would suggest that he was not a new brother. Jill Lepore states assuredly that he was, but her source is unclear (Lepore, *New York Burning*).

⁸⁴ *New York Weekly Journal* February 19, 1739.

William Kane surprised the judges by describing a Catholic conspiracy to burn the town. Among the men Kane implicated were Henry Holt and a fellow dancing master named John Corry. The object of this conspiracy was allegedly to kill the principal leaders of the colony, burn large parts of New York, and to instate tavern-owner John Hughson as a papist king, residing in the opulent estate of John Alexander. Kane and other witnesses attested to often seeing Holt at Hughson's home. Even among the other conspirators, Holt and his slave Joe were regarded with fear and suspicion.⁸⁵ On one occasion, Holt was said to have beaten Joe so savagely that he had to be pulled off of him. Joe was also implicated in the plot, and in the Slave Conspiracy itself—according to Hughson's daughter, Joe planned to burn down Holt's home during the revolt.

Was this Catholic conspiracy real? Was Holt one of the conspirators? Was Holt a Catholic? There are more questions than answers. The trials of 1741 were complex events, and there has been no historical consensus as to the legitimacy of these alleged conspiracies.⁸⁶ But in March 1741, a fire broke out at Fort George, completely destroying the Governor's mansion and several administrative buildings. Whether out of coincidence or a guilty conscience, Holt decided to leave town soon after the fire. He and Joe left for Jamaica that spring. When his alleged co-conspirators were interrogated that summer, they portrayed Holt as resentful and churlish. Jill Lepore has suggested that the underground networks of association that gave shape to the possible conspiracies of 1741 were driven as much by class division as by religious or racial identity. The whites accused of colluding with the slave plot and possibly generating a plot of their own—

⁸⁵ Hughson's daughter said as much in her deposition. See Lepore, pp.180-182.

⁸⁶ For an excellent account of the trials and the supposed conspiracies, read Jill Lepore, *New York Burning*, as cited above.

John Corry, Henry Holt, John Ury, John Campbell, Andrew Ryan, Edward Kelly, Edward Murphy, Peter Connelly, John Coffin, and David Johnson—were mostly soldiers, petty smugglers, and, in at least four cases, teachers. Several were Irish; all were financially strapped. Perhaps Holt's humiliation at the hands of Charles Town's elites had calcified into a murderous hatred for the upper class.

If Holt had grown resentful of the ruling elites he served, this resentment seems to have been reciprocated. Dancing masters were easy enough targets for the resentment of a class who had to rely on the judgment of tradesmen who were beneath them. Tailors, wig-makers, importers of fine goods, and other style-driven tradesmen all advised their wealthy clients on matters of taste. Their coaching may have seemed at times an implicit or even an explicit rebuke of a provincial elite unfamiliar with London styles. While dancing masters were unquestionably members of this category, they were even more vulnerable to the elite's resentment. Unlike tailors or wig-makers, dancing masters had to look and act like gentlemen. And unlike these other trades, who operated out of shops and were ballasted to a community by merchandise stock that was not easily moved from colony to colony, dancing masters could—and usually did—float from town to town. As itinerants who seemed other than what they truly were, dancing masters invited a heap of suspicion.

Henry Campbell overcame that suspicion as well as any colonial dancing master could. He remained rooted both socially and commercially in South Carolina, with a wife who was as firm a fixture in Charles Town society as he was himself.⁸⁷ If he was

⁸⁷ Henry and Sarah Campbell invite comparison to Nicholas and Mary Scanlan. When Nicholas Scanlan absconded, he left his wife unable to pay his debts. Their home was seized and she was turned out. Nicholas Scanlan's caddish behavior is a reminder that the stability of the Campbell's partnership—both commercial and matrimonial—was not insignificant to Henry's good social standing.

frequently seen at the town's more lighthearted social events, he was also frequently seen in the St. Philip's sanctuary or in attendance at the meetings of a local charity.⁸⁸ Henry Holt, on the other hand, had an unmusical ear for respectability. As William Kane's New York testimony shows, he frequented downscale taverns, more like Christopher Dennis's dram-shop than Charles Shephard's tavern. While Campbell was married, Holt was unmarried, and possibly implicated in an adultery scandal with Mary Simmons. While Campbell was a visible member of the Anglican Church, Holt was tied to an alleged Catholic conspiracy.⁸⁹ Even more to the point, Holt comes across in the historical record as an impulsive, hotheaded, and perhaps even unpleasant person. His migrations from one theatre to another, and eventually from one colony to another, seem best explained as being motivated by bruised ego. His extravagant chaise and the imprudent frequency of his benefit balls in Charles Town throw his migratory patterns into further relief, suggesting a profligate spender with a restless ambition. Furthermore, the most telling detail of his life—the only eyewitness account of his personality that survives—involves his violent temper, as he attacked his slave Joe so brutally that other slaveholders in the room felt compelled to intervene. However proper his minuet, Holt was as un-genteel as he was un-gentle.

Holt's alleged involvement in rebellious conspiracies gets to the heart of the public's distrust of dancing masters. Dancing masters worked on genteel society like valves, dilating or constricting the inflow of new members as circumstances allowed. Politeness, like the money it emblemized, worked as both an amalgamator and a

⁸⁸ On the South Carolina Society as a charity, see the final chapter of this dissertation.

⁸⁹ Although accusations are hardly compelling evidence of guilt, especially in the anti-Catholic paranoia of the eighteenth century, it is noteworthy that under the accusation of Catholic collusion, Holt had no church affiliation to offer as counterevidence.

divider. Even as it distinguished “the better sort,” this distinction was available to anyone with access to the codes of polite behavior. In times of expansion, as was the case for Charles Town during the rice boom of the 1730s, dancing masters were welcome features as new elites were welcomed into the ranks of polite society. But when a society felt itself under threat from outside forces, when unknown faces and new arrivals with mysterious pasts could harbor legitimate threats, dancing masters were implicated in their role as “guardians of the gate.” Such was the case for Charles Town after the rice bubble burst, as Spanish Florida loomed as a Catholic threat on the southern border. Such was the case for New York, when a series of mysterious fires led to suspicion of a Catholic conspiracy. Dancing masters’ power to transform bodies and augment the ranks of polite society gave them the capacity to disguise dubious outsiders as the real thing. Turning on dancing masters in a time of crisis was in part a way of locking down the borders of a now-insular society.

For South Carolina’s white elites, Spanish Florida was not the only outsider to be feared. Charles Town’s streets were growing increasingly full of slaves from Africa. These slaves had already come to outnumber Charles Town’s white population by the 1730s, but the question that haunted Charlestonians was whether being outnumbered also meant being overwhelmed. Many slaves were trained soldiers, and their powerful bodies and thick social networks kept alive the fear that blacks might physically overpower Lowcountry whites—a fear that materialized in the Stono Rebellion of 1740. But there was also the fear that blacks might *culturally* overtake Lowcountry whites. If South Carolina was, in Peter Wood’s phrase, a “black majority,” how could its power elites ensure that it remained a “white” colony? In the next chapter, I suggest a new set of

stakes for a solid minuet, as whites tried to reckon with the bodily practices of their slaves—who were constituting a newly “Africanized” body—that were asserting themselves across the South Carolina landscape with increasing determination.

Chapter Three

“Pushing and Dancing”: Dance and Martial Arts in the Construction of the “African” Body

On a winter night in 1740, George Whitefield and his travelling companions lost their way in the South Carolina woods. The famous minister had entered South Carolina the night before, staying at a tavern near the Georgia border, where he harangued a group of country dancers who were celebrating the New Year. He had convinced them to put away their fiddles and reject dancing as the Devil’s pastime, and then he headed off to bed, whereupon they ignored his sermonizing and continued their dancing. After rising “very early” and singing a hymn, he gave the (probably hungover) dancers a hearty what-for and then set off on horseback through forty miles of placid coastal countryside, stopping to observe dolphins playing in a “beautiful bay as plain as a terrace walk.” Once night fell, however, he and his party became less sure of their way. A lunar eclipse darkened the woody path even further and Whitfield missed the turn-off to the gentleman’s house to whom he had been recommended. Finally seeing a light ahead, Whitefield came upon a “hut full of negroes,” whom he asked about the house he was seeking. When he did not get a straight answer, his travelling companion suggested that “these Negroes might be some of those who had lately made an insurrection in the province [the Stono Rebellion of 1739].” Whitefield and his party fled back to the dark road and “mend[ed their] pace.” They soon came across a great fire near the roadside; a nighttime fete for Lowcountry slaves was underway. To Whitefield’s eye, these black

bodies were fearsome, dancing around in exotic fits of ecstasy. He heard terrible thundering sounds erupt from the drums as the flames danced and flickered in the darkness. Whitefield and his companions fled in terror and raced through the darkness, “expecting to find Negroes in every place,” until they reached a “great plantation” twelve miles away. The plantation’s owner, who gave them food and lodging for the night, explained to them “whose [slaves] they were, and upon what occasion they were in those places in which we found them.” Whitefield was much relieved, and perhaps a touch red-faced: “This afforded us much comfort, after we had ridden nearly threescore miles, and, as we thought, in great peril of our lives.”¹

Whitefield’s story is the primal story of the white gaze. Unable to parse out African identities, Whitfield was in thrall to what he saw merely as the hulking shadows of black bodies around a spasmodic fire, shadows he perceived as fierce, menacing, and primordial. The spectre of recent bloodshed was “ghosted” onto the dancing bodies he encountered, transfiguring his partial understanding into the certainty of dread.

Whitefield had no shortage of moxie the night before, when he came upon a tavern full of drunken and possibly rowdy white revelers. He assumed the mantle of authority, excoriating the prodigals for wandering from the flock. But the black dancers he encountered the next night were another matter. Although Whitefield never denounced slavery entirely, he elsewhere embraced the equality of black and white souls. In the same year as this episode, he blasted Virginia slaveholders in an open letter: “Blacks are just as much, and no more, conceived and born in sin as white men are, and both, I am

¹ From the entries for January 1 and January 2, George Whitfield. *George Whitefield’s Journals*. (Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2000.) pp. 246-248.

persuaded, are naturally as capable of the same improvement.”² But he was not moved to attempt any improvement when he came upon the dancing slaves in the night. This is one of the very rare episodes in Whitefield’s life where he chose safety over a chance to win over souls.³

This scenario further underscores the role of the sensorium in the construction of racial categories. The white observer attains sensation without sense; he makes his own meaning of these sensations out of half-remembered terrors and the anxious anticipation of terrors to come. Peter Silver has explored the role of a rhetorical pitch he calls the “anti-Indian sublime” in consolidating white identity in the middle colonies during the Seven Years’ War. He notes that whiteness in the eighteenth century was “less a coherent coalition—let alone a racial self-identification that could powerfully color people’s everyday lives” and was instead a way of consolidating and embodying opposition to the perceived threat from groups who had cause for violent reproach.⁴ In colonial South Carolina, the profusion of enslaved black bodies and the “afflicting Providence of God” that kept the white population hemmed in by disease and attrition made the consolidation of white identity feel all the more urgent.⁵

As Whitefield’s anecdote illustrates, the white gaze inscribed blackness onto slave bodies in the colonial Lowcountry. But this act of inscription was itself a reckoning

² George Whitefield. “A Letter to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, and North and South Carolina, Concerning Their Negroes.” qtd. in Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1989. Reprint).

³ Any reader well-read in the American 19th century may notice that Whitfield’s journal is echoed in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown” and other stories of the ‘godly man’ who travels through the woods and beholds something like a witches’ Sabbath. I bring this up only to point out how this pattern endured and echoed in the American imagination, with nefarious implications for those marginal identity groups who of necessity turned to the woods for their gathering spaces.

⁴ Peter Silver. *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America*. (New York: Norton, 2008). xxi

⁵ Statute, qtd. in Wood, p. 145.

with an “Africanized body” that was making itself visible in increasingly obtrusive ways. This Africanized body was kinesthetically distinct from the embodiment of European whiteness that was being fashioned in the ballrooms of Charles Town’s elites. And as the black population in Charles Town grew throughout the eighteenth century, Africanized bodies intruded onto the white public imagination with increasing frequency. African slaves put their bodies on display in the streets, at plantation gatherings, and in the slave-operated market at the center of town. Meanwhile, white authorities put black bodies on display in ways that attenuated black agency and reinforced the culture of submission—at slave auctions, public executions, and other performances of white authority. A contest was underway for control over the visibility of the black body.

But black *dancing* bodies—and the drumming that accompanied them—were an especially conspicuous (and to many whites, a particularly frightening) survival of African culture in the South Carolina landscape. Just three months before Whitefield’s visit, a band of slaves had violently resisted white authority in what came to be known as the Stono Rebellion. After beating a bloody path southward on the road to Florida, the rebels stopped in a clearing, and when the white militia found them there were a hundred men or more, dancing hot-bloodedly in a circle and waiting for battle. Drumming and dancing also featured heavily in a foiled revolt of Coromantee slaves in Antigua in 1736, where the slaves supposedly planned a “Military Dance and Show” that would tip over into open revolt.⁶ In the Slave Code passed after Stono, the South Carolina legislature outlawed slaves’ playing of “drums, horns, or other loud instruments” and threatened

⁶Richard Cullen Rath. “Drums and Power: Ways of Creolizing Music in Coastal South Carolina and Georgia, 1730-90.” in *Creolization in the Americas*. ed. David Buisseret and Steven G. Reinhardt. (College Station: Texas A & M UP, 2000). p.108.

with a ten-pound fine “whosoever shall suffer and countenance any public meeting or feasting of strange Negroes or slaves in their plantations.”⁷ Similar laws prohibiting drumming and feasting had already been passed in Barbados (1699), St. Kitts (1711, and again in 1722), and Jamaica (by 1688, and again in 1717).⁸ That such laws were often passed more than once is a testament to the endurance of African drumming practices and the community feast events in which they took place.

For Charles Town's black population, dancing was a multivalent practice. As Africans, they used dance as an essential tool in maintaining contact with the spirit and ancestral world; as slaves, they found in dance an expression of self-mastery that challenged the authority of the white masters who would control their bodies. Together, these overlapping contexts positioned black dancing as a conduit for producing an early strand of an identity that, while not yet properly African-American, maneuvered within the tension between those two terms. Charles Town's slaves endured a great violence against their identities: they were forced immigrants, renamed and in many ways dehumanized, robbed of their self-determination on even the most quotidian level. It would be a mistake, however, to assume they did not seize opportunities for regeneration and self-assertion. By syncretizing performance traditions from different cultures of the West-Central African coast, slaves created a shared kinesthetic disposition, one that delimited the body's relationship to the landscape, to the spirit world, and to the social order.

⁷ Statute 670, Act XXXVI

⁸ Rath, Richard Cullen. “Drums and Power: Ways of Creolizing Music in Coastal South Carolina and Georgia, 1730-90.” in *Creolization in the Americas*. ed. David Buisseret and Steven G. Reinhardt. (College Station: Texas A & M UP, 2000. As for Jamaica, when Hans Sloane was writing in 1688, he noted that the practice was already outlawed, although a new law was passed in 1717. That he cites such a law just before describing a drumming/dancing event further attests to the inefficacy of such laws.

In constituting a shared kinesthetic disposition, Lowcountry slaves were participating as agents in the creation of a new embodied vocabulary. This vocabulary expressed trans-Atlantic continuity through the restoration of fragmentary practices from diverse West African traditions—Kongolese, Senegambian, Igbo, Yoruban, etc. By restoring these behaviors, black slaves built for themselves an “Africanized” body. The Africanized body was neither exhaustive in its representation of Africa nor totalizing in its expression of a coordinated identity. The Africanized body was instead a bricolage of corporeal tactics for resisting the existential annihilation of slavery. That the performances of “African-ness” were necessarily fragmentary and unrooted did not compromise their illocutionary force. The power of the Africanized body lay not in the “authenticity” of its African roots but in the citationality of the performance. Performances of African-ness created a discursive “Africa” as a shared reference point that expanded the slave body beyond its colonial role as economic fodder. The Africanized body re-inscribed the slave body as a site of meaning, history, and continuity.

White slaveholders, on the other hand, sought to void the slave body of history and to imbue the body with meanings that reflected their own social and economic dominance. The slave’s body was the central commodity of the slave trade, and as in any market, the edges of a unique ontology had to be sanded down into syntagmatic qualities that were shared and replaceable. In order to control slave bodies, then, white society had to control *the* slave body. They had to control the horizons of meaning within which the black body was capable of performing. This not only involved negating the black body’s referentiality to a trans-Atlantic history, it also meant actively creating a body that would extenuate the brutal physical suppression of slavery. As South Carolina’s black

population swelled past the size of its white population, the question of social control came to seem ever more desperate. In order to stabilize their social position, it became necessary for whites to naturalize the social relation that lay at the heart of slavery. They tried to accomplish this by constructing a docile, submissive “slave body.”

Despite the efforts of white South Carolina to impose its own meanings on slave bodies, the Africanized body blossomed through the “cracks in the mortar” of slave repression. That is not to say that the slaves themselves were able to escape repression in any meaningful way, or that African cultural practices found unproblematic channels for continuity. Scholars have debated for years the degree to which African cultures survived the middle passage and what residues of those folkways can meaningfully be read into later African-American practices.⁹ The term ‘creolization’ has been much used—and much abused—as a linguistic model for bridging this debate by following Sidney Mintz and Richard Price in reading “deep structures” in African-American life as survivals of African cultures. For my purposes here, I am leaving aside the question of persistence and whether or not we might read early-modern “African-ness” into the practices of the nineteenth, twentieth, and even twenty-first centuries.¹⁰ What is beyond dispute is that Charles Town’s slave population in the first half of the eighteenth century was overwhelmingly African-born, and as such, their cultural practices should more properly be thought of as ‘adaptations,’ rather than as the multi-generational process of ‘creolization.’ Also, in exploring dance’s role in creating and embodying a sense of

⁹ This debate, sometimes called the Frazier-Herskovits debate, extends the positions of Melville Herskovits, an anthropologist who studied “Africanisms” in American culture, and sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, who maintained that the ordeal of slavery erased any cultural continuity with Africa.

¹⁰ For the interested reader, I recommend the essays collected in *Africanisms in American Culture*, ed. Joseph E. Holloway (Indiana UP, 2nd ed.: 2005).

African community in South Carolina, I am leaving aside any questions of “authenticity” regarding African source cultures. I am considering here the re-constitution of practices as they served the constitution of an adaptive identity. In other words, I am focusing on the act of remembering and not on the accuracy of the memory.

It may still be seen by some as problematic to ascribe to slaves any agency in fashioning identities or cultural communities. Some scholars see claims of cultural resilience as trivial in the face of slavery's overwhelming effects.¹¹ While I certainly do not mean to underplay the dehumanizing qualities of slavery, I suspect that this view is informed by a misunderstanding of the terms “culture” and “identity.” Too often, we regard culture and identity as the outcomes of voluntary acts, emerging from a collective will and hemmed in only by the material circumstances with which a community must contend.¹² In fact, culture and identity are processes themselves, turning on a dialectic of coercion and volition. Building an “Africanized” identity, therefore, did not amount to an unproblematic expression of will. It emerged instead from within a pair of concentric spheres: a sphere of volition that was nested within a sphere of coercion. To the degree that slaves were able to carve out spaces and practices of their own (constituting a 'sphere of volition'), these practices were never entirely outside the 'sphere of coercion' but were always contained within it.

I have extended the introduction to this chapter in order to acknowledge the complexity inherent in historicizing the cultural practices of Lowcountry slaves. The

¹¹ Jon Butler, for instance, has dismissed the idea of African religious continuity, claiming instead that Africans suffered a “spiritual holocaust” in the New World. See Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Harvard UP, 1992), p. 151.

¹² Modern-day discourses of 'multiculturalism' and 'identity politics' have—particularly in their over-generalized mass-media incarnations—fed this misunderstanding with their emphases on celebrating and respecting cultural difference without interrogating the coercive conditions under which these processes developed.

social realities of slave life were thickly overwritten by the material realities of a system of human property. Questions of social value were entangled with questions of monetary value, and social positioning was a fraught enterprise. In order to untangle these questions, a historian must approach slave life through alternative frameworks. Accordingly, the following chapter differs in several ways from my other chapters, as I have adjusted my methods to meet the historiographical challenges of its subject. In order to recuperate the dancing practices of the African diaspora, I read a wider variety of sources across a wider temporal and geographical range. I track the Africanized body through written records, archeological traces, and pictorial representations across Charles Town, Jamaica, Virginia, and Africa itself. I then contextualize those practices by locating them within the contest for control of the black body and its social meanings in colonial South Carolina. At the end of the chapter, I offer a reading of the Stono Rebellion of 1740, which was both the apex and the turning point for the interpenetration of African and Euro-colonial worlds.

The City Within a City

Dance and other African cultural performances were largely internal to the slave community; that is, dance events were “by slaves, for slaves,” to borrow DuBois’s formulation. White observers were sometimes—but not always—avoided through a number of ruses, including tripwires and sentries. This presents a keen challenge for the historian: while many scholars of slave life have lamented the unreliability of white accounts of black life, which are often ignorant of or unsympathetic to the meanings and worldview of the community they describe, to historicize African dance is a bid to descry

a practice that mostly escaped white description altogether. Few accounts survive, the most notable of them being an anonymous editorial in the *South Carolina Gazette* (“The Stranger,” 1771), an undated watercolor painting (commonly called *The Old Plantation*), and a Royal Academy naturalist’s account of an evening dance in Jamaica (Sir Hans Sloane, 1688). These documents offer rich clues to dancing practices, and I address each one below, but their chronological range fails to suggest the ubiquity of African dance in the eighteenth-century Lowcountry. African performances existed mostly within a world that was deliberately hidden from white view. This world was situated within the white world of local and colonial rule, and white hegemony was always an implicit presence among its spaces. But in order to understand the centrality of dancing to black Lowcountry life, it is first necessary to understand how dancing made possible and was made possible by this hidden world.

Despite the displacements and degradations of slavery, the black community of colonial Charles Town was able to carve out a vital social, economic, and religious world throughout the Lowcountry. Slaves were able to create and maintain this world by rendering it partially invisible to white eyes. Some slaves sought literal invisibility through amulets, charms, roots, or potions that were believed to cloak the owner from sight.¹³ These potions and charms (another example of Africa's cultural survivals in the New World) were sold by local conjurers for nighttime travel, an illegal activity for slaves.¹⁴ But Charles Town’s slave society also enjoyed other, less mystical, forms of invisibility. Slaves gained access to physical spaces which they were able to re-inscribe

¹³ Peter Charles Hoffer, *Cry Liberty: The Great Stono River Slave Rebellion of 1739* (Oxford UP, 2011), p.52

¹⁴ The market in amulets and other invisibility charms implicitly acknowledges that slaves were always aware of being “seen” by whites and suggests the anxiety that followed from living under surveillance.

as social spaces. Within these social spaces, cultural practices could be revived and rehearsed, perhaps even revised, as Africans from different ethnic backgrounds came together as a slave community. Money and property also changed hands in these spaces, as goods—either stolen or handmade—were exchanged for the money that some slaves were able to piece together by selling food at market, plying a trade outside their master’s house, or putting out their boats for charter. Channels of culture, commerce, and sociability coursed through this “city within a city” and proved crucial to the establishment of a slave culture in South Carolina.¹⁵

Just as slaves brought to North America did not come from homogenous communities, neither did they enter into identical conditions of bondage. There were many regionally and subregionally distinct forms of slavery in the eighteenth century, of which Charles Town was but one example. Slaves in Virginia, for example, were tied more closely to the plantation model of slavery, since tobacco and cereal cultivation were the prime directives of the Virginia economy. Compounded with the relative absence of urban centers in the Chesapeake region, the material conditions of producing these crops meant that slaves worked primarily in gangs and social units were largely determined by work units. Meanwhile, in the urban centers of the Northeast, a high percentage of slaves worked in non-agrarian production, such as ironworks, saltworks, and ship-building; and many even developed skilled trades, such as butchery, blacksmithing, or artisanry. Such skilled and semiskilled slaves were often

¹⁵ There has been much debate in the past two generations over whether or not it is appropriate to speak of a slave culture. On the one hand, critics warn that such a term might vitiate the weight of oppression and constraint that these people lived under as slaves. On the other hand, some say it is necessary in order to re-orient the agency of these individuals. I offer here that it is more or less meaningful to speak of slave culture depending on the area and time period under consideration. Virginia, for instance, had a less distinct culture among its slaves, as they were not geographically concentrated enough to build the necessary networks. If there is a time and a place in which it is meaningful to talk about slave culture, it is Charles Town in the eighteenth century.

hired out by their owners, which afforded the slaves in question more mobility through the colony, but disrupted the establishment of strong social ties. Charles Town's slaves were bonded into a landscape of labor that borrowed something from each of these models. Charles Town slaves might work on a plantation, or might be hired out for more skilled labor. They might work on a labor gang, such as those that were digging passages to the North Branch of the Stono River when the Stono Rebellion broke out. Others worked in relative isolation, set apart from the laboring of other slaves, such as the overseers or those who acted as bodyguards for their masters. Also, plantations in the Lowcountry were closer together than elsewhere in the South, with a network of rivers and a population of skilled black boatmen allowing slave communities to come together more easily. These conditions allowed for a more closely-knit slave community in the Lowcountry than in other parts of the continent.

Overall, Charles Town slaves also had more independence than slaves in many other parts of the empire. Charles Town in the eighteenth century had several circumstances that allowed for a measure of independence among its slaves. Perhaps most crucial was the force of numbers: slaves outnumbered whites in the colony throughout the eighteenth century. Even with the legal and sometimes physical apparatuses that white Carolinians employed to control the slave population, their authority was incomplete. Also, unlike in other parts of British North America, South Carolina's slaves worked on a 'task' system. This means that instead of working for a set number of hours a day, slaves were usually given a specific task or series of tasks to accomplish. Once the task was accomplished, a slave might retain the balance of time in

the day to do with as he or she pleased (within the tightly prescribed horizon of possibilities that the white authorities allowed).

What South Carolina's slaves did with the time they had to themselves often involved visiting with slaves from nearby plantations. This was another geographically specific condition that gave South Carolina its slave culture. Most plantations in South Carolina were relatively close to one another compared to colonies like Virginia. The slaves in these areas worked under varying degrees of supervision, depending on the slave, the master, or the task at hand. This amounted to even more independence for the most trusted and productive slaves in the colony. Furthermore, the Lowcountry was easily navigable, especially by water. Many male slaves were handy seamen, as there was a constant need in the area for ship hands. Some slaves even owned small boats which they used for fishing, but also for navigating up and down the network of Lowcountry rivers. Slaves used the rivers and other byways to visit family members at other plantations or to go into Charles Town and take advantage of the opportunities available to them there.

Although slaves were forbidden from leaving their master's grounds after night, many still travelled across the marshes under the moonlight. They doused themselves in turpentine to hide their scents from the tracking dogs of the slave patrols. They met up in wide, open areas, where the moonlight could light their way without the need for fires. They guarded themselves by installing trip-wires on nearby roadways and electing sentries to stand watch and sound an alarm when slave patrols were near.¹⁶ By reclaiming these backwoods clearings as positions in their own cultural landscape, Africans were

¹⁶ Hoffer, p.52.

able to continue the nature-based religious practices they brought with them across the Atlantic. Ras Michael Brown has explored the ways in which African spiritual traditions—especially the Kongolese *simbi*, or water spirits—framed slaves’ understanding of the natural world and informed the creation of African and African-American communities into the twentieth century.¹⁷

While some of these spaces were in the swampy backwoods of the Carolina Lowcountry, many spaces were also in Charles Town itself. Slaves were able to congregate and communicate right under the noses of Charles Town’s white elites by renting rooms, meeting in alleys, and even convening in the kitchens of absent masters.¹⁸ Slaves enjoyed more freedom in the city than on the plantation, in part because the city was a space that allowed more mobility and less surveillance. Slaves teemed through the alleys, the wharves, and the markets of the small city, hauling cargo, carrying messages, or shopping for their masters. By 1725, there were twice as many slaves in South Carolina as there were whites, and the port city was bustling with them.

If slaves moved with relative freedom by day, nightfall was little deterrent. Charles Town did not have many lamps in the first half of the eighteenth century, leaving the streets too dark to be effectively policed. Groups of slaves were reported to collect in alleyways, on the marshy edge of town, and underneath oak and pine trees in the shadow of their masters’ homes.¹⁹ Modern-day archaeologists have lately uncovered the remains of one such meeting place near the mansion of Miles Brewton. The Miles Brewton

¹⁷ Ras Michael Brown. *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*, (Cambridge UP: 2012).

¹⁸ J. William Harris. *The Hanging of Thomas Jeremiah: A Free Black Man’s Encounter with Liberty*. (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009). p. 31.

¹⁹ Ibid.

House—actually a townhouse complex, featuring dependencies that housed a dozen or more slaves—was built in the 1760s and is still standing today. Archaeologists uncovered charcoal remains along with several bits of African-style colonoware in an area behind the main house. They have also uncovered an unbroken bottle marked with Brewton’s monogram, possibly pilfered from Brewton’s wine cellar.²⁰ These items were found on the lot at 14 Legare Street, a short walk away from Brewton’s King Street complex. However Brewton’s bottle travelled to the Legare Street lot, it was likely part of some social gathering. The charcoal pit suggests that this was a gathering place where slaves could get together and cook the small animals or vegetables they were able to raise or grow on their own time.

If slaves had some small change, they also had the option of gathering at Charles Town’s numerous “dram-houses.” More than one hundred Charles Town residents held licenses to sell liquor by the middle of the eighteenth century. One such house still remains, just a block from the waterfront in Charleston’s historic district. The Pink House Tavern on Chalmers Alley is a three-story Bermuda-stone structure built in the early eighteenth century. Its three rooms are tiny and stacked on top of one another; this building was not a high-end establishment. Its coral-colored façade stood out from the dingy houses that surrounded it in what would come to be called Mulatto Row—Charles Town’s seedy



Figure R: The Pink House Tavern, photo by Brian Stansberry. Wikimedia Commons.

²⁰ Martha Zierden. “Object Lessons: The Journey of Miles Brewton’s Bottle.” *Common-Place* (Vol 1: Issue 4, July 2001), <http://common-place.org/vol-01/no-04/lessons/> (Accessed 10/22/13)

brothel district.²¹ In a city with so many licensed “groggeries,” many low-end tavern-keepers could not afford to heed the section of the Slave Code that forbade serving alcohol to slaves. Charles Town residents often complained about “Dram-Shops and Tipling-Houses in Charles-Town, such as entertain Negroes and other disorderly persons.”²²

Slaves rendered themselves still more invisible by using even more private spaces. Although laws forbade any property owner from leasing or selling space to slaves, there is enough anecdotal evidence to illustrate that this was a common practice. Slaves rented rooms and small buildings, which might be put to a number of purposes. Slaves might use such spaces to hide stolen items. Stealing was common among Charles Town’s slave population, as one English observer noted: “They are, no doubt, very great Thieves, but this may flow from their unhappy, indigent Circumstances, and not from a natural Bent.”²³ Slaves pilfered items from their masters or ‘bought’ merchandise on credit under felonious names and employed a number of other tactics for purloining valuable goods. Some slaves may have even organized themselves into gangs: a group of New York slaves operating in the 1730s were known as the “Geneva Club” after they stole some Geneva Gin.²⁴ Many slaves also “stole themselves” by running away from their masters’ surveillance, hiding themselves in these rented rooms. One critic wrote to the *Gazette*: “many rooms, kitchens, &c. are hired to or for the use of slaves in this

²¹ For more on Mulatto Row, see Cynthia Kennedy, “Nocturnal Adventures in Mulatto Alley: Sex in Charleston, South Carolina.” in Thomas H. Appleton, Jr., and Angela Boswell, eds. *Searching for Their Places: Women in the South Across Four Centuries*. (Columbia: Missouri UP, 2003).

²² *SCG* Feb7, 1771, qtd in Harris, 33.

²³ “Itinerant Observations in America” qtd. in Peter Wood, *Black Majority*, p.212.

²⁴ For a more in-depth consideration of stealing among Charles Town’s slaves, see Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*. (New York: Norton, 1974) pp. 211-216.

town; and, by such slaves, let to others, in subdivisions, which serve as places of concealment for run-aways, stolen goods, &c.”²⁵

Running away was, of course, the extreme end of invisibility among Charles Town slaves, and the social networks that coursed underneath the surface of slave life played an important part in many runaway attempts. While an accurate comparison of numbers is impossible, it seems that many slaves who ran away during this period ran away in groups, more often non-family groups.²⁶ Also, as the above quotation illustrates, slaves were able to hide themselves in spaces they rented from other slaves, whether that was an apartment in Charles Town or in one of the outbuildings on a plantation. Most slaves do not seem to have run far. Many ran into the city, and there are several runaway advertisements from the period that note the runaway in question was “now supposed to be lurking in or about the town.”²⁷ With the advantage of rented spaces and a network of slaves willing to assist, a slave might stay well-hidden even in the bustling metropolis.²⁸

But the ‘invisible’ that channeled the social lives of slaves outside their masters’ gaze could only thrive by strategic sites of ‘visibility.’ One such site was the marketplace. Slaves sold produce, meats, fish, and baked goods both in the markets and on the streets. Sundays were particularly crowded, as plantation slaves came into the city, bringing the surplus of their subsistence gardens or the fish they had been able to catch when they were not laboring. The markets in particular were dominated by slave

²⁵ Qtd. in Harris, p. 32.

²⁶ See Wood, “Runaways: Slaves Who Stole Themselves” in *Black Majority*; Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia, 1730-1775* (Athens: Georgia UP, 1984) p.176; Michael P. Johnson, “Runaway Slaves and the Slave Communities in South Carolina, 1799 to 1830.” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Volume 38, Number 3 (July 1981) pp.418-481.

²⁷ Hoffer, p. 33.

²⁸ Runaways may have gotten assistance from more than just whites. Alexander VanderDussen fumed to the *Gazette* in 1738 “I am informed that there are certain Persons, who entertain Runaways, and in Time send them out of the Settlements.” (*SCG*, Feb 2, 1738)

women.²⁹ One observer fulminated about “a great number of loose, idle, disorderly negro women, who are seated there from noon ‘til night, and buy and sell on their own accounts, what they please, in order to pay their wages, and get as much for themselves as they can.”³⁰ Gay Gibson Cima has interpreted these slave women in the marketplace as offering explicit critiques of slaveholder society through their visibility and audibility in a society that prescribed strict control of slaves’ and women’s bodies.³¹ If the shouts and calls of market women were pointed acts of resistance, they were the utmost protuberances of an African world that hummed quietly beneath the surface of Charles Town’s Anglo- European lifestyle.

Becoming ‘African’ in America

The African world of this “city within a city” was not, however, a monocultural one. Generations of scholars have vividly portrayed the connections between dance performance and national and/or ethnic identity, but one must take care not to reverse the logic and suppose that participating in shared cultural performances fuses plurality into a singular identity. Slave performances mixed, but did not blend, African cultures. The syncretism of performance traditions did not necessarily disrupt the native meanings of those traditions, no more than they necessarily preserved those same meanings. The meanings available in specific performances to individual subjects or communities at any

²⁹ See Robert Olwell, “‘Loose, Idle, and Disorderly’: Slave Women in the Eighteenth-Century Charleston Marketplace,” in *More Than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, ed. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine. (Bloomington Indiana UP, 1996).

³⁰ *SCG* Sep 24, 1772

³¹ Gay Gibson Cima. *Early American Women Critics: Performance, Religion, Race*. (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006).

given point during the era of slavery lies mostly beyond the grasp of historiography. We can, however, discern the possibility for solidarity without consensus implicit in dance syncretism. By bringing together disparate dance traditions in performance, African slaves were able to build solidarity across ethnic lines without allowing those lines to dissolve. Indeed, creating a context of “Africanism” allowed ethnic differentiation to survive slavery’s encroaching “black-washing” of African identities.

To white eyes, South Carolina’s lowcountry was a “nest of negroes” wherein the ubiquity of black bodies swelled and threatened to overwhelm the white population. But the slaves themselves saw the fault lines of ethnic disparity that fractured and segregated the conglomerations of black bodies forced together in the streets and swamps of South Carolina. These fault lines were in many cases re-constituted from the civil wars and ethnic hatreds that flamed in Central Africa during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While an Igbo farmer from the Bight of Biafra and a Kongolese warrior may have a language barrier to overcome, two captured Kongolese warriors may share a language but be bitterly divided by their loyalties to the houses of Kimpanzu or Kinlaza.³² These hatreds were compounded by their implication in the Atlantic slave trade itself. Many of the slaves who wound up in South Carolina were pushed into slavery by family debt, kidnapping, or as prisoners of war. Thus, the tensions that divided the societies of the African coast were still present and immediate in the South Carolina lowcountry.

And yet, slaves built community ties across ethnic lines throughout the eighteenth century. Displaced from their native environments, African slaves fought back against

³² These two *kandas*, or royal lineages, were behind much of the factionalism and violence in the Kingdom of Kongo during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

the existential violence of ethnic erasure by Africanizing their new environment. Just as "whiteness" was constituted as a consolidating response in the face of violent "otherness," slaves came together as Africans in order to resist the physical and spiritual violence of slavery. As I explain above, the Africanizing process did not produce an undifferentiated *communitas*, but instead effected points of solidarity within which ethnic differentiation still mattered. This process depended on maneuvering between points of juncture where many African communities overlapped: shared fragments of cultural practice that were common enough among African societies to prove durably mutable across cultural contexts.

One of these points of juncture was the crucial tie between ancestor worship and the veneration of nature. Across many African cultures, ancestors comprised a category of beings that were capable of interfering with the course of human events. In some cultures, when ancestors became so old that they no longer had a recognizable line of descent, they became nature-spirits, who were similarly able to interrupt human affairs, but who typically had a more geographically specific jurisdiction.³³ Many anthropologists and historians in the last century have attempted to synthesize the religious traditions of west-coast Africa, and their findings have revealed remarkably stable patterns in the belief systems of these disparate communities. Most notably, Wyatt MacGaffey compared his own field notes from work among the Congo with the writings of Kongolese writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and travel descriptions going back to the 1500s.³⁴ He was able to draw out four main categories of supernatural beings:

³³ John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*. (Cambridge UP, 1998), p.251.

³⁴ Wyatt MacGaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa: The Bakongo of Lower Zaire*. cited in Thornton, p. 251.

the ancestors, the territorial nature-deities, lesser spirits who could be captured in charms, and ghosts who wandered in remote places (the last being capable of great harm). Adam Jones attempted a similar project among the Akan people of the Gold Coast, and found the former three categories also existed in those communities:

territorial nature deities, ancestor spirits, and spirits who inhabited charms.³⁵ P. E. H. Hair found similar results in the Portuguese Jesuit descriptions of the Sierra Leone.³⁶ The stability of these categories over time and space attests to the consonance of African belief systems and their adaptability to one another.

One of the most widely distributed concepts in African cosmology was the Kongolese concept of *kalunga*. Kalunga is the threshold between the land of the living and the land of the dead, and it is closely associated with bodies of water. In Kongolese cosmology, the living emerge from and ultimately return to an inverted world where ancestors walk on their hands.³⁷ This inverted world comes into contact with the living world through rivers, oceans, caves, and other natural features. When one has become an *n'gunza*, or spiritual person, one is able to make contact with the ancestral spirits (*simbi*) through sacred songs, chants, and dances.³⁸ The concept of kalunga was often represented visually by an equilateral cross contained by a circle. In this figure, the horizontal line represented the "kalunga line," the barrier between the realms of the living and the dead.

³⁵ Adam Jones, *Brandenburg Sources for West Africa History, 1680-1700*. cited in Thornton, p. 252.

³⁶ Hair's commentaries in the *Africana Research Bulletin*, cited in Thornton, p.252.

³⁷ "KalŪnga." *Encyclopedia of African Religion*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008. *Credo Reference*. 8 July 2010. Web. 12 Nov. 2013. <<http://proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/login?url=http://www.credoreference.com/entry/sageafricanrel/kalunga>>

³⁸ "Palo." *Encyclopedia of African Religion*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008. *Credo Reference*. 8 July 2010. Web. 12 Nov. 2013. <<http://proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/login?url=http://www.credoreference.com/entry/sageafricanrel/palo>>. Palo is the modern-day religious practice of the traditional Kongolese cosmology. For an intriguing historical study of the *simbi* and their relationship to the South Carolina landscape, see Ras Michael Brown's *African- Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry* (Cambridge UP, 2013).

Each quadrant represented a different stage in the life of man, and each stage was connected to the annual seasons. The circle surrounding the cross represented an individual's passing through the various phases of existence, a counter-clockwise journey of birth and rebirth that traversed back and forth across the kalunga line.

The spiritual importance of counter-clockwise circular movement was another belief that transcended local provenance. Sterling Stuckey has traced the sanctity of the circle among the Yoruba, the Kongolese, and other African cultures and argued persuasively for its persistence in the "ring shouts" of African-American Christianity.³⁹ Moving slowly in a counter-clockwise circle, chanting repetitious prayers and songs, often picking up speed as the ceremony continued, was a technique for coming into contact with the spirit world, especially the ancestors. Anthropologists have noted the remarkable persistence of this pattern across the African diaspora, and its near-ubiquity in ceremonies of life-passages, whether marking births, initiations, marriages or deaths.⁴⁰ The ring dance was also an important site of inter-ethnic contact and worship. Frederick Forbes, travelling through Dahomey in 1851, noted in his journals that women from various parts of Africa would come together and each dance "the peculiar dance of her country" before coming together to perform a ring dance.⁴¹ What Forbes describes is entirely consistent with accounts of slave dancing in North America. Ring dancing, then,

³⁹ Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1987).

⁴⁰ See Stuckey, pp. 11-17.

⁴¹ Frederick E. Forbes, *Dahomey and the Dahomans, being the Journals of Two Missions to King of Dahomey and Residence at His Capital*. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1851). This work has been widely used, both for its insights and its vivid color illustrations. The portion on dance that I am using has also been thoroughly explored by Melville Herskovitz, *Dahomey* (New York: Augustin, 1938), and Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture*.

seems to have been one of the more crucial elements in bringing Africans together across ethnic lines.

The scholar's most valuable window into the syncretism of African music and dance forms comes from late seventeenth-century Jamaica.⁴² Dr. Hans Sloane, physician to the Royal Governor of that colony, was invited by a plantation owner to observe a slave dancing event late one Saturday night. Accompanied by a French musician named Baptiste, Dr. Sloane hiked to a clearing near the plantation and beheld a ring of slaves around a fire. Inside this ring were two musicians with string instruments and about a dozen dancers, each one wearing rattles around their ankles and wrists. Sloane interviewed the overseer, who in turn questioned the musicians and dancers, so that a chain of interlocutors—in some ways obstructed by language barriers—helped the Europeans to parse the African practices they were witnessing. Baptiste jotted down the melodies that he heard, albeit in the European style of musical notation, which was bound to distort African musical styles. Sloane published his observations and Baptiste's melodies in 1707, identifying three African musical folkways that were being fused together in this performance: Angola, Coromantee, and Papa. This document is extraordinary and unique in its proto-anthropological approach to African performance.⁴³ As Richard Cullen Rath reminds us: “several languages—pidgin, English, French, at least two (and probably more) unrelated African tongues—three discrete musical styles

⁴² Although the modern South Carolinian might see themselves as remote from Jamaican culture, the two colonies were closely connected, both culturally and materially, before the Seven Years' War. What's more, many of the slaves and planters in South Carolina went through a 'seasoning' process of living in the West Indies before coming to the mainland. When these ties are adjoined by the close demographic parallels in the slave communities of Jamaica and South Carolina, Dr. Sloane's account gains considerable credence in describing the slave practices in both locations.

⁴³ Although it should be noted that Dr. Sloane's book—a natural history written by a physician—treats the slaves as a feature of the island's fauna and not as an entirely human society.

being recorded by someone versed in a fourth, participants ranging from slaves to gentry, with connections to three continents, all thrown together for a moment in time.”⁴⁴

Because Sloane’s major interest in the proceedings was musicological, he has not left a very detailed notation of the dances. The only detail he noted were the rattles: “They have likewise in their dances rattles ty’d to their Legs and Wrists, and in their Hands, with which they make a noise... Their dances consist in great activity and strength of the body, and keeping time, if it can be.”⁴⁵ Perhaps if he had witnessed this event a decade or more later, he would be familiar with the styles of dance notation that were coming out of France.⁴⁶ But the cultural distinctions that Sloane’s interlocutors are able to make between the styles reveal important aspects of the syncretic process underway. Sloane hears distinct songs—including one that is a repetitious rhythm of hand-clapping and gourd-beating while another was a quiet melody by a single singer with stringed accompaniment—and believes (as the slaves claim) that the songs are from different cultural traditions.

From this, we can infer that the all-night dances that slaves often participated in were more likely to be cross-cultural, not trans-cultural, events. An evening of song and dance was an act of bricolage that left ethnic distinctions relatively intact, even as the singers and dancers forged a community. The African identity that they were about the business of creating did not obscure their identities as Igbo, Akan, Bambara, etc. African-ness was instead an overlay, possibly one that even intensified these ethnic distinctions by re-inforcing a context in which they were decipherable. This particular

⁴⁴ Rath, *How Early America Sounded*, pp. 69-70.

⁴⁵ Sloane, xlix.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

brand of syncretism, and its careful balance between intracommunal disparateness and solidarity, may have been an African survival. Residents of large geographic areas that were ethnically linked—such as Senegambia—were used to being surrounded by communities that were culturally similar but still ethnically distinct. Michael Gomez posits that in these areas “broad and encompassing conceptualization may have been emphasized over specific form and content without great difficulty.”⁴⁷ As a result, Senegambians and slaves from similar areas may have been particularly well-suited to the adaptive strategies necessary in North America. For instance, a demographic study of slave ethnicity in Louisiana shows that Senegambian men married Wolof, Igbo, and American-born women, while Wolof men—the majority of whom were Muslim and held beliefs less consonant with other Africans—mostly married Wolof women.⁴⁸

By syncretizing performance practices, slaves in the New World were able to produce not a singular culture, but a multivocal vocabulary with which to speak against the abasement of slavery. Armed with this vocabulary, slaves struggled to set their own terms for how their bodies might accrue and project meaning. This struggle played out at the level of the senses, and the residues of that struggle can still be read in white-produced aesthetic documents of the period, such as the paintings I consider below. Although these paintings projected white contexts onto black bodies, they retain some of the content of African resistance. In their efforts to control the black body through aesthetic production, these painters have left traces of the Africanized body, both in the

⁴⁷ Gomez, p. 43.

⁴⁸ Gwendolyn Midlo Hall. *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana UP, 1992), qtd in Gomez, p.43. Neither Gomez nor Hall address the question of why so many Muslim Wolof women would marry Bambara men. I submit, however, that there is another factor that likely played into this dynamic: records show that Wolof Muslim men were disproportionately appointed as overseers on eighteenth-century plantations. This status differentiation may have complicated their matrimonial prospects.

details the paintings transcribe and the negative spaces against which the paintings project. As is often the case in aesthetic representation, these paintings speak beyond the voice of the speaker, bearing witness to practices they cannot fully contain.

Kinesthetic Mistranslations

Perhaps the most vivid document of the Africanized body in eighteenth-century America is the watercolor now conventionally known as *The Old Plantation*. This image depicts a dozen black slaves dancing and playing traditional African instruments in between two small buildings on the grounds of a plantation.⁴⁹ *Old Plantation* is unusual in that it depicts slaves relating to other slaves, with no white figure present in the frame. These slaves are in their “sphere of volition,” being African with other Africans. The image itself, however, was likely painted by a white man, so we know one to have been present—perhaps even the slaves’ owner himself. Furthermore, the plantation house is visible across the river, a monumental reminder of white authority. These presences, at once marginal and central, remind the viewer that white hegemony was a transcendental point of reference for black activity in the colonial slavery system. Slaves were able to build ties of community outside the master’s gaze, but their ontological condition precluded them from ever being entirely outside of the master’s presence.

⁴⁹Although the provenance of the painting is not entirely clear, Susan Shames has recently laid out a persuasive argument that the image was painted by South Carolina planter John Rose. Susan P. Shames, *The Old Plantation: The Artist Revealed* (Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2010). Shames is as of this writing a decorative arts librarian for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

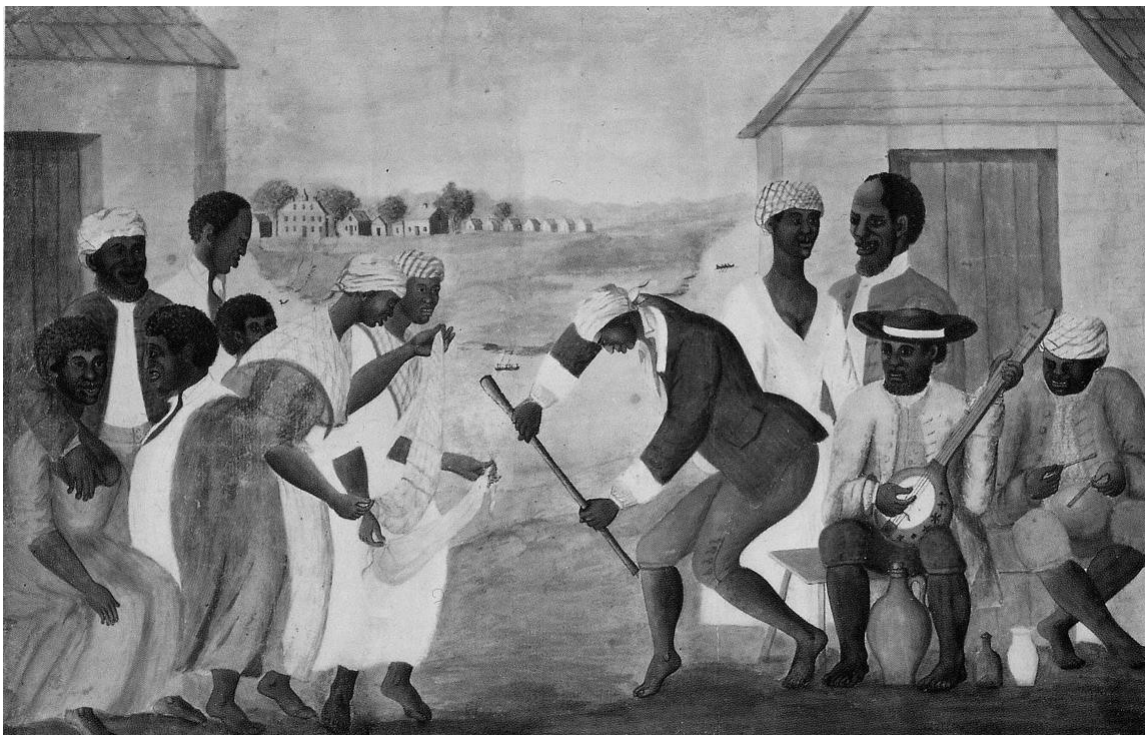


Figure S: The Old Plantation, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller
Folk Art Museum. The Colonial Williamsburg
Foundation. Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller.

The figures in *Old Plantation* exhibit both African and American elements. The most immediately discernible syncretism in the painting is the mix of clothing pieces. Periwinkle-colored European-style coats and salmon-colored breeches are worn with West African headdresses and scarves. A less-obvious syncretism can be found in the bottles at the musicians' feet. Two of these vessels have the globular shape of African colonoware. They were almost certainly made by slave hands for slave use.⁵⁰ The third seems to be made of glass and is shaped in the European fashion, with a straight body swooping into a shouldered top. The shoulders of European-style glassware likely originated as a way of catching agricultural sediment while pouring from a bottle of wine.⁵¹ For West Africans, who did not produce or consume anything similar to

⁵⁰ On slave access to, and use of, different bottle styles in South Carolina, see Martha Zierden, "Object Lessons: The Journey of Miles Brewton's Bottle" in *Common-Place*, (Vol 1, Issue 4, July 2001) at <http://common-place.org/vol-01/no-04/lessons/>

⁵¹ This theory is widely distributed among wine historians.

European wine, bottles and jugs usually took on a globe shape with a small, narrow neck. Curved bottoms allowed these vessels to be set down at any angle or to be carried easily against the shoulder.⁵² The earthenware jugs shown here have flat bottoms, attesting to the diffusion of cultural forms. Flat-bottomed jugs may even have been a market-based adaptation of European style: as European ceramics were rare and expensive in the colonies, Africans were able to sell their pottery to white consumers.⁵³

And yet, a discernibly African voice speaks through this painting. Even though they are dressed in a mix of clothing styles and their drinking vessels are somewhat creolized, the dancing and music depicted in this painting are inescapably African. The musicians at right are playing a stringed instrument resembling a banjo and a small drum. Both of these instruments attest to the richness of African syncretism in North America, as well as to the futility of trying to parse out definitive lines of origin. The banjo was probably Central West African in origin, though it may have evolved from the Senegambian *ngoni*, the Ghanan *molo*, or a number of other African instruments that followed the same basic design.⁵⁴ These instruments were all composed of strings stretched over a hollowed-out gourd with a wooden fretboard attached to allow for note fingerings.⁵⁵ The small drum pictured is of similarly non-specific origin, although Marvin

⁵² Jane Bingham, *African Art and Culture* (Chicago: Raintree, 2004) p.20.

⁵³ Sharon F. Patton, *African-American Art* (Oxford) pp. 38-39.

⁵⁴ While the banjo's history is much commented-on, the best source is still Dena Epstein, "The Folk Banjo: A Documentary History," *Ethnomusicology: Journal of the Society for Ethnomusicology* (Vol 19, no. 3, Sep 1975, 347-371).

⁵⁵ A fascinating trend in modern African music is the return to this instrument type in the form of the *karindula* among Congolese musical groups in Katanga. The *karindula* is a large, bass-tuned banjo that uses an oil-drum in place of the smaller, alto-pitched gourd. Karindula groups, who take their name from the instrument itself, often use subversive lyrics to protest the exploitative conditions in which southern Congolese are forced to live. These bands play in a variety of venues, but are most frequently found at funerals. The homologies between this emerging practice and the practices of displaced Kongolese slaves in the eighteenth century—especially the echoes of self-assertion and resistance tied together by music and funerary rites—are a testament to the enduring power of eighteenth-century Africanisms.

Kay and Lorin Cary identify it as a Yoruban *gudugudu*.⁵⁶ But drumming was a mutable Africanism, one that could be tapped out on any object at hand, the rhythm itself being the more crucial vehicle for cultural transmission. An even more mysterious practice is being performed by the two women in the left-center of the painting. Are they waving white scarves to scare off bad spirits, as was recorded in the nearby Sea Islands?⁵⁷ Or were they waving *shegura*, a type of rattle among the Mende of Sierra Leone made by enclosing a gourd in a tube of net into which small objects have been woven?⁵⁸ Whatever the origin of the instruments themselves, the musical event depicted is almost surely a syncretic one, a collage of different African practices.

The figures in the painting suggest still more about the bodily vocabulary of the slaves depicted. At the center of the painting, a dancer with a cane dips down while rising up on his toes. The painter has allowed the cane to serve as the visual fulcrum of the composition. While slave figures are crowded into two solid clusters, both backed by slave quarter buildings, the cane is near-dead center, accented against the rolling landscape behind. In this case, the painter's composition may echo the prominence of the cane in the dance that the painting depicts. As the painted cane draws the viewer's eye, the actual cane may also have drawn the spectator's eye, and the painter need not have understood the significance of the cane to have recognized its centrality to the dance. Canes were frequent accessories to dancing in many different African cultures and this one may have had some religious significance or supernatural power. Among ritual

⁵⁶ Marvin L. Michael Kay and Lorin Lee Cary, *Slavery in North Carolina, 1748-1775* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 1995), cited in Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, p. 586.

⁵⁷ Mary Arnold Twining, "Movement and Dance on the Sea Islands," *Journal of Black Studies* (XV, 1985). ⁵⁸ Joseph A. Opala, *The Gullah: Rice, Slavery, and the Sierra Leone Connection* (Sierra Leone, 1987). This relatively short but thoughtful pamphlet is available online through the University of South Florida at http://www.africanaheritage.com/Gullah_and_Sierra_Leone.asp.

experts and holy men, the staffs held a mediatory power, allowing them to commune with invisible divine forces. Staffs were capable of attracting and holding supernatural power. When a west wing was added to Stagville Plantation (near Durham, North Carolina), a sweet gum staff was hidden in the wall during construction. The staff was situated in an east-west position and was probably consecrated beforehand as either a blessing or a curse on the house's inhabitants.⁵⁹ This painting could depict a ceremony worshipping the Yoruban deity (*orisha*) Papa Ogún, the spirit of iron and the patron of smiths. In Haitian *vodun*, an Ogún-worshipping ceremony survives in which the dancer, possessed by the spirit, dances with an iron bar that has been heated in a fire. As the dancer handles the heated staff with his bare hands, he exhibits both the depth of his devotion to Ogún and the power of his self-mastery.

Although the dance itself is forever lost, the bodily disposition of the dancer exhibits some of the traits widely described as characteristic of slave dancing. The main dancer in *The Old Plantation* has a downward disposition to his carriage that echoes throughout eighteenth-century accounts of African dance. The dancer in the painting is almost crouched, bent at the knee and waist with his face turned straight down. Other accounts of slave dancing similarly emphasized the downward movement of the body, particularly as an accent to the beat of the drum. John Fanning Watson described “the steps of actual negro dancing” as “a sinking of one or other leg of the body alternately; producing an audible sound of the feet at every step.”⁶⁰ The downward emphasis that was common to many African forms of dance was a sharp contrast to the elite white habits of upwardly-disposed “grace.” While eighteenth-century whites trained to project a sense of

⁵⁹Nancy C. Curtis, *Black Heritage Sites: An African-American Odyssey and Finder's Guide*. p. 174.

⁶⁰Quoted in Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, p. 588.

lithe weightlessness in their bearing, black slaves enacted a bodily style that was athletic, percussive, and weighty.

The bodily style of downwardness that characterized slave dancing also informed slaves' gestures and other bodily practices in daily interaction.⁶¹ Several slave-owners described their slaves as having a "slouchy" or "lounging" gait, one master describing his slave as "slouch-walking."⁶² Even more obvious to whites was the habit among slaves of downcast eyes and faces. In many parts of Africa, it was a sign of respect to avoid meeting the gaze of one's elders.⁶³ There was also a widespread custom in Africa of avoiding eye contact in hostile or otherwise unpleasant circumstances. In British North America, where whites lacked the cultural context for these expressions, they often attributed slaves' avoidance of eye contact as signs of submission or fecklessness.

Thomas Poindexter noted in 1766 that his slave Jack "avoids looking in the face of them he is speaking to as much as possible."⁶⁴ In 1745, Philip Lightfoot put out an ad for a runaway mulatto man who "has a down look."⁶⁵ Thomas Thompson, a European missionary to West Africa in the mid-eighteenth century, related that Africans "hide their faces, or cast down their Eyes, when they hear anything which does not please them."⁶⁶ A related phenomenon was the gesture of the "cut-eye," wherein an individual could convey hostility by glaring at a person and then "cutting" his or her eyes downward and

⁶¹ See Kenneth R. Johnson, "Black Kinesics—Some Non-Verbal Communication Patterns in Black Culture, in J. L. Dillard, ed., *Perspectives on Black English* (Mouton, 1975), pp.299-300.

⁶² Quoted in Morgan, p. 596.

⁶³ See Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African-American Expressive Culture from its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1998), pp. 68-69.

⁶⁴ *VA Gazette*, August 8, 1766. Quoted in Morgan, p. 597.

⁶⁵ *Virginia Gazette*, November 21, 1745

⁶⁶ Thomas Thompson, *An Account of Two Missionary Voyages...*(London, 1758), pp.55.

across the body.⁶⁷ This practice has been identified in the same terms (in Haitian Creole as *couper yeux* and in Saramaccan as *a ta koti woyo*) in different geographic areas, suggesting that the practice travelled westward from Africa.

In the daily non-verbal interactions of blacks and whites, then, several conflicting systems of meaning collided with one another. As I discuss in Chapter One, white elites had their own non-verbal method for sustaining a chain of deference in the language of bows and honours with which they greeted one another. The mini-ritual of the social bow contained and contextualized the show of deference, distinguishing it from surliness or an unwillingness to engage. When black slaves enacted their own physical displays of deference in the avoidance of eye contact, white observers read the gestures as evidence of shiftiness or untrustworthiness. This misunderstanding was compounded by the slaves' physicality, which was downward and loose in contrast to the feather-light elegance of white elites. To white eyes, black bodies behaved in a manner that directly expressed an interior disposition of torpor and feeblemindedness. To white eyes, the depravity of the slaves was an inescapable reality.

By generalizing black affect as avoidant and disengaged, whites set up a binary frame for the racial character they increasingly ascribed to African slaves. This binary frame held that in their undisciplined state, blacks were shiftless and deceitful, though through discipline and paternalistic guidance, they could be made docile and subservient. Subjective agency—always problematic in a slave regime—was erased from this equation.⁶⁸ White colonists went further in aestheticizing this submissive ideal through

⁶⁷ See John R. and Angela Rickford, "Cut-Eye and Suck-Teeth: African Words and Gestures in New World Guise." *Journal of American Folklore* (1976), pp.294-309. Also see Kenneth Johnson, p. 298.

⁶⁸ Alex Bontemps has offered a nuanced argument charting the process through which the slaveholding elite deliberately suppressed the subjective agency of slaves both in their everyday treatment of the slaves

the portraiture of the colonial elite. American portraiture underwent a transformation in the eighteenth century, as generic classical-European pictorial backgrounds were replaced by more specifically American representations. Unlike the portraits of the seventeenth century, eighteenth-century American portraits often contextualized their subjects with reminders of the lived realities of a colonial context, such as local fauna or tools of agriculture. One of the “props” that were increasingly used to illustrate the colonial elite’s projected self-image was the black body itself. Slaves were depicted in colonial portraits as subservient and often adoring figures. Although portraitists of the seventeenth century had shied away from portraying slaves at all, in the eighteenth century the pictorial slave served a complex of interrelated purposes. Slaves functioned as both an aesthetic and a social presence in the portrait frame. Aesthetically, their blackness highlighted the whiteness of the painting’s subject, endowing that whiteness with value and meaning. In this dimension, the pictorial slave was a tool of metaphysical juxtaposition, enshrining the cult of authority and power through which slaveholders operated. Socially, the pictorial slave ennobled the economic institution of slavery by offering a beautification of submission. The pictorial slave was the emblem through which whites refigured black affect in the service of naturalizing the relationship between slave and master.

Charles Bridges’s portrait of William Byrd II’s only son, William Byrd III, exemplifies the use of the pictorial slave as a submissive ideal. The portrait depicts a young Byrd—probably around six years old—in the company of a slightly older (perhaps teenaged) slave.⁶⁹ The slave nearly fades into the background of the portrait, his lines so

and in their personal and public writings about slavery. See his book *The Punished Self: Surviving Slavery in the Colonial South* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001).

⁶⁹ The painting has been dated to 1735. William Byrd III was born in September of 1728, and would have been six or seven in 1735.

soft and his skin so dusky that he seems to hang in the air like a ghost. Byrd, by contrast, is the bright and beaming boy; his alabaster skin gleams against the russet-colored background. His radiance is accented by the shimmer of satin draped across his young frame. The slave figure, by contrast, is modestly hidden under a tatty coat, the white scallops of his sleeves offering a visual rhyme for Byrd's lustrous skin. Byrd holds up an arrow and the slave boy reaches out to the tip. The arrow is the third racial presence in the painting, alluding to the often-hostile Indian presence on the North American frontier. The arrow binds slave and master both compositionally and contextually, reminding the viewer that both figures are globally displaced. The menace of warfare with North America's indigenous population unites European and African. The combined effect of the symbolic arrow, the pictorial composition, and the affective representation—notice the slave's downcast face—sentimentalizes the attachment between black slave and white master, rendering economic reliance as affectionate devotion.

While white portraiture appropriated the black body for its own ideological ends, black slaves reciprocated in their satirical performances of whiteness. The *Gazette* editorialist who styled himself “The Stranger” claimed that slaves openly mocked white styles of dance, often beginning their evening assemblies by lampooning the courtly dances of their masters. This practice persisted through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries. One Beaufort, SC, slave later recalled, “us slaves watched white folks’ parties where the guests danced a minuet and then paraded in a grand march... Then we’d do it, too, but we used to mock ‘em, every step.”⁷⁰ Over the years,

⁷⁰ Quoted in Philip Morgan, p. 586.



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Figure T: Charles Bridges's portrait of William Byrd III

slaves' embodied mockery of the white body found a verbal counterpart as their vocal music replaced traditional African lyrics with English lyrics, many of which carried a

satirical edge. Nicholas Cresswell, writing about Virginia slaves, described their music as “droll” and “having a very satirical style and manner.”⁷¹ Modern ethnographers have suggested that satire was a recurring feature of public ceremonies in many African societies.⁷² I would offer, however, that whatever the origins of satire among the Lowcountry slave community, these satirical performances played a crucial role for Africans responding to the circumstances of slavery.

Satire is widely understood as both entertainment and a form of political speech, but it is also a valuable resource for self-imaging, at both the individual and community levels. Satire establishes a critical distance from its object, thus undermining the totalizing effect of a dominant ideology. As an embodied performance, satire is especially powerful in its capacity to challenge the process by which bodily practices naturalize a regime of social order. Embodied satire abstracts vital constituent parts of the naturalized body and subjects them to caricature, isolating and exaggerating individual mannerisms for comic effect. Sigmund Freud observed that the comic effect of caricature is achieved through a degradation of the integrated whole; that is, by emphasizing “a single trait which [is] comic in itself but [is] bound to be overlooked so long as it [is] only perceivable in the general picture.” By foregrounding isolated mannerisms at the expense of the integrated whole, caricature-based satire destabilizes the coordinated integration that is essential to the performance of a “natural” bodily regime. Satirical impersonation is thus the “un-making” of another’s body. This process of un-making operates on two levels: the act of impersonation effects an existential diffusion by unmooring a set of

⁷¹ Quoted in Philip Morgan, p. 590.

⁷² See William D. Pierson, “Puttin’ Down Ole Massa: African Satire in the New World,” in *African Folklore in the New World*, ed. Daniel J. Crowley (Texas, 1977), pp. 20-34.

bodily practices from the source body while the edge of satire dissolves the connections that integrate that body into a whole.

For displaced Africans struggling with the oppressions of slavery, the un-making of the white body was an act of resistance. The resistance that satire made possible was not a political resistance, however, and that point needs to be emphasized. When “The Stranger” wrote about slaves’ mocking dances, he was calling attention to what he (and others) perceived as impertinence, not burgeoning rebellion. Saidiya Hartman has offered a penetrating analysis of slave performance in which she asks, “How does one make any claims about the politics of performance without risking the absurd when discussing the resistances staged by unauthorized dance in the face of everyday workings of fear, subjugation, and violence?”⁷³ For South Carolina slaves during the colonial period, the crucial feature of these “staged resistances” is that they offered existential, not political, resistance. By establishing the critical distance necessary for satiric impersonation, African slaves resisted ontological absorption into the racial categories that sustained their own subjugation. While whites aspired to monopolize the process of racial signification, slaves unsettled that monopoly with their satirical dances. Humor served as both a tool of criticism and a pressure valve for Lowcountry slaves. But there was another performance tradition that offered resistance that was more directly empowering: martial arts.

⁷³ Hartman, p. 55.

African Martial Arts in the Atlantic World

When Thomas Butler escaped from the plantation of Col. Alexander Vanderdussen in May of 1733, the colonel identified him in the *South Carolina Gazette* as the “famous Negro Pushing and Dancing master.”⁷⁴ While the phrase “pushing and dancing” has not yet surfaced in any other document from the time, these two activities imagined together suggest a kind of martial art. That the colonel advertised his servant (whether slave or indentured is unclear) as “famous” suggests that Butler’s talents had drawn significant white spectatorship. There are sporadic accounts of white observers at black dance events (not all of them as fearful as George Whitefield). Perhaps Butler had gained a reputation for his skill at the Saturday night bonfires, displaying his traditional moves in a dance piece or in one-on-one contests with other warriors. Charles Town’s elite were avid horse race-goers and gamblers during this period; one can easily imagine them placing bets on the competitive sports between slaves on their own plantations. He may also have been connected to the local militia during the Yamassee War, as many former African warriors had been. This seems especially likely, since his master was a leader of the militia and one of the heroes of that war. However he came to be “famous,” Thomas Butler was able to distinguish himself through his visibility in both the black and the white communities.

African martial arts in particular had strong connections to dance, so much so that the two activities were nearly inextricable in many African cultures. Dance was a vehicle for pedagogy and display in martial cultures throughout Central Africa. Through dancing, combatants learned the basic figures of a fighting tradition and internalized those figures so that they could be instinctively deployed in the heat of battle. As with martial arts

⁷⁴ *SCG*, May 19, 1733

traditions around the world, African martial arts were passed on not just for their practical application, but also as embodiments of a traditional worldview. The Japanese concept of *kata* offers a helpful tool for understanding the relationship in traditional martial arts between worldview and practice.⁷⁵ *Kata* describes the figures a martial art student must practice repetitively and exactly in order to internalize the ideal form of the martial art. The literal meaning of *kata* is approximate to “molding wet sand” and it invokes a process of embodied pedagogy that teaches both a kinesthetic style and its attendant ideology from the outside inward. Once the student has fully internalized the *kata*, he may improvise within the spirit of the form; the student is no longer bound by the strictness of the *kata*, because he now embodies the form. Since the zeitgeist of the “New Age” ascended in the 1970s, many martial arts practitioners have focused on the practice as a philosophical exercise, using the *kata* as a path to self-knowing and inner peace. This is sometimes the case with African martial arts’ most well-known New World survival, *capoeira*.

By the start of the eighteenth century, musket brigades had become the main unit in central African militaries. And yet, hand-to-hand martial arts and the dance styles that were associated with them continued to thrive in African martial culture. Travelling through the Kingdom of Kongo, Luca di Caltanissetta witnessed a military dance by the full host of the Prince of Nsayo’s musketeer army. Nearly a century later, Father Rafael de Castello de Vide witnessed a similar dance among the Kinlaza forces of José I as they

⁷⁵ T. J. Desch Obi invokes the Japanese concept of *kata* in describing this aspect of the Angolan *engobo* form, although he does not engage with the process of internalization that *kata* affords, because it is not as pertinent to his study.

prepared to drive partisans of Pedro V out of Sao Salvador in 1781.⁷⁶ Castello de Vide also witnessed a *sangamento*, or war dance, in a small village, although it was as part of a religious ceremony, and he was told the dancers were making war on the Devil.⁷⁷ Among these Kongolesse musket units, dancing may have performed a function much like the military drill in the modern U.S. military: preserving a martial culture through embodied practice even after the need for hand-to-hand combat is minimized. However, Kongolesse musketeers did not have bayonets on their rifles. This should not be surprising: European musket units developed out of piking units, and the weapon followed suit; Kongolesse warriors never wielded pikes and the bayonet would have been a problematic addition to the Kongolesse musket. But because they did not have any weapon at hand for close combat, the traditional martial arts forms may have continued to be useful.

These martial arts traditions travelled to North America in the embodied memories of their practitioners. Many of the slaves that were brought to Africa in the first half of the eighteenth century were captured soldiers and prisoners of war. The Kongolesse Civil War, which began in 1665 and continued sporadically until after the American Revolution, was a major source of Angolan slaves, who comprised a major component of Charles Town's slave population. John Thornton has identified Kongolesse martial traditions among the slaves who participated in the Stono Rebellion in 1739, such as marching under banners, the accompaniment of drums, and the dance that the rebels danced before battle (likely a *sangamento*).⁷⁸ Although these dimensions of the rebellion could have been appropriated from other military cultures, the rebels' familiarity with

⁷⁶ Castello de Vide, "Viagem do Congo," MS Vermelho 296, fols. 98, 119, Academia das Ciencias, qtd. in Thornton.

⁷⁷ Ibid., fol. 137, qtd in Thornton.

⁷⁸ Thornton "African Dimensions" in Smith, *Stono*, p. 81

guns offers compelling evidence that at least some of them were Kongolesse soldiers. Proper use of eighteenth-century muskets required specialized training, and the Stono rebels appear to have known what they were doing. The most highly-trained gunmen on Africa's Central Western coast were the Kongolesse. T. J. Desch Obi has also explored the survival of African martial arts in the West Indies and coastal South. Using a blend of archival work and ethnographic study, Obi has identified two broad 'families' of martial art in Africa, the "grappling zone" of the West Central coast and the "percussive style" found in areas south of the Coanza River.⁷⁹ Obi's "grappling" style, which emphasizes wrestling over blows, emerged from the Igbo taboo on the shedding of blood, while the "percussive" Angolan style of kicking and acrobatics was an outgrowth of the Kongo notion of *kalunga*, where ancestors walked on their hands.

Trained martial artists in the South Carolina lowcountry could translate their abilities to certain opportunities within the "sphere of coercion." Some were able to enter the ranks of those slaves with specialized skills, many of whom enjoyed more independence and better living conditions than field laborers or domestic servants. A fairly common role for trained African fighters was to act as a bodyguard for their white masters. Josiah Henson, a Virginia slave who gained local fame as a wrestler and dancer in the early nineteenth century, described performing such a role at local taverns, horse races, and cock fights: "whenever [quarrels] became especially dangerous, and glasses were thrown, dirks drawn, and pistols fired, it was the duty of the slaves to rush in, and each one drag his master from the fight, and drag him home...It was a rough business,

⁷⁹T. J. Desch Obi, *Fighting for Honor: The History of African Martial Arts Traditions in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: South Carolina UP, 2008).

and I went in roughly.”⁸⁰ In 1712, the General Assembly created a legal space for black bodyguards when it stipulated that a slave may not strike a white person except in the defense of their masters.⁸¹ The law drew the line at thuggery, however, and forbade “such striking, conflict, or maiming” if it came at the direct command of the master. This caveat was to stem the tide of slaveowners using their slaves to shake down debtors, intimidate enemies, and resist the collection efforts of the provost marshal.⁸² In 1736, a story appeared in the *Gazette* about a Lowcountry man who sent a slave after a friend who had been “too familiar” with his wife. The slave cut off the man’s ear.⁸³

But service to the master was not the only way to translate martial arts training into a real-world advantage. African martial traditions were a vital resource for maroon communities looking to defend themselves. When a white posse came upon a maroon community on the Savannah River in the 1760s, they found a community under strict military order, with a regular layout of houses, the beating of drums, and a color standard flying.⁸⁴ But even within the regular slave community, martial arts traditions were an important part of the fabric comprising the ‘sphere of volition’ on which slaves built their sense of community. The wrestling matches, acrobatic routines, and head-butting contests (known as “knocking”) that martial artists exhibited at the community bonfires were an embodied connection to African ancestry and African values. Embedded in these

⁸⁰ Josiah Henson. *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself*. qtd in Obi, p. 101. Henson, who claimed to have been enthusiastic in his role as bodyguard, later escaped to Canada and wrote his autobiography. His story is widely believed to have inspired the character of George Harris in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

⁸¹ *Statutes* VII, 359, qtd in Wood, p. 231.

⁸² *Ibid*.

⁸³ *SCG*, July 24, 1736.

⁸⁴ Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, pp.450-451.

acts were concepts such as Kongolesse *kalunga*, the threshold to the land of the ancestors, or Biafran *omenani*, a code of tradition and moral conduct sanctioned by the spirit world.

But especially for the African-born slaves who comprised the majority of the black community in the first half of the eighteenth century, these martial arts displays could serve as a reminder of African strength. They emblemized an African military prowess that was still a living memory for these slaves. The dancing soldier may have acted as a ‘surrogate’ for the armies of the Kakongo, the Loango, or the coast of Nsoyo, allowing spectators an outlet for imagined wish-fulfillment. Refugees who had endured violent displacement, the horrors of the Middle Passage, and the degradations of service to be-wigged strangers in a hot and swampy land may have seen in the rhythmic kicks and sweeps of a graceful fighter the ghost of a military might that still lay across the sea.

Or did it? As Kongolesse soldiers came to comprise an ever larger portion of the Lowcountry slave population, military might may have seemed an ever more feasible ideation. The graceful fighter who performed rhythmic kicks and sweeps at a community dance event was not just a reminder of military power, but an instance of it. As the ongoing wars of the *Kimpanzu*, the *Kinlaza*, and other Kongolesse divisions pressed prisoners of war into South Carolina servitude, trained military bodies added their capabilities to the struggle over bodily vocabularies. Their input may have reached critical mass in September of 1739, during the Stono rebellion.

Stono

The battle to control bodily vocabularies in colonial South Carolina erupted in the autumn of 1739 into one of the bloodiest revolts in American history. On Sunday,

September 9, a group of at least sixty slaves beat a murderous path southward towards Spanish Florida, murdering whites and burning property along the way. The incident, which came to be known as the Stono Rebellion, was the bloodiest slave uprising in British North America and has been memorialized by historians as a turning point in the culture of slavery. The bloody events of the uprising brought about an urgent and coordinated effort by white authority to suppress black agency, an effort which put into place laws and conventions that shaped slaveholders' authority up until the eve of the Civil War. Historians of Stono have teased remarkably diverse narratives out of the scanty evidence surrounding this episode.⁸⁵ The Stono Rebellion has been characterized as both a carefully plotted revolt and as a spontaneous uprising, as a reaction to local conditions of power and misfortune and as an expression of global tensions, as a bid for Spanish freedom and as a self-consciously suicidal mission. Mark M. Smith has embraced the diversity of these approaches: "...the meaning of the Stono Rebellion...is best understood not by trying to flatten the binaries but, rather, by treating them as reliable indicators of the complicated, textured, multivalent world in which the slaves and white South Carolinians lived in 1739."⁸⁶ In this spirit, I submit that both black and white South Carolinians drew on the complex and intertwined vocabularies of racialized bodies in assaying and assuaging the violence of the rebellion.

⁸⁵ I propose that most of these accounts go too far in ascribing a sense of unity to the band of slaves involved in this revolt. Here is the standard narrative: a group of twenty or fewer slaves attacked Hutchenon's Store in the pre-dawn hours and stole ammunition. They set about killing local white families and eventually led a parade down Pon Pon Road. Over the course of their activities, they attracted eighty or so more slaves to join them. While it seems fair to assume that the original twenty had a bloody uprising in mind, we need not ascribe the same intentions to all eighty of the late-joiners, many of whom may not have understood the full implications of what they were getting into. The white authorities at the time even seem to have made this distinction; they only prosecuted those slaves involved in the murders and arson committed in the morning.

⁸⁶ Smith, xi.

The rebellion began in the small hours of a Sunday, when a group of twenty or so slaves gathered on the shore of the Stono River in St. Paul's Parish. They proceeded from there to Hutchenson's Store, likely a dry goods outpost on the lowcountry frontier. There they killed two white men, Robert Bathurst and John Gibbs.⁸⁷ After loading their arms with guns and provisions, the slaves decapitated the two white men and set their heads on the stairs as a grisly signal to anyone who discovered the scene. From there, the slaves began attacking nearby plantations, murdering the owners and their families and burning down the buildings. More slaves joined the group, either through volunteerism or by force.⁸⁸ The slaves raised a banner and beat drums, calling out for liberty. By mid-morning, the gang of revolting slaves was near one hundred people, and twenty-five white men, women, and children were dead. The rebels, now marching as a military column, tread fifteen miles west along the Pon Pon Road, a segment of the King's Highway linking Savannah and Charles Town. In the early afternoon, the rebels stopped in a clearing off the main road. In that clearing, they danced.

Why did a hundred slaves who were fleeing a murderous revolt, who already had a lead in their flight to Florida, stop to dance? The question was puzzling to South Carolina's whites and their answers were ungenerous. Some claimed later that the slaves imagined themselves to be victorious over the whole province, not understanding that the militia was on its way. Others suggested that the slaves were drunk, having stolen rum along their way. What white observers did not seem to understand is that they were

⁸⁷ In most of the historians' accounts noted above, Bathurst and Gibbs are thought to be the shopkeepers. This is not likely to be the case, however, as Peter Charles Hoffer points out in *Cry Liberty*, pp.79-80. Gibbs was a highway commissioner who owned more than fifteen hundred acres. Hoffer suggests Bathurst may have been his assistant.

⁸⁸ Accounts suggest that some slaves resisted the rebellion and in the case of slaveowner Thomas Rose, his slaves allegedly hid him from the approaching mob, saving his life. Later legal actions distinguished between those slaves believed to have joined by choice and those who were coerced.

likely witnessing a *sangamento*, a collective war dance that served to prepare Central African soldiers for battle. Father Lorenzo, a Capuchin missionary in Africa during the early eighteenth century, observed soldiers “commence to ‘sangare’ that is, to make contortions to demonstrate their force and their dexterity.”⁸⁹ The word *sangare*, and by extension, *sangamento*, are likely Portuguese derivations of *nsanga*, the dance through which an African soldier exhibited his ferocity while preparing the soul for battle. When *nsanga* were danced collectively, in the *sangamento*, they offered a kind of military review, bringing soldiers together into a united fighting force. Perhaps for this reason, West Central African armies seem to have never undertaken a large scale military campaign without first dancing a *sangamento*. Many of the slaves at Stono were likely to have been Kongolesse soldiers, as demonstrated by their facility with firearms. Therefore, it seems likely that they were dancing as a way of preparing for a battle they knew was coming.⁹⁰

The battle came when the militia arrived in the late afternoon. Colonial militias were not often of professional caliber; their training consisted mostly of “muster days” that were often more about drinking and conviviality than about drills and discipline. It would be hard to say who was outmatched in this contest: the well-armed amateur militia

⁸⁹ Quoted in Obi, p. 22.

⁹⁰ The question remains as to whether or not the slave rebels reasonably expected to win the battle they foresaw. Although historians have long understood the uprising in the context of the slaves possibly fleeing to Florida, the slaves only made it one-fifth of the way and trained soldiers such as these slaves likely were would have known how slim the possibility of continuing as a group would have been. The dance suggests that the slaves may have been preparing themselves for a “last stand” for freedom. On the other hand, it should also be kept in mind that not all slaves present would have understood the events in the same terms. Perhaps the Kongolesse soldiers who stole firearms at Hutchenson’s store and murdered nearby homeowners had grown to a multi-ethnic host of slaves with different expectations about where and why they were marching.

or the mostly-unarmed professional soldiers.⁹¹ In keeping with British military practice, the militia-men surely formed a firing line at the edge of the woods, launching volleys into the clearing. Muskets were unreliable at more than thirty feet, so the fusillade was probably not as deadly as may be imagined. Many slaves fled into the woods, some returning to their plantations in the hope that their masters had not noted their absence. Others stood their ground, including one who, according to a later secondhand account, “came up to his Master his Master asked him if he wanted to kill him the Negroe answered he did at the same time Snapping a Pistoll at him but it mist fire and his Master shot him thro’ the head.”⁹² A company of about ten slaves marched thirty miles south, according to an account later published in London’s *Gentleman’s Magazine*.⁹³ These men were likely part of the original company of Kongolesse soldiers, as it was customary for African infantrymen to retreat as a group, maintain organization and continuing to fight. These ten were eventually overtaken by planters on horseback, at which point they “fought stoutly” and were “killed on the spot.”⁹⁴

As the white militia took possession of the field, they interrogated wounded slaves and executed many on the spot. After some investigation, they determined that

⁹¹ It is impossible to say, of course, how *armed* the slaves were, just as it is impossible to say how many of them were trained soldiers. When the rebels pilfered arms from Hutchenson’s Store early that morning, they were a company of twenty or less. Now they were a host of a hundred or more. How much ammunition had they been able to carry that morning? How many of the slaves in the clearing were armed? ⁹² “A Ranger’s Report of Travels with General Oglethorpe, 1739-1742.” in *Stono: Documenting and Interpreting*, ed. Smith, pp. 7-8.

⁹³ “An Account of the Negroe Insurrection in South Carolina.” in *Stono: Documenting and Interpreting*, ed. Mark M. Smith, pp. 13-15. This account has often been ascribed to General Oglethorpe himself, though there has been some debate over the matter.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* I take this opportunity to re-iterate that historians have too often over-romanticized the sense of solidarity among the slaves involved in this incident. That some slaves beat a panicked retreat while others maintained military discipline further supports my contention that the hundred slaves who danced in the field were a mixed group, many of whom did not understand or subscribe to whatever goals the leaders had in mind.

many of the slaves had been forced to join and were not involved in the murders earlier that day. These slaves were pardoned. An anonymous letter writer, possibly General Oglethorpe, remarked, “this is to be said to the honor of the Carolina Planters, that notwithstanding the Provocation they had received from so many Murders, they did not torture one Negroe, but only put them to an easy death.”⁹⁵ However, the white militiamen performed at least one grisly act of vengeance: they beheaded the executed slaves and set them on pikes at every milepost along the bloody road. The severed heads were a form of spectacular violence intended to remind the surviving slaves of white power in the colony. No further reprisals were taken against the slave community (as sometimes happened in the wake of suppressed slave revolts elsewhere in the colonies), but the trail of heads leading south from Stono was enough to escalate the sense of grief and horror among fellow Africans.

The grisly events of the Stono Rebellion were punctuated at either end by beheadings. The slaves began their killing spree by beheading Bathurst and Gibbs, while the white militia put a period on the rebellion by decapitating the captured rebels. In both cases, the beheadings served some spectatorial purpose: Bathurst and Gibbs were displayed on Hutchenson’s stairs, while the heads of the suppressed rebels were piked along the side of the road over several miles. The symmetry of the narrative invites the historian to view these beheadings as discursive acts, that is, actions in conversation with one another that capitalized on the metaphorical resources inherent in the actions

⁹⁵ “Account of the Negroe Insurrection” in Smith, *Stono*, p. 15. Another account differs in claiming that some of the insurrectionists were gibbeted alive. (*The Boston Weekly News-Letter*, November 1, 1739). Either way, “honor” is a slippery concept for a modern historian looking back at a slaveholding society.

themselves.⁹⁶ Decapitation was sometimes committed against the corpses of executed slaves, with their heads being posted on the roofs or chimneys of the courthouse. This display made clear the implacability of white justice in a manner that could hardly be misunderstood: the significance of a bailiff's mace might be missed, but a head on a pike would not. For Africans, the detachment of the head from the body was a spiritual as well as a physical blow. A headless body was barred from entering the spiritual world, left to face the miserable fate of eternally wandering the realm of the undead.⁹⁷ For some ethnicities, a dismembered body prevented the soul from returning to Africa after death. Thus, the terror of decapitation was keenly felt among the slaves.

Perhaps the rebels at Hutchenson's Store were responding to English judicial practice when they decapitated Bathurst and Gibbs. It is more likely, though, that they were newly-arrived slaves who had not been in South Carolina long enough to witness such a thing. They might have witnessed decapitations among the Portuguese in Africa, or among the traders who had brought them to America. The practice was not germane to Kongolese warfare. They were borrowing from the white vocabulary of violence when they beheaded Bathurst and Gibbs, perhaps intending a direct inversion of colonial power relations. By setting the heads on the staircase, they consecrated Hutchenson's Store not as the scene of a murderous robbery, but as a site of execution. They claimed

⁹⁶ I do not mean to be blithe in focusing on murder as a metaphorical act. Paul Ricoeur has claimed that humans are inherently linguistically productive creatures who generate meaning through the metaphoricity of their actions as much as by their words (*The Rule of Metaphor*). I am following him here in reading these decapitations as acts rich in metaphorical power. I remain acutely aware of the human suffering that lies behind such a metaphor.

⁹⁷ Whites were probably aware of this dimension of African belief. It is worth noting that while English courts often ordered criminal corpses to be mutilated after death, no colonial court is known to have done so to a white body. By contrast, Virginia courts displayed slave heads on poles in at least twenty-six cases. See Douglas R. Egerton, "A Particular Mark of Infamy: Dismemberment, Burial, and Rebelliousness in Slave Societies" in *Mortal Remains*.

for themselves a legitimacy and the authority to judge the whites under whose yoke they had labored. They further vested themselves with judicial power when they spared the life of an innkeeper named Wallace, who they understood to be a kind master. In order for their actions to have adjudicatory power, they had to make their executions visible. In this light, the severed heads on Hutchenson's stairs sent a crucial message: "We will judge you, and we will execute justice as we see fit." The slaves carried the spectacular nature of their revolt further in burning down the neighboring farms. In the colonial landscape, the fires would have been visible for miles around. For the Stono rebels, arson was less significant as a property crime than it was a visual index of their power that spread terror across the Lowcountry.⁹⁸

When the militia beheaded the slave rebels, they wrested back judiciary power. They also reclaimed control over black bodies. Mutilation was the ultimate act of corporeal mastery. Decapitation dissolved personhood finally and indelibly, erasing the slave as a unified entity on both a physical and spiritual plane. But whites did not only regain their mastery of black bodies through the punishments they meted out to the rebels; they also asserted their control in the rewards they doled out to the faithful. The Commons House of Assembly identified slaves who had helped suppress the rebellion, such as Thomas Elliott's July and John Smith's Quash, and rewarded them with new suits, including a shirt, a coat, stockings, a hat, and a pair of shoes.⁹⁹ The new suit was

⁹⁸ Taken together the beheadings and the arson suggest a force that was more focused on arousing local terror than on slipping away to Florida. Twenty runaways—approximately the number at Hutchenson's Store—could have easily hid two bodies and no one been the wiser until the runaways had a substantial lead on the road to Florida. This was especially the case on a Sunday, when whites kept the Sabbath and slaves travelled back and forth to other plantations.

⁹⁹ A Commons House of Assembly Committee Report, in a Message to the Governor's Council, *Journal of the Upper House*, no. 7, (November 29, 1739) in Mark M. Smith, *Stono*, p. 18. This document also stipulates that July was given his freedom for his efforts, though there is no suggestion that this happened for any of the other slaves.

made of blue stroud wool with red facing and trimmed with shiny brass buttons. Thus, loyal slaves were emblemized as such by being clothed in the style of the white elite. But for a black body, sartorial finery could never read as affluence. The process of signification was interrupted by skin color, as the wearer's race declared him or her to be categorically denied the "grace" of gentility. The new suit served instead as a marker of submission, signifying its wearer as a loyal subordinate.

In response to the bloody revolt, South Carolina's General Assembly overhauled its slave code in early 1740.¹⁰⁰ The new act imposed more draconian control, not just on the slaves themselves, but on the masters. This new code made it illegal for masters to manumit their slaves or to teach them to read. It also limited masters to working their slaves no more than fifteen hours a day, even fewer in the winter, and stipulated that all slaves be given Sunday to themselves. Meanwhile, the new code barred slaves from carrying firearms, purchasing liquor, or leaving town or their plantation without a signed ticket from their master. Most pointedly, the new code prohibited "wooden swords and other dangerous weapons, or using or keeping of drums, horns, or other loud instruments." On the surface, it is remarkable that South Carolina legislators put musical instruments in the same sentence as "dangerous weapons," suggesting that the categories were parallel. But in the light of African martial arts, it seems clear that this provision was aimed as much at the dancing as the music. It is true that drums and other instruments could serve as communicators, announcing martial intentions across the Lowcountry landscape. But the "wooden swords" mentioned may have referred to the hallowed canes and staffs that were part of African dance and martial arts. What the

¹⁰⁰ Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes and Other Slaves in This Province." *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, in Mark M. Smith, *Stono*, pp. 20-27.

South Carolina General Assembly was protecting itself from in this provision was not just a communication network, but a complex of bodily practices that could erupt into overt violence at any moment.

While the General Assembly was trying to stem the tide of African dancing in South Carolina, other social forces were putting pressure on the dancing styles of the white elite. A growing class of middling tradesmen were raising doubts about genteel dancing as a suitable marker of class status. The Stono Rebellion was the first in a series of catastrophes in Charles Town and the Lowcountry that gave traction to this argument. In the next chapter, I trace the development of an anti-dancing rhetoric among the middling classes of Charles Town in the early 1740s.

Chapter Four

A New Grace: The Rise of the Benevolent Class

Hugh Bryan was a gentleman among gentlemen. Hugh was a member of one of South Carolina's most honorable planter families, having been born the second son of Joseph Bryan just before the turn of the eighteenth century. After the death of his first two wives before 1734, he married Catharine Barnwell, the daughter of one of South Carolina's founding families.¹ In 1735, he and his elder brother Joseph (the second) were appointed commissioners of the roads from Cambee to Port Royal and Purrysburg, and directed subscribers toward their agent in Charles Town.² In 1738, the General Assembly passed an act awarding him the management and profit of a new ferry on his estate at Cochran's Point.³ Hugh Bryan was highly regarded by his peers and wielded both economic and political power within the colony; he was just the sort of elite gentlemen who thrived in Charles Town's oligarchy.

Bryan's reputation began to change, however, in 1740. In that year, his wife Catherine died at the age of thirty, with no children, after six years of marriage.⁴ Also in that year, he met George Whitefield, the charismatic itinerant minister who was known throughout the colonies for his firebrand style of revivalist preaching. Bryan was captivated by Whitefield's persona, and he and his younger brother Jonathan converted. Bryan soon began to experience visions; impressions of Scripture passages emblazoned themselves on his imagination. Although Bryan initially fell into a personal crisis, he

¹ Joseph Gaston Baillie Bulloch, *A History of the Habersham Family*, p. 198.

² *SCG*, March 5, 1735

³ *SCG*, March 23, 1738.

⁴ Bulloch, p. 198. Hugh had a twelve-year-old daughter from his first wife, however.

understood the visions as assurance of his salvation. He wrote that he was “transported with raptures of joy from the rays of divine light and love darted into my soul, which fill my mouth with thanks.”⁵ He began to believe that God had elected him as a prophet and charged him to vilify Charles Town for its way of life. Bryan filled a book with his prophecies and sent it to the legislature. When a third of Charles Town was consumed in a devastating fire, Bryan claimed victory for the Lord in the local *Gazette*. Soon thereafter, he became convinced that God called on him to “smite the waters of the river, which should thereby be divided, so as he might go over, on dry ground.”⁶ Bryan took a rod and charged into the river, flailing and shouting until all of his enthusiasm was spent. When authorities came to serve him a warrant for his seditious prophesies, he was repentant, sober, ashamed.⁷

Bryan’s downfall was comic; Anne Le Brasseur’s was not. Like Bryan, Le Brasseur was a member of the South Carolina elite, her husband Francis having been a successful merchant of wholesale and retail goods. A *Gazette* ad of 1732 suggests a sumptuous display of “blue Ozenbrig, irish Linnen, Silesia Linnens sorted, scotch Cloth, diaper Clouts sorted, suits of Napkins & Table-cloaths, ghentish Holland, gulick Holland; bag Holland, brown Holland, Cambric & Garlix sorted; sheeting Linnens.”⁸ The Brasseurs also had a plantation from which they advertised for runaway slaves and horses throughout the 1730s.⁹ Also like Bryan, Anne had recently lost her spouse when

⁵ qtd in Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, p. 217.

⁶ Kidd, p. 218.

⁷ He issued an apology in the *Gazette* in March (as part of his sentence) in which he attributed the “impressions of [his] mind” to Satan’s influence.

⁸ *SCG*, November 4, 1732.

⁹ At a time when most retail merchants in Charles Town lived and worked in the same space, the Brasseurs’ plantation is a reliable index of their pecuniary worth. Anne’s obituary in the *Gazette* also described her as being of “considerable fortune.”

she met Whitefield, although Anne had been a widow for three years. These were a restless three years for Anne; She moved between living spaces while renting out her plantation and *Gazette* ads proclaimed that she was leaving the province on two separate occasions. But after Whitefield touched her life, she became one of his prime disciples. His ministry filled her with a sense of purpose and a longing for the great hereafter. On a June day in 1742, she retreated to her house across from the French Church, brandished a pistol loaded with a brace of balls, and shot herself. According to the obituary in the *Gazette*, she “expired in an Hour or two after, professing her full Assurance of her Salvation, and that she longed to be in the blessed Mansions which she knew were prepared for her.”¹⁰ Her young child was committed to the care of Rev. Alexander Garden, minister of the Anglican Church.

Hugh Bryan and Anne Le Brasseur were casualties of a new wave of evangelicalism that was sweeping across the colonies. This wave emphasized the emotional experience of the individual worshipper over the corporate unity of a disciplined congregation. This emphasis on individualism and interior experience was not unique to the evangelical movement, however. I argue in this chapter that the evangelical movement in Charles Town articulated itself within the context of a broader turn towards sincerity and benevolence throughout the colonies. This turn was concomitant with the rise of an upper-middling class, that is, members of the “middling sort” who were ascending in the social order through their business successes. This emergent class—not yet fully articulated as the “middle class” in a strict sense—challenged the elite posturing of Charles Town’s social set and replaced the outward definition of gentility, marked by physical grace and elite dance styles, with an

¹⁰ *SCG*, June 21, 1742.

inward definition of gentility, distinguished by compassion and benevolence.

In this chapter, I focus especially on those public critics who questioned the suitability of dance as a marker of status. In *South Carolina Gazette* editorials and other primary documents, two distinct and interrelated strains of anti-dance rhetoric took shape. One was the theological argument posed by George Whitefield, Josiah Smith, Sophia Hume, and other religious figures. This view argued for a very different kind of “grace,” the “Mystery of Godliness” that evangelicals experienced during the Great Awakening. The other strain was the emerging world view of middling strivers who contested the exclusivity and decadence of colonial ball culture. This view sought to replace the outward definition of gentility, marked by physical grace and elite dance styles, with an inward definition of gentility, distinguished by compassion and benevolence. Both of these anti-dance worldviews sought to replace kinesthetic schemes of status performance with an essentialized inner sincerity. The resulting tension between the established social barons and the emerging ranks of strivers had a transformative effect on Charles Town’s social development throughout the rest of the eighteenth century.

The spectacular downfall of Hugh Bryan and the poignant end of Anne Le Brasseur were squarely in the crossfire of this dispute. For the modest and hard-working trade class, these episodes confirmed the decadent eccentricity of the elites, suggesting that many of them lacked the mettle to assume the authority that was the birthright of their class. For the established elites, these episodes confirmed the destructive radicalism inherent in the new paradigm of interiority, hinting at the threat to order if traditional class patterns were done away with. For both sides, they were emblems of a shift in the

social order, as the landscape of authority in South Carolina became increasingly less clear.

The Mulatto Gentleman

The South Carolina Gazette ran an editorial in 1735, complaining about status posers who “by their Industry or good Fortune, from mean Beginnings find themselves in Circumstances a little more easy, there is an Ambition seizes many of them immediately to become Gentlefolks.” The editorialist, styling himself as “Blackamore,” ridiculed social climbing, claiming that one “cannot help considering him as a Monkey that climbs a Tree, the higher he goes, the more he shews his Arse.” Blackamore even went so far as to couch social climbing in the terms of racial amalgamation: “With Regard to the Respect shown them by the true Gentry, and the no Gentry, our half Gentry are exactly in the Case of the Mulattoes abovementioned... there are perhaps Mulattoes in Religion, in Politics, in Love, and in several other Things; but of all sorts of Mulattoes, none appear to me so monstrously ridiculous as the Mulatto Gentleman.”

Given the rhetorical force of Blackamore’s poison pen, perhaps it should come as little surprise that Blackamore was none other than a twenty-seven-year-old Benjamin Franklin. Franklin could have been writing about himself: by 1733, he had already begun his rise from a simple tradesman to a distinguished figure in Philadelphia’s public sphere. He had joined the Freemasons in 1730, founded the Library Company in 1731, and was now the official printer for the Philadelphia Legislature. In this light, the essay reads as an expression of Franklin’s own anxiety about his rising status. Franklin is instilling in himself and his readers the idea that true gentility is not an outward show of

class status, but an inner disposition gained through “Experience of men [and] knowledge of books, or even common wit.” He relays the story of a supposed acquaintance, Jack Chopstick, who comes into some money and attempts to socialize outside of “his natural sphere.” But his performance is a misfire: “[for] ’tis the curse of *imitation*, that it almost always either under-does or over-does.” Chopstick becomes a laughing stock among the “people of the best sense and the most polite, [as] his absurdities, which were scarcely taken notice of among us, stand evident among them, and afford them continual matter of diversion.” Cast out by polite society, Chopstick cannot even return to his former social station, “[for] now he cannot speak to me.”

The disposition of the true gentleman and the struggle between internal sentiment and external pretension were on Franklin’s mind throughout the summer of 1733. In July, he had run an editorial criticizing anyone who would use their status to demean others: “Know, ye Wretches, that the meanest insect, the trifling Musketoe, the filthy Bugg, have, as well as you, the Power of giving Pain to Men; But to be able to give Pleasure to your fellow Creatures, requires Good-Nature, and a kind and humane Disposition, joined with Talents to which ye seem to have no Pretension.”¹¹ For Franklin, gentility was an inner distinction, borne out by kindness and “good-nature,” not by the external distinction of a graceful posture.

Franklin carried through his hostility to the outward effects of gentility in a clamor over Philadelphia’s Dancing Assembly in 1740. In April of that year, the Reverend William Seward, an associate of George Whitefield, closed up Robert Bolton’s assembly room and pocketed the keys. Members of the Dancing Assembly were

¹¹ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 12, 1733

incensed and broke open the doors. When Franklin reported on the event, the gentlemen of the Dancing Assembly took umbrage at what they saw as Franklin's insinuation that Whitefield's preaching had converted them, "as tho' he had met with Success among the better sort of People in Pennsylvania."¹² Franklin countered the next week under the pseudonym "Obadiah Plainman." After correcting the gentlemen's claims as to points of fact and reportage, he took a final swipe at their Dancing Assembly: "For my own Part...I cannot conceive how any Person's Reputation can be prejudiced, tho' it should be reported, that he has left off making of Legs, or cutting of Capers."¹³ Franklin, who was thoroughly socially connected and maintained memberships in several of Philadelphia's social clubs, never joined the Dancing Assembly. His close friends Thomas Hopkinson and William Plumsted and his son William were members, but Franklin was not. Leo Lemay has speculated that "Perhaps a prejudice against dancing (and inability to dance?) is one of the unremarked Boston (Puritan?) influences on Franklin."¹⁴

Franklin's antipathy to dancing and his anxiety over the outward effects of polite society reflected the suspicions of a new class emerging within colonial society by midcentury. This class originated among the "middling sort"—tradesmen, artisans, and other skilled workers—who were beginning to reap the benefit of the expanding colonial economy. As these businessmen began to thrive, they found themselves in transit between the modesty of their origins and the polite society into which they were rising. For modern historians, Franklin has been particularly emblematic of that rise, and several recent biographies have painted the circumstances of Franklin's life as the ur-

¹² *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 8, 1740.

¹³ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 15, 1740.

¹⁴ J. A. Leo Lemay, *The Life of Benjamin Franklin, Volume 2: Printer and Publisher, 1730-1747*. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 2006.) p. 429.

text of the American Dream.¹⁵ But for this class in transit, trying to preserve a continuity of self meant struggling to locate identity in internal values rather than external effects. Emergent businessmen—the “upper-middling”—were already indoctrinated into the values of their station, values that coalesced around the circumstances of commerce on a smaller scale. Merchants and planters participating in trans-Atlantic markets had their own codes, behaviors, and values through which they built their identity as an elite class. But the emerging upper-middling class re-calibrated these values as they joined the elite ranks, pitching for a balance between resistance and assimilation.

Anxiety over class fluidity was not just the pique of established elites; it was a concern throughout Charles Town’s social structure. Order and hierarchy were essential to the fabric of South Carolina life, and class was an essential marker of that order. In the *Book of Homilies* that Anglicans read from every Sunday, the *Homily of Obedience* stated, “Every degree of people in their vocations, calling, and office, hath appointed to them their duty and order. Some are in high degree, some in low, and everyone have need of the other.”¹⁶ Charles Town businessmen lived out this mutual need in the “commercial friendships” that Defoe laid out in his *Complete Tradesman*. Participants in the colonial market environment were bonded together through thick commercial networks, and each individual in this network needed to behave conventionally for the network to run smoothly. When someone managed to change station, there was always a hazard that they would not be fluent in the new conventions to which they were called to adhere.

Franklin’s essay tied anxiety over class fluidity to another of colonial America’s rising fears: racial amalgamation. In Charles Town, this anxiety erupted in a public

¹⁵ For instance, see Gordon Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

¹⁶ qtd in Louis P. Nelson, p. 280.

debate in the pages of the *Gazette* in the early 1730s. The debate began with a poem in March of 1732:

The CAMELEON LOVER
 If what the Curious have observ'd be true,
 That the Cameleon will assume the Hue
 Of all the Objects that approach its
 Touch; No Wonder then, that the Amours
 of such
 Whose Taste betrays them to a close Embrace
 With the dark Beauties of the Sable Race,
 (Stain'd with the Tincture of the Sooty Sin,)
 Imbibe the Blackness of their Charmer's Skin.¹⁷

An outraged reader identifying himself only as “Albus” wrote a lengthy reply the next week. Albus raged against the poem and the “scandalous Offence, there hinted at.”¹⁸ In Albus’s worldview, whiteness and blackness were divinely ordained categories, structured by higher and lower degree, respectively (“...this Distinction of Colour, in our Complexion, from that other Part of his human Creatures, of the opposite Hue, may be a concurrent Instance of his Favour.”). The hierarchy of skin tone that this essay implies was analogous to the hierarchy of vocation suggested in the *Homily of Obedience*. Racial amalgamation was in Albus’s view a transgression against divine order: “What then can be said of Those, who, living in the full Possession of those Indulgences, shall yet dare to subvert and deface the Order and Beauty , which this our All-wise Creator has discovered to us through all his Works? To say nothing of the base Ingratitude of the Fact, it must surely be allowed to be the grossest Affront upon his Wisdom.” Albus specifically called out racial amalgamation as an “ingratitude” against the divinely-ordained privileges of whiteness, and excoriated the gentleman who would not

¹⁷ *SCG*, March 18, 1732.

¹⁸ *SCG*, March 25, 1732.

feel horror to behold “the exact Features of his own Face, skulking beneath the base thin Disguise of a tawny Complexion.”

As “Cameleon Lover” and Albus’s response illustrate, attitudes towards interracial sexual contact varied from flippant indulgence to indignant horror. Another poem ran in response in the same *Gazette* issue as Albus’s letter. This other poem, signed ‘Sable,’ joined the original poet in laughing off interracial love:

My Faults you too severely reprehend,
More like a rigid Censor than a Friend.
Love is the Monarch Passion of the Mind,
Knows no Superior, by no Laws confin'd.¹⁹

These conflicting points of view were evidence of a growing divide among the Charles Town public. On the one hand, there were those—especially among the wealthy elites—who regarded interracial sex as a naughty-but-inevitable indiscretion. When Pastor John Martin Boltzius visited Charles Town from Georgia in October of 1741, he noted in his diary that “the Europeans commit dreadful excesses with the Negro girls, as a result of which one sees many half-white children running around. I was told that many leading gentlemen do not marry but commit their disgrace with such heathen folk, which, however, is considered little or no shame.”²⁰ On the other hand, a growing contingent of voices shouted down this behavior. In 1743, South Carolina’s Grand Jury declared “the

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ George Fenwick Jones, “John Martin Boltzius’s Trip to Charleston, October 1742.” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* (Vol 82 No 8, 1981), 101.

too common practice of CRIMINAL CONVERSATION with Negro and other slave wenches in this province, as an Enormity and Evil of general Ill-Consequence.”²¹

It was also more squarely in the self-interest of the middling class to clearly delineate racial distinction. As Philip Morgan has argued, social and legal controls in South Carolina kept black slaves in a more firmly subordinate position than in other colonies. The wealthy elites had less to fear from the issue of interracial mingling. The fundamental social distinctions were too vast a chasm to be bridged by a few openly carnal liaisons. On the other hand, the middling and lower classes lived across a thinner barrier between their lives and the lives of slaves. Although there was a legal architecture that stipulated clear distinctions between blacks and whites (especially after the Slave Code of 1740), there is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that many of those laws were incompletely applied. Charles Town’s sub-elite whites lived cheek-by-jowl with a black population that proved perennially resistant to social and legal controls. They encountered blacks at the downscale dram-shops and tippling-houses where they retired for drinks, they encountered blacks moving unrestrainedly through the streets on official business for their masters, and they encountered blacks at the Sunday markets where slave women sold their wares. The laborers among them likely competed with hired-out black slaves for work on ships and in warehouses along the wharves. The specter of interracial sexuality haunted the heart of the city in the form of Mulatto Row, an alley of brothels on Union, just a block and a half south of St. Philip’s Church. For the laboring and middling whites who lived their days in the urban mixing pot, racial

²¹ *SCG*, March 28, 1743.

differentiation was a strategy of alterity that aligned their interests more closely with the elite class and distanced them further from slaves and free blacks.

The deepening cultural divide between the elites and the ‘middling sort’ was at the heart of the public tension over miscegenation. For the modest tradesmen and small-business owners of Charles Town, interracial sex was emblematic of one of the great dangers that a ruling class might bring down on society: luxury. Luxury was the gateway to decadence, effeminacy, and dissipation.²² Luxury was antithetical to the middle-class values of modesty and frugality. Luxury was its own bad result, but it might also bring on other consequences as well. During a tornado in May of 1737, one reader wrote in to the *Gazette* to suggest that the storm was “a Chastise of divine Vengeance of the Luxury and Pride of the Inhabitants, tho' no measures are taken to avert it.”²³ A letter from Spanish Town, Jamaica, in the same year, exposed the role that luxury might play in the decaying of authority, which would have fearful repercussions in the slave-heavy Lowcountry: “Our once most flourishing Island is now exceedingly upon the Decline; and nothing so much as *Luxury*, Poverty, Taxes and Faction abound among us: Neither are our intestine Wars with the rebellious Negroes in the least abated; and nothing is become more common, than to hear of Plantations burnt and utterly destroy'd by them, insomuch that some of our distant Parishes will be oblig'd in a little Time to abandon their Habitations.”²⁴ In the ideology of the middling sort, luxury was seen as corrosive to the bonds of civic order.

²² In August of 1746, a reader wrote in to the *Gazette* and made the link between luxury and effeminacy explicit when he criticized members of the town “who have hitherto wallowed in Luxury and consequently are very much disposed to Effeminacy.” (*SCG*, August 23, 1746).

²³ *SCG*, May 21, 1737.

²⁴ *SCG*, January 29, 1737.

For the ascendant upper-middling class, then, a delicate balance had to be struck. As tradesmen and artisans, these businessmen grew up in the ideology of a class that drew its identity and sense of security from the virtues of hard work, modesty, and civic order. But as they entered elite circles, it became necessary for these businessmen to adapt their cultural values in order to assimilate into their new station. At the same time, many upper-middling strivers resisted certain cultural practices and values of the elite class, while embracing and transforming others. The result was a set of cultural practices that were aligned neither entirely with nor entirely against the polite world that South Carolina elites had forged for themselves by 1740.²⁵ For the upper-middling class, such adaptations had to be calibrated and institutionalized through a deliberative process. Fortunately for them, the elites already had such a mechanism built into the fabric of their society in the form of social clubs.

“Be Firm to Your Duty”: From Social Clubs to Charities

Associational life expanded rapidly throughout the empire in the early eighteenth century. Exclusionary clubs offered gentlemen and affluent would-be gentlemen the opportunity to develop and display the patterns of grace and learning that befitted their station. These clubs sometimes met in private homes, other times in public places, such as high-end taverns or assembly rooms. Many clubs met in both private and public spaces at different times, thus weaving together a genteel urban landscape that fused

²⁵ This process of adaptation was underway throughout the colonies in the mid-eighteenth century. As I have already made clear, Benjamin Franklin has carried the metonymous weight for modern historians studying this process, as his literary output and the circumstances of his early adulthood powerfully illustrate the mental and material processes of this adaptation. Charles Town merits attention on its own terms, however, because the divide between the ruling (elite) class and the middling orders was wider, both in terms of money and influence.

private and public spheres. Clubs were crucial institutions in the transformation of the public sphere into a site wherein private householders could express and debate alternative policies and philosophies.²⁶ David S. Shields has described the clubs as “havens of play and free conversation in which the sorts of expressions most troublesome to church and state could be voiced, whether with seditious plainness, or, more artfully, as travesty.”²⁷ But these clubs were not engines of democratization; they were still venues for genteel display whose membership was often only open to the upper echelons of British society. Most clubs ascribed to a body of rules and principles, many of which emphasized charitable or artistic aims; nevertheless, the main activities of most clubs involved elegant dinners, solemn parades, and courtly dancing.

Shields has also suggested that London’s social clubs employed two common strategies for shielding their seditiousness from public censure.²⁸ On the one hand, many groups emphasized their charitable aims and piousness towards the public good. On the other hand, many groups cast themselves as trivial—and thus toothless—by emphasizing the frivolity and ridiculousness of their proceedings. These strategies survived the translation of club society into the provinces, and eventually coalesced into genre patterns for club activity. Of the former category, academies and conventicles in the early part of the century gave way in British America to library societies, private insurance groups, and those societies that sought to develop the fine and performing arts. The latter category found expression throughout British America as well, perhaps most notably in the Tuesday Club of Annapolis at midcentury. These motifs for associational life were

²⁶ Habermas, et al. Margaret C. Jacob.

²⁷ Shields, 1997, p. 175.

²⁸ Shields, 1997, pp. 176-177.

not mutually exclusive—as Shields points out, the Freemasons employed them both—but the tension between the two dispositions often brought about conflict and criticism as the associations insinuated themselves into colonial power structures. In Charles Town, social clubs maintained the tension between charity and frivolity, and the emergence of the upper-middling class both complicated and deepened that tension.

Charles Town's rice boom quickly occasioned the formation of English-style social clubs. Throughout the 1730s, several such clubs were formed to the purpose of bonding gentlemen together for both commercial and convivial purposes. These associations ostensibly existed for fraternity and charity, lending the colony's powerful elites an outlet for homosocial conviviality while also giving them a channel through which to consolidate their financial resources into a kind of "safety net." They were often formed along ethnic lines, ostensibly committing themselves to the support of ethnically similar newcomers to the colony, although none of these organizations closed its membership to other ethnicities. Club dues and membership fees were pooled together for the relief of those members who fell on hard circumstances. In this respect, the clubs functioned as early insurance schemes. The funds raised by these charitable societies could not only be used to prop up established gentlemen who were brought low by circumstances, it also allowed them to "sponsor" new arrivals in the colony. One such new arrival was Dr. Thomas Dale, who was sponsored by the St. George's Society upon his arrival in Charles Town. Dale was fleeing debt and penury in London. He went on to become not only an active member of the St. George's club, but also a vocal member of the city's cultural set.

In 1729, the St. Andrew's Society was set up for protecting and promoting the interests of Scottish immigrants, although the membership rolls show a far more diverse group, representing many of the most powerful individuals and families in the colony. This club was built in the charitable vein, declaring as its goal to "alleviate the cares of life; to endear men to one another."²⁹ The group raised a common fund to provide relief to those in want. Although the group certainly came to the aid of its members when necessary, much of the aid it provided was to non-members in the Charles Town community-at-large. Within the first two years of the society's existence, they raised seven hundred pounds and gave in charity four hundred and sixty pounds, "a good part of which Charity is defrayed by the Quarterly payment due by each Member of 7s. 6d. As the principal Design of this Club is to assist all People in distress, of whatsoever Nation or Profession they be, it's not doubted, their Number and Stock will continue to increase."³⁰

That the St. Andrew's Society had a more august complexion is not surprising given the gravitas of its members. The membership rolls of the society's first decade reveal names from every pillar of Charles Town's power elite: Royal Governor Robert Johnson, Reverend Alexander Garden of St. Philip's, rising merchant elites such as Robert Pringle, wealthy landowners such as Alexander Skene (who was also a Council Member), and military leaders such as Alexander Vanderdussen or Maj. General James Douglas.³¹ In this first decade, the society accrued a glut of honorifics: two baronets, two

²⁹ *St. Andrew's Rules*, p. i.

³⁰ From a notice in the *South Carolina Gazette*, December 9, 1732.

³¹ *Rules of the South Carolina Society Established at Charleston A.D. 1736*, thirteenth edition, (Charleston: Lucas and Richardson, April 1886); for what it's worth, wealthy landowners had less of a presence in the St. Andrew's Society than they did in later groups such as the St. George's Society.

reverends, several doctors, and a host of esquires. Perhaps the group's most unlikely member was accepted in 1735, when the St. Andrew's Society conferred membership (remotely) on Kouli Khan, the Shah of Iran. Kouli Khan, also known by Nadir Shah and many other names, was a Persian general who by 1735 had already deposed Tahmasp II (shah of Iran after his father Husayn abdicated) and was leading a wildly successful military campaign against Ottoman invaders to reclaim Georgia and Armenia.³²

That a Scottish ethnic society in South Carolina conferred membership on such a figure not only suggests the global consciousness of South Carolina's elite class, but also attests to the de facto function of the society. However lofty or charitable the society's goals, it functioned largely as a matrix through which currents of power came into contact with one another. In this regard, the St. Andrew's Society provided an unparalleled opportunity for those of its members who were not already established in Charles Town's power elite to gain the social capital necessary to rise to higher posts. One example is John Clark, a shoemaker at Ashley Ferry who was among the original founders of the Society as a young man and rose to the position of constable in 1744.³³ However, the majority of St. Andrew's members were already established when they joined, and those who did rise to a higher station than that in which they entered only rose to relatively modest positions when compared to the mobility enjoyed by members of later societies.

³² Nadir Shah went on to expand the Persian Empire by conquering large parts of the Mughal Empire and other key parts of the Middle East and South Asia. His exploits were well known throughout Europe, and the power vacuum left in India after his assassination in 1747 may have been one of the precipitating conditions of the British expansion into that country.

³³ This John Clark should not be confused with the John Clark who served as rector for St. Philip's Parish, the latter having only arrived in Charles Town in 1754.

In April of 1733, a group of interested gentlemen gathered at Thomas Batchellor's house and laid out articles for the St. George's Society, a private club devoted to the propagation of English culture in Charles Town.³⁴ If the St. Andrew's Society presented itself as a sober and serious group of powerful men interested in the common good, the St. George's Society may be said to have filled out the more frivolous possibilities of gentlemen's sociability. The founding itself was immediately precipitated by the elaborate celebration of St. George's Day the year before. The *Gazette* ran a poem by "Dismal Doggerel" in March of 1732 announcing the hijinks to follow in April:

Twenty-third, did I say 'no ---- that will be Sunday,
Excuse the Mistake ---- on the following Monday
The Gates of Fort Jolly we resolve to attack,
And, without Fire or Sword, that strong Garrison sack.

The Commander, we know, 's a tough militant Blade,
And may not perhaps be so easily taken;
Yet, as stout as he is, no Defence can be made
'Gainst 'th Havoc design'd on his Fowls and his Bacon.

Yes, their Destruction 's resolv'd, to Pot they shall go,
But hush, not a Whisper to your Mistress or Wife
There's a Stratagem laid, which good Sirs, you well know,
May (with Conduct) preserve a brave Volunteer's Life.

And since a Secret in War Success oft begets,
We tip you the Wink, by the By, in this Paper.
And invite you next Thursday to Trooper Pointsetts
That our Plot mayn't take Air by Listner or Gaper.

The Orders you know, then be firm to your Duty,
Have Courage, my Lads, for there's nothing to hurt
us. If unmov'd by Hopes of your Share in the Booty.
Remember the Forfeit on those that desert us.

³⁴ David S. Shields. *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters in British America*. (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia by University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 283.

The next month, the *Gazette* ran a description of the caper, offering a rare glimpse into a carnivalesque performance in the early Georgian colonies:

CHARLESTOWN, April 29.--Last Sunday (being St. George's Day) the Celebration of that Festival was deferr'd to the Day following, when the Company of Fort-Jolly Volunteers, consisting of 25 able Men, met at the House of Trooper Pointsett, their usual House of Rendezvous, from whence they proceeded to the Water-side, to embark on board the Transports that lay ready for that Purpose, and were saluted at their Departure, with five Guns from each of the Merchant Ships in the Harbour. The Wind and Tide being against them, they found it necessary to land about 2 Miles short of the Fort, which made it impracticable to carry up their heavy Cannon, but being provided with a sufficiency of Small Arms, and Great Courage, they march'd with indefatigable Resolution up to the Gates, with Colors flying, Drums beating, and Trumpets sounding, &c. After 2 Dollies the Fort was surrendered upon their own Terms, which were so honorably complied with, that no Man had reason to be dissatisfied with his Share of the Plunder. After this, they march'd in Order to the new Battery, which was well provided with Ammunition, &c. Where, under a Discharge of the Cannon round the Battery, at each Health, they drank to the pious Memory of King William the 3d. Prosperity to the House of Hanover, and several other loyal Healths. This being done, they returned, in the same good Order, to their General, who kept the Garrison, and having taken all necessary Precautions to keep it in due Submission for the future, they remarked again, and happily arrived in Town, about Eight that Evening, and at their Landing were saluted by the Ships in the Harbour as before. But the Crowds of Spectators and Friends to congratulate them on the Success of the Day, being so great, it was with some difficulty, that they march'd regularly in their Return to the Troopers. N.B. There was never a Man kill'd, but 1 wounded. As the Persons engaged in the Annual Meeting abovementioned, are Gentlemen of Worth and Abilities, it is not to be doubted, but, like many other Societies of the like Nature, it will in due time be directed to some beneficial Purpose to such of their Country, as may be proper Objects of their Benevolence, and that they may live to hear their Praises sounded, not by the Voice of the Trumpets only.³⁵

The “Fort Jolly Volunteers” were a rambunctious fraternity, made up of “Gentlemen of Worth and Abilities,” but gentlemen who were committed more to their own mirth than to a social conscience. David S. Shields describes this event as evincing “the low humor of masculine sociability.” The postscript, however, points the way to an emerging sense

³⁵ SCG, May 6, 1732.

of gravity among the participants, and by the next year, some of the Fort Jolly crew had established “proper Rules” and collected membership subscriptions. The Society was officially established at the house of Robert Raper, where, amidst an elegant dinner, John Bayly was chosen president. However, even among newly stated benevolent goals, the St. George’s Society always maintained its function as an arena for theatricality.

Clubs such as St. George’s and St. Andrew’s were exclusive sites of genteel performance. Members signaled their class status through parades, balls, and elegant dinners. Although their meetings were usually closed, there was a semi-public character to the proceedings that kept this genteel performance in the public eye. Meetings were announced in the *Gazette*, and so were the officers elected at these meetings. Meetings were often preceded by a procession or parade, allowing members to showcase the dignity and flamboyance of their club. The Freemasons, who were another exclusive social club, began their annual anniversary meetings by assembling at the Grand Master’s house and parading by the sound of French horns to Shepheard’s tavern. At the tavern, members of the public who bought a ticket to the proceedings were treated to “a very grand Show” which included a speech in praise of Masonry delivered by the Grand Master. After this show, the Freemasons withdrew in order to attend to official business, such as the election of the following year’s officers.³⁶ The Freemasons also sponsored a command performance at the Queen Street Theater in 1737. The *Gazette* reported afterwards that the Masons had arrived “about 7 o’clock, in the usual manner, and made a very decent and solemn appearance.”³⁷ Before the play, Masonic songs were sung from

³⁶ *SCG*, January 5, 1738.

³⁷ *SCG*, May 28, 1737.

stage, with the Masons joining in on the choruses. Afterwards, the Masons “return’d to the lodge at Mr. Shepheard’s, in the same order observed in coming to the Playhouse.”³⁸

The South Carolina Society, by contrast, came from much humbler origins. The seed of this organization was in a cohort of French immigrants, members of the French Protestant church, one of whom had opened a small tavern to support himself and his family. Seeing that their colleague was struggling with his new business, other members of the congregation resolved to conduct their business at the tavern at least two nights a week.³⁹ This campaign evidently worked, and the group began raising a collection among its members in the same fashion as the St. Andrew’s and St. George’s societies had done. This new group, being made up of middle-class tradesmen, contributed a more modest sum: only fifteen pence.⁴⁰ Ten of these men officially organized themselves into the French Club in September of 1737, though they were more commonly known as the “Two Bit Club” for the cheapness of their dues. French was the only language spoken at the club’s meetings, and soon local French immigrants and French-speaking Britons began to join the club. The Britons who joined claimed to want to improve their facility with the French language, although the low membership dues were likely the greater temptation. By the next April, the group had swelled to forty members and the official language was changed to English. The group was re-named the South Carolina Society.

³⁸ The Freemasons may not have been the only club with explicit ties to the theatre. As Julia Curtis has pointed out, the *Gazette* advertisement for subscriptions to the soon-to-be-built theatre appeared in the *Gazette* scarcely a week after the St. George’s Society met at Shepheard’s tavern (in 1735; see Curtis’s “The Early Charleston Stage: 1703-1798,” PhD diss., Indiana University, 1968., p. 20). When the theatre opened the following season, an epilogue by Dr. Thomas Dale was performed, and Dale was an active member of the St. George’s Society. It may be that the St. George’s Society was the launching pad for the theatre project. (For more on Dale and the St. George’s Society, see David Shields, 1997, pp. 275-301.)

³⁹ This origin story was reported in the sixth edition of the *Rules of the Incorporated South-Carolina Society* in 1795. The records of the club’s founding and early years burned in the fire of 1740.

⁴⁰ At twelve pence to a shilling, the South Carolina Society’s dues were about one-sixth as high as the dues for the St. Andrew’s Society.

The South Carolina Society offered the same forum for mixing social and commercial contacts that earlier groups such as the St. Andrew's and St. George's had, but they offered this opportunity at bargain prices. While a member of the South Carolina Society may not have come into a direct relationship with the ruling elite, the middling tradesmen of this club were capable of knitting together networks of more modest power. Of the thirty men who joined between September of 1737 and April of 1738, those who can be traced through the evidentiary record were all tradesmen: Hugh Evans was a tailor, John Bee was a carpenter, William Pollard was a silversmith, George Helm was a baker, Gabriel Guignard was a cooper, Moreau Sarrazin was a jeweler, Moses Audebert and Richard Herbert were both perukemakers. Among those men who joined during this period were Lewis Timothy, the printer of the South Carolina Gazette, Henry Campbell, the dancing master, and the improbably-named Rice Price, a local merchant who administrated numerous land sales and estate auctions. The coordination of interests and trades in the South Carolina Society allowed the membership to form alliances that were vital to commercial success. For instance, Thomas Tew joined the club in October of 1737 and Emanuel Smith joined the following March; in August of 1740, the pair announced in the *Gazette* that they were going into partnership with one another.⁴¹ Nearly a year later, Smith announced his retirement for health reasons and declared his full faith in Tew, "who has managed all our Business in our Shop for near a Year, to my Satisfaction."⁴²

In addition, many of these men were parishioners of St. Phillip's, the Anglican church that stood at the center of Charles Town's power structure. Although the club had

⁴¹ *SCG* August 1, 1740.

⁴² *SCG* April 2, 1741.

begun as a cohort of French Protestant congregation members, the middling ranks of St. Philip's infiltrated the club so quickly that it might productively be thought of as an invasion. As members of the powerful Anglican congregation, these men knew how power could be channeled through overlapping religious fellowship and secular conviviality. Several prominent members of St. Philip's were also prominent members of the St. Andrew's Society. By garrisoning the South Carolina Society, these men were creating their own corollary to St. Andrew's; a club where they could adjoin and consolidate their own lines of power into a more substantial collective effort.

The class identity that this middling sort was carving out for itself conjoined political and economic power with cultural distinctiveness. By 1751, South Carolina governor James Glen observed a "middle sort" in Charles Town that set itself apart in its behaviors and values as much as in its circumstances.⁴³ This new middle sort shared values with the rising class of tradesmen and artisans across the British Atlantic: they were entrepreneurial heads of household dedicated to hard work, sympathetic to charitable impulses, and willing to share the management of their business with their wives.⁴⁴ This same class differentiated itself further from the established elites by rejecting leisure and abjuring the decadence and indolence of elite lifestyles.

Lewis Timothy, the printer of the *South Carolina Gazette* and a member of the South Carolina Society, exemplified the character of this new class. Timothy was born Louis Timotheé in Holland in 1699, the son of French Huguenots who had fled

⁴³ Glen quoted in Emma Hart, "'The Middling Order Are Odious Characters': Social Structure and Urban Growth in Colonial Charleston, South Carolina." *Urban History* (Vol 34, Issue 2: 2007).

⁴⁴ On the behaviors and values of this class throughout the British Empire, see Margaret Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England, 1680-1780* (Los Angeles, 1996), as well as the essays in Jonathan Barry and Christopher Brooks, eds., *The Middling Sort of People: Culture, Society, and Politics in England, 1550-1800* (New York: St. Martin's, 1994).

to Rotterdam to escape persecution. He and his wife Elizabeth immigrated to Philadelphia with their four children in 1731, and Timotheé soon found work as a printer for Benjamin Franklin. Under Franklin he published Philadelphia's first German-language newspaper in 1732, although it was not successful. When Thomas Whitmarsh (the original printer of the *South Carolina Gazette* and another Franklin protégé) died in 1733, Franklin entered into a partnership with Timotheé, offering expensive equipment such as a press and letters in exchange for a third of the profits; Timotheé changed his name to Lewis Timothy and moved to South Carolina. As South Carolina's publisher of record, Timothy maintained an even hand, avoiding factionalism and remaining impartial through the social and political debates of the 1730s.⁴⁵ Franklin wrote years later that after Timothy's death in 1738, his wife Elizabeth "continued to account with the greatest regularity and exactness every quarter afterwards, and managed the business with such success that she not only brought up reputably a family of children, but, at the expiration of the term, was able to purchase of me the printing-house and establish her son in it."⁴⁶ The Timothys were respectable and upstanding folk (Franklin praised Lewis as "honest") who succeeded through hard work and entrepreneurship, established business connections based on mutuality, and with Elizabeth contributing to the business as an equal partner.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ For more on Timothy's impartiality, see Jeffery A. Smith, "Impartiality and Revolutionary Ideology: Editorial Policies of the *South Carolina Gazette*, 1732-1775" *The Journal of Southern History* (Vol. 49, No. 4: Nov 1983), 511-526.

⁴⁶ Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*, p. 46.

⁴⁷ The involvement of wives in commercial activity (and the attendant blending of commercial and domestic spheres) may have been the crucial distinction between the cultural practices of middling and elite households. As a matter of economic necessity, middle-class wives needed to be productively employed in order to maintain the security of the household. One popular occupation for wives in Charles Town was the running of public houses; half of the liquor licenses granted in the colonial period were granted to women (see Emma Hart, 2007, p. 215).

The South Carolina Society may have been the first social club for the middling sort, but it was not the only one. Emma Hart has charted the extension of this middle-class morality in the later part of the eighteenth century in the activities of the Fellowship Society. The Fellowship Society was formed in 1766 by an upholsterer named Edward Weyman and its membership was heavily weighted towards tradesmen, with all of the pre-Revolution officers professing trades such as carpenter, goldsmith, and tailor. Unlike the South Carolina Society, some of the Fellowship Society's meeting minutes survive, and they provide a vivid glimpse into the activities of the middle class club. Meetings often involved sermons from local Anglican ministers and many harangues from the society leadership to keep up the good name of the Fellowship Society through prudent conduct in the town-at-large. While elite associations dined on extravagant dinners, the Fellowship Society dined more modestly and donated leftovers to the local poorhouse and gaol. The charitable respectability of the Fellowship Society stands as one extreme pole of the spectrum of middle-class values informing Charles Town's associational life. Other gentlemen's clubs of the eighteenth century, such as the Charleston Library Society (est. 1748) or the St. Cecilia Society (est. 1766) were located somewhere on a continuum between lavish entertainment and moralistic austerity.

The shift towards charitable values in Charles Town's associational life was not a rebuke of aristocratic power. If anything, it was a re-direction of that power. Charitable organizations reaffirmed and institutionalized the paternalistic role of Charles Town's elites. Rather than assaying to replace the power that elites wielded within the colony, groups such as the South Carolina Society exerted a corrective force on that power. The rules that governed private clubs were scripts for proper aristocratic behavior. They

replaced the extravagant entertainments that occupied the social efforts of the early elites with codes of benevolent and modest behavior.⁴⁸ These behavioral codes, and the social networks that sustained them, led back in every case to the seat of moral authority in the colony: the Anglican Church. Although the Church in South Carolina held less secular power than in New England, it was still the great organizer of men and morals. By the end of the 1730s, however, the Anglican Church was approaching a great crisis, one that would alter the landscape of South Carolina's material and moral power base forever.

Son of Thunder

The growth of a middle-class paradigm that glorified charity and denounced balls and other extravagant entertainments took a big step forward in the year 1740. The balance of power among South Carolina's religious denominations had been a settled matter throughout the early part of the eighteenth century, with Anglicans allowing an established but ultimately powerless niche for the Huguenots, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and other dissenting Christian groups. There was a growing disconnect, however, between the pious modesty of these groups and the ostentatious display of Charles Town's Anglican elite. 1740 was a tipping point, a year in which networks formed, congregations re-shuffled, and a stream of committed and charismatic ministers opened up a channel into the South Carolina Backcountry. In that year, circumstances collided with beliefs in spectacular ways through a series of crises including a ruinous fire, two fever outbreaks, and the emergence of a new form of

⁴⁸ Although none of the original documents that recorded society rules from the pre-Revolutionary period survive, rules from the 1790s are suggestive of the charitable impulses that had become codified by mid-century.

religious experience; the spiritual geography of Charles Town and the Low Country was forever changed.

When George Whitefield and his followers introduced into Charles Town a new experiential religious practice that might broadly be called evangelicalism, they were addressing a population that had been through a short series of profound devastations. The Stono Rebellion of late 1739, two waves of plague—the first one smallpox, the second yellow fever, the outbreak of war with nearby Spanish Florida, a precipitous drop in rice prices (still the backbone of South Carolina’s economy), and a fire that destroyed over three hundred buildings had brought the city to its knees. Whitefield’s followers capitalized on these crises directly, and the Congregational minister Josiah Smith issued a pamphlet blaming the Charles Town fire on the sinfulness of its citizens, asking “whether our Streets, Lanes, and Houses did not burn with Lust, before they were consumed with Fire?”⁴⁹ Whitefield and his evangelical followers took particular aim at dancing as a provocation of God, one that Whitefield warned would lead to a divinely-ordained Spanish invasion. What the evangelicals offered in the place of balls and assemblies were a new kind of identity performance: a spontaneous emotionalism linked to religious conversion and transformation that positioned itself in virulent opposition to the schemes of grace and self-control that had characterized genteel comportment. This challenge—and the charismatic sincerity of the ministers who issued it—gave fortitude to the middling tradesmen who had long been skeptical of the elite’s decadent posturing.

⁴⁹ Josiah Smith, *The Burning of Sodom*. p. 11.

In this way, the implications of Charles Town's "Great Awakening" resonated throughout the rest of the eighteenth century.⁵⁰

Before Whitefield arrived, Anglicanism had been relatively unchallenged as the central player in South Carolina's religious landscape. There were some tensions between Anglicans and Congregationalists in the early decades of the century, but these pertained mostly to the political influence of the Anglican Church. Congregationalists had a weaker stomach for collusion between church and state, preferring a system of governance that emanated from the individual congregation. But these tensions never amounted to any serious challenge, and Anglicans lived in relative peace with a variety of local dissenting congregations—including Baptists, Presbyterians, French Protestants, German Lutherans, and Congregationalists. Quakers had been a sizable minority in the colony since its founding, and a meeting-house was built in Charles Town near the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁵¹ The largest and most powerful Anglican worship-house was St. Philip's, which stood on Church Street at a monumental 110 ft x 62 ft, with a one-hundred-foot steeple rising over the town. In Bishop Roberts's "Ichnography of Charles-Town at High Water" engraved in 1739, St. Philips is a sizeable mass that dwarfs the surrounding buildings and protrudes into the street, disrupting the city grid and asserting its own presence and authority. One can also see on this map the more modest (and geographically marginalized) Presbyterian, Quaker, French Protestant, Anabaptist, and Congregationalist meeting-houses. The St. Philip's steeple also

⁵⁰ Whether the spread of evangelicalism in the 1730s and 1740s can be generalized as a 'Great Awakening' and whether the Southern colonies participated substantively in such a phenomenon have been matters of much recent debate among scholars. I have invoked the term here with much reservation, but with the intent of drawing attention to the lasting effect of a brief period of evangelical activity.

⁵¹ Before the Anglican supremacy had solidified in the colony, South Carolina even had a Quaker governor, John Archdale, who presided in 1695-1696.

draws the eye in “An Exact Prospect of Charles Town,” which Bishop Roberts painted in the same year.

Eighteenth-century Anglicanism has been much abused by historians, especially South Carolina Anglicanism. The prevailing narrative about the Anglican Church has been that it was an effective platform for elite hegemony, but a lackluster avenue for spiritual excitement.⁵² Anglican congregants have been portrayed as indifferent and insincere, while Anglican clergymen have been painted as anodyne and toothless. Such a portrait nicely sets up a contrast with the feverish charisma of the evangelicals, but it obscures the historical truth. The Anglican faith was a divine reality for very many colonists. St. Philip’s held services twice on Sunday, as well as on Wednesday and Friday mornings. The Charlestonians who attended these services were not all members of the powerful elite; middle and lower classes may have sat in more marginalized pews, but they worshipped with the same discipline and piety. John Wesley even noted in his journal during a visit to St. Philip’s in 1736 that there were “several negroes” attending the church. South Carolina diarists such as Eliza Lucas Pinckney and Henry Laurens filled their diaries with sincere expressions of piety and faith. Anglican theology exerted a powerful force over the imaginative power of Charlestonians at every level, and it is an important context for understanding the conflicts surrounding Whitefield’s arrival in the colony.

Nevertheless, to the outside observer, an Anglican worship service might appear stultifyingly repetitive. The Anglican liturgy that was adopted in 1662 in the wake of

⁵² See, for instance, Dell Upton’s *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1997), or Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 1982).

Charles II's restoration to the throne emphasized repetition of moralistic homilies. Any rhetorical flourishes that might smack of "popery" had been removed in an unsuccessful bid to please the diverse array of religious dissenters whose numbers had expanded during the English Civil War. William Beveridge, a seventeenth-century bishop in Wales, described the liturgy thus: "...by a set form of public devotions rightly composed, we are continually put in mind of all things necessary for us to know or do, so that it is always done by the same words and expressions, which by their constant use, will imprint the things themselves so firmly, that...they will still occur upon all occasions."⁵³ Louis P. Nelson has argued that the regularity of the Anglican liturgy was a vital tool both for inculcating morality and for gaining access to the Divine. Citing the consistent use of the word "regular" to describe church buildings, Nelson observes, "Regularity was not a natural state in the eighteenth century; it implied a consistency of form or action that was the result of submission to a rule superior to natural inclinations."⁵⁴ Regularity not only governed the development of an individual's moral sense, it also conformed that individual into the collectivity of the whole. Early eighteenth-century Anglicanism centered not on the individual body, but on the corporate body...the "body" of the church and its union with the body of Christ.⁵⁵

The corporate body of the church was one that was articulated in the hierarchy of its members. Anglicans believed that the corporate body had two distinct manifestations,

⁵³ Bishop Beveridge, "Sermon on the Excellency and Usefulness of the Book of Common Prayer." 1681, quoted in Rhys Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, p. 64.

⁵⁴ Louis P. Nelson, *The Beauty of Holiness: Anglicanism and Architecture in Colonial South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2007), p. 222.

⁵⁵ The union of Christ and the church as a union of bodies akin to a marriage was a persistent metaphor in North American sermons throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. See Elizabeth Reis, "The Devil, the Body, and the Feminine Soul in Puritan New England," *The Journal of American History* 82 (June 1995), 15-36.

the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant. One South Carolina minister explained the dyad as “the church above, the Church Triumphant in Heaven; and the church below, the Church Militant on Earth.”⁵⁶ Equality and parity were blessings of the Church Triumphant; the earthly Church Militant was still ruled by hierarchy and station and the Anglican service reinforced that arrangement at every turn. Even the seating arrangement of Anglican churches doubled as a diagram of rank, with the wealthiest and most prominent families seated in the central pews, facing the chancel and altar. Less prominent members sat in smaller pews, usually perpendicular to the central pews. The liturgy contained in the Book of Common Prayer reinforced the divine sanction over secular authority that consecrated the local hierarchy, while ministers paid lip service in their sermons to the probity and virtue of local elites.⁵⁷ This complicity between the church and the social order has invited a historical narrative that condemns eighteenth-century Anglicanism as a cynical tool of hegemony, devoid of any spiritual sincerity. It must be remembered, however, that the ritual of the sacrament—the liturgical focus of the Anglican service—was meant to transform a heterogeneous congregation into a unified spiritual body. Hierarchical order provided ligature to the Church Militant, making unity possible through a system of mutuality in which everyone had a part to play.

⁵⁶ qtd in Nelson, p. 180.

⁵⁷ Anglican ministers in South Carolina were especially beholden to local elites. In other parts of Britain, ministers were routinely elected to the rectorship of the parish vestry, a position they held for a lifetime tenure. In South Carolina, however, vestrymen forestalled the necessary elections, leaving rectorships vacant and depriving ministers of a vote in the vestry meetings of their own parishes. Thus, local ministers were subordinated to the tastes and sensibilities of the elites. For more on the relationship between South Carolina power elites and the local Anglican church, see Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects: South Carolina Low Country, 1740-1790*. (Ithaca: Cornell, 1998), pp. 108-115.

The Anglican emphasis on subverting the individual body to a corporate identity through repetitive ceremonial acts was consonant with the deployment of dance and physical grace as markers of imperial identity. In both cases, South Carolinians compressed their individual corporeal bodies into transpersonal schemes that secured their attachment to communities that extended beyond the boundaries of town or colony, across the sea and into the heavens. As Charles Town's elites sat in the central pews of St. Philip's, they were on display for the middling and laboring orders who sat on the sides of the nave or in side galleries. The piety and grace that they exhibited as they took communion, read from the liturgy, or bowed their heads in prayer naturalized their dominance of the social order in the same manner as their comportment in the street or in other arenas of genteel display. Ballrooms and churches were both ritual spaces in which the character of local society was both made visible and performatively reinforced. That churches were more heterogeneous spaces, filled with Charlestonians of every station, did not change its purpose as a socially symbolic environment; what elites communicated to one another in a ballroom, they communicated more widely in a sanctuary.

Although no record has been found of eighteenth-century Anglicans commenting on the link between balls and church services, the analogy was not lost on evangelical critics. George Whitefield saw dancing and the theatre as the greatest enemies of the pious, and he excoriated balls and assemblies in many of his sermons. Evangelical diarists such as Hester Ann Rogers included the renunciation of dancing as integral parts of their conversion experiences. Essays printed in the *South Carolina Gazette* during the evangelical outpouring called out dancing as a "*monstrum horrendum*."⁵⁸ The evangelical

⁵⁸ *SCG* December 22, 1739.

movement—and Whitefield in particular—called out polite entertainments such as dancing and play-going as a kind of *anti*-church, a place of worship unto Satan himself. Whitefield noted in his diary that “[Satan] is there obey’d and pleas’d in as certain a manner, as God is worshipped and honoured in the Church.”⁵⁹ By setting themselves in opposition to dancing, evangelical leaders were able to gain valuable traction in distinguishing themselves from their Anglican counterparts. They were also able to exploit the unease that middling tradespeople felt for the highly codified world of social dancing. If there was a simmering resentment among the middling sort against a world of genteel entertainment to which they could gain no access, evangelical ministers were able to stoke that resentment to a full boil.

The evangelical proscription against dancing amounted to more than class warfare, however. Although the efforts of evangelical ministers across British North America never amounted to a coherent theology, there were persistent characteristics to their revivals. One of these characteristics included an emphasis on an emotionally overwhelming conversion experience, often accompanied by wailing, shouting, fainting, or some other spontaneous bodily display. In 1740, the Presbyterian Gilbert Tennent disseminated a sermon titled “The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry,” which cast suspicion on ministers who had not undergone a life-changing conversion experience.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ qtd. in Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). Stout argues that Whitefield’s charisma as a speaker was rooted in his theatre-going youth and tracks Whitefield’s denunciation of the theatre as a conflict he never fully resolved. Says Stout: “In the end, theater won the contest for Whitefield’s personality, even as Methodism won the contest for his soul.”

⁶⁰ Gay Gibson Cima has offered a thorough analysis of the performative implications of Whitefield’s preaching in Charles Town in her book *Early American Women Critics: Performance, Religion, Race* (Cambridge UP, 2006), especially pp. 24-25 and 45-47. As she notes, “If grace and identity were invisible...the old Puritan notion of the visibly elect had to be scrapped and colonial American identity had to be re-imagined” (p. 25). The idea that dance (and even more acutely, theatre) obscured the sincere expression of one’s spiritually unique identity had been floated by English dissenters throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, most notably in William Prynne’s *Histrionomastix: The Player’s Scourge, or Actor’s Tragedy* (1632). Some of these ideas in turn date back as far as Tertullian’s *De Spectaculis* (ca. 200). The classic work on this subject is Jonas A. Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice*, (California UP, 1985).

This emphasis on the interior experience of converts as expressed through unchecked emotional display portended a different meaning of “grace” than that which colonial elites trained themselves into. Whereas dance instruction and the Anglican liturgy both worked from the outside in, inculcating one’s identity and position through repetitious impersonal movements, evangelical grace worked from the inside out, as one showed the worth of one’s soul through one’s physicality. The “falseness” of genteel comportment could only obscure the expression of one’s inner self.

George Whitefield brought these ideas to Charles Town in January of 1740. On the sixth of that month, he took the pulpit at Josiah Smith’s Independent meetinghouse and accused the audience of “a deportment ill-becoming a people who have lately had such divine judgments sent among them.”⁶¹ The crowd listened attentively, but with a polite and unmoved air. For Whitefield, who judged sincerity in passion, this was a chilly reception. He wondered at the “affected finery [and] gaiety of dress” he saw among them, which he supposed to exceed “the court-end of London.”⁶² When his sermon was over, the townspeople left “in a light, airy, unthinking manner.”⁶³ He redoubled his efforts the next day, preaching at the French church to a crowd “so great that many stood without the door” and preaching another sermon that night at the Independent meetinghouse.⁶⁴ This time, Whitefield was freer in his performance: “God strengthened me to speak, I trust, as I ought to speak.” The people of Charles Town wept and were

⁶¹ George Whitefield’s Journals, p. 248. Whitefield is probably referring here to the Stono Rebellion and the outbreak of war with Spain...the great fire and both plagues were yet to come. Whitefield preached at the Independent meetinghouse because Alexander Garden (the St. Philip’s minister) was out of town, and he was unable to preach at St. Philip’s without Garden’s permission. This circumstance may have proven consequential for Whitefield’s career in Charles Town, as he and Garden developed a fierce rivalry.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 249

⁶⁴ Ibid.

afraid; one Charlestonian slipped a short letter into his hands as he was on his way to dinner: “I appeal to you for help in the way to salvation.”⁶⁵ Whitefield left for Georgia the next morning “full of joy at the prospect of a good work begun.”⁶⁶

When Whitefield returned to Charles Town in March, he called upon Rev. Alexander Garden, the minister of St. Philip’s and the personal representative of the Bishop of London in South Carolina. The visit began cordially, but began to unravel when Garden rebuked Whitefield for enthusiasm and pride and for speaking against the local clergy. Whitefield replied that he had “as yet... scarce begun” to speak out against Garden and his associates. Whitefield then pinned Garden with a direct question: “Have you delivered your soul by exclaiming against the assemblies and balls here?” Garden sniffed at Whitefield’s impertinence: “What, Sir... must you come to catechize me? No... I have not exclaimed against them; I think there is no harm in them.” “Then, Sir,” retorted Whitefield, “I shall think it my duty to exclaim against you.” Whitefield recorded in his diary that Garden—“in a very great rage”—snarled back “Get you out of my house!” at which point Whitefield and his entourage made their bows and left. Whitefield called on Josiah Smith for tea later that afternoon and made arrangements to preach the next two nights at the Independent meetinghouse. On Sunday (two days after his confrontation with Garden), he went to St. Philip’s to witness Garden abuse him as a self-righteous “Pharisee.” He went on that evening to preach again at the Independent

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ I have already recounted in Chapter Three the episode that began Whitefield’s week in South Carolina, when on the first of January he and his cohort stopped at a tavern just over the border from Georgia. This was the tavern wherein he met with a company of dancing partygoers, whom he vilified until they stopped their dancing, only to pick back up again once he had retired to bed. Rather than react with more confrontation, Whitefield reflects “upon my own past follies with shame and confusion of face; for such a one, not long since, was I myself.” This episode may be seen as a foreshadowing of his sermons to come later in the week, especially when he beseeched God in his diary: “Suffer them not to go in such a carnal security till they lift up their eyes in torment! Draw them, oh draw them, from feeding upon such husks!”

meetinghouse; his sermons were turning increasingly on his denunciation of balls and assemblies rather than on the Georgia orphanage he had come to raise funds for. On Monday morning, he preached again at the Independent meetinghouse, this time “more explicit[ly] than ever...against Balls and Assemblies.”

Josiah Smith lurks quietly in the background of this story, but after Whitefield’s departure that Tuesday, Smith rose to the forefront, assuming the mantle of Whitefield’s representative in South Carolina. Josiah Smith may have seemed at first like Whitefield’s sycophant, but he became a key figure in the evangelical movement of the South. He was a native son of Charles Town, the grandson of South Carolina’s Royal Governor Landgrave Smith, though he was raised mainly in Bermuda by his dissenting father. Dr. George Smith rejected the Anglicanism predominant in both his home colony and his adopted Bermuda, and sent his son Josiah to Harvard, to be trained in the Congregational faith. Josiah Smith graduated Harvard in 1725 and preached briefly in Bermuda and in Boston before returning to South Carolina. Smith became the lead pastor at Charles Town’s Independent meetinghouse in 1738 and remained active in the colony for many decades, even after suffering a debilitating stroke in 1749. Soon after his stroke, Smith met a slave trader named John Newton who had endured a near-death experience the previous spring. Newton was so impressed with Smith that he gave himself over to the evangelical movement, renouncing the slave trade and becoming one of Britain’s foremost abolitionist.⁶⁷ But Smith’s brand of evangelicalism did not have the abolitionist streak he apparently inspired in Newton. Arguably the key to Smith’s enduring success

⁶⁷ He is arguably best known today for penning the hymn, “Amazing Grace.” For more on his time in Charles Town, see William E. Phipps, *Amazing Grace in John Newton: Slave Ship Captain, Hymn Writer, and Abolitionist*. (Mercer UP, 2004) pp. 34-37.

in the colony was his ability to temper evangelicalism to make it more palatable to Charles Town sensibilities, and his most substantial effort to that end was to mute those strains of the evangelical movement that pushed for the Christianization of slaves.⁶⁸

Smith had written in the *Gazette* after Whitefield's first visit, extolling the "Son of Thunder" for his "warmth and zeal."⁶⁹ Even at this early point, Smith parroted Whitefield's especial umbrage at Charles Town's dancing assemblies:

I can't conclude, without wishing Success to Mr. WHITEFIELD'S publick and repeated Censures upon our BALLS and MID-NIGHT ASSEMBLIES ; especially in the present Scituation of our Province . To bid such open Defiance to Heaven , to turn such a Season of Mourning, under its Judgments, into publick Dancing, has such a Mixture of Impiety and Infatuation, that I can't see, how any Minister of Christ who desires to be found faithful, dare to shew any Indifference to it; nor will I ever believe, that Religion and Virtue can thrive under the Shadow of a Theatre .

Elsewhere in this essay, Smith was engaged in the task he would come to perform for Whitefield throughout the decade: sanding down Whitefield's rhetoric and making his preachings appear milder than they were. But in this penultimate sentiment, he pulls no punches in echoing Whitefield's thoughts on dancing. Garden responded the next month with a rejoinder that faulted Smith for his willingness "to defend that Excess of Uncharitableness, of which Mr. Whitefield was guilty...endeavoring to palliate...harsh and damnatory Expressions and take off the Edge of Censure, by ascribing them to a divine Principle."⁷⁰ A print war erupted between the two correspondents, one that lasted

⁶⁸ Smith has been overlooked by many historians of the evangelical movement, but a thorough and fair account of his career can be found in Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (Yale UP, 2007), pp. 68-82.

⁶⁹ *SCG*, January 19, 1740.

⁷⁰ *SCG*, February 2, 1740.

through all of 1740. By the end of March, Elizabeth Timothy (the *Gazette's* printer) seems to have grown bored with the feud, because she started parceling out portions of Smith's letters only when she did not have sufficient overseas news to include in the week's issue. Smith lashed out that summer, demanding that his full argument be heard:

July 1, 1740

Mr.[sic] Timothy, I was very much surprised to see you insert in one of your late Gazettes, that the Controversy between Arminius [Garden's pseudonym] and J---- S---- was ended; when to my certain Knowledge, you have had the Copy laying in your Hands a considerable time, so hope you'll insert it in your next and thereby undeceive the Public, and in so doing, you'll very much oblige many of your Readers.

Your humble Servant,
PHILALETHES.

Timothy continued to print the back-and-forth between the two in sporadic bursts until Smith withdrew in a snit:

January 22, 1741

Mr. Timothy, Meeting with frequent and long Interruptions, from foreign News crowding into your Gazette, I shall, in Compliance with the repeated Desires of my Correspondents in Boston, send over the Remainder of my Answer to Arminius, to be there printed, with His, together in a Pamphlet, which will give the reader a fuller View of the whole Controversy, and I doubt not make Arminius turn out Hay Wood and Stubble. J_____S_____.

The source of conflict between the two gentlemen centered on Whitefield's enthusiasm. That is to say, it was a question of decorum. In Garden's view, Whitefield had comported himself with an extravagant assurance of divine inspiration. He saw Whitefield's enthusiasm in the sense intended by Shaftesbury: "Inspiration is a real

feeling of the divine presence, and enthusiasm a false one.”⁷¹ Garden was standing up for the self-control that was integral to Anglican identity. Smith saw Whitefield as someone who wore the state of his soul plainly in view, with no refinement to obscure it. For him, enthusiasm was as Dryden had described it: “enthusiasm, or extraordinary emotion of soul.”⁷² Smith celebrated Whitefield’s enthusiasm as “the sudden Excursions of his divine Warmth and Zeal” and attributed the griping of his critics to “too much Reason.”⁷³ Garden supposed that Smith himself, as well as Whitefield’s other followers, suffered from “Enthusiasm and an heated Imagination,” and that is why they “could suppose the Pulpit almost like the great Tribunal, and Mr. Whitefield to resemble Jesus Christ, clothed in Flames, & coming to Judgments.”⁷⁴ Garden questioned how sudden an excursion of the spirit Whitefield’s sermons could have been, “when he has preached the same Sermons in divers Places of England, to my certain Knowledge, with the very same rash and enthusiastic Expressions.” Smith was stung and fired back at Garden’s smugness: “If a Man in Prayer rises a Degree above the Pathos of a Parrot, or speaks of eternal Themes, with any feeling Concern, 'tis Enthusiasm, beneath Man's Reason and Powers of Intelligence.”⁷⁵

The sum of the correspondence amounts to a treasure of church-based eighteenth-century performance criticism, measuring out at over thirty thousand words before Smith looked to a Boston publisher to continue. The Smith-Garden feud can usefully be understood in the context of a larger conversation about the dialectic of inspiration and

⁷¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristics*, Vol I. p. 53.

⁷² Dryden, *Apology for Heroic Poetry*.

⁷³ *SCG*, January 19, 1740.

⁷⁴ *SCG*, February 2, 1740.

⁷⁵ *SCG* February 23, 1740.

artifice that seized pens across the Atlantic in the eighteenth century. French, German, and English critics especially engaged in a re-conceptualization of the sources and uses of affect in public performance. Joseph Roach has argued that the eighteenth century saw the gradual unmooring of public performance (and theatre in particular) from Classical theories of rhetoric that emphasized a sustained spiritual connection between performer and spectator.⁷⁶ Roach finds in eighteenth-century theatrical criticism the “birth of the modern theatre of illusion in which the spectator pays to be annihilated.”⁷⁷ This shift in theatricality was concomitant with scientific explorations of the body that moved away from Early Modern theories of the humors and vital spirits. In the years immediately preceding the Smith-Garden debate, Aaron Hill was publishing a series of essays in his London-based theatrical newspaper *The Prompter* that used Cartesian physiology as a springboard for re-conceiving the work of the actor. In Hill’s model, passions emerge at the discretion of the imagination and impress themselves on the corporeal body through the network of nerves, thus rendering affect as a mechanical necessity. Hill suggested that actors would do well to train the mind to call up ideas of passion at will, that those ideas might exert themselves on a pliant body.

Whitefield’s evangelical zeal exemplified a similar process for his audiences. The excitation of his spiritual imagination exerted a kind of pressure on the expressiveness of his body. His voice, his gestures, and his “warmth” made visible the sincerity of his experience of divine inspiration. Moreover, he had disciplined soul and mind to such an extent that he could achieve such a visitation through an act of will. For

⁷⁶ Joseph R. Roach, *The Player’s Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting*, (Ann Arbor: Michigan, 1983, 1993).

⁷⁷ Roach, p. 155.

Josiah Smith, Whitefield's performance *was* the message: "The Beauties and Ornaments of Language were not so much consider'd in them, but the Decencies of Action in his Deportment and Gesture, the Modulations of his Voice, of which he is a great Master, the regular Exertions and Cadencies of it, join'd with the Zeal, Pathos and Fire of his Expressions."⁷⁸ Alexander Garden, on the other hand, rejected this new paradigm. Garden found truth in reason, not in sense. He rebuked Smith for triumphing in Whitefield's "performances, which [he] praise[s], as inimitable... yet, merely on account of Voice and Gesture and the Warmth with which, he says, he delivered some awful Truths in his Explication of the Ten Virgins, [and] compares him to one who had his Tongue touched with a Coal from the Altar, like the inspired Prophet Isaiah, to a Seraph, and to St. Paul."⁷⁹ Whitefield's ministry echoed Charles Town's ballrooms in locating a shibboleth for authentic identity in a specific bodily practice, thereby naturalizing a schismatic division into the elite and "the rest." Garden fumed: "Did he not affirm he felt the Spirit of God sensibly moving within him, that all who have the Spirit must feel it, as sensibly as one, who perceives the Sun shining in his Face, and that whoever have not this Sense and Certainty of the Spirit of God moving within them are not new-born nor in a State of Salvation?" But Whitefield's elite was spiritual, not economic, and the bodily practices of this elite emphasized spontaneity and sincerity over calculation and artifice.

"No Peace for the Wicked"

In November of 1740, the stakes of this argument rose sharply as calamity blasted the streets of Charles Town. Sometime around two o'clock on a Tuesday afternoon in

⁷⁸ *SCG*, January 19, 1740.

⁷⁹ *SCG*, February 2, 1740.

mid-November, a fire broke out at a saddler's house in the center of town. Embers rode a brisk wind to the tinder-rich roofs along Church Street, dried out by two weeks of fair weather. Soon the fire had blanketed the city's main trading district, and set-by stores of pitch, turpentine, and gunpowder fueled the fire to an even greater frenzy. Bucket brigades scrambled to douse the fire, while militia-men and ship commanders razed houses in an attempt to contain it. Local carpenter and South Carolina Society member John Bee exerted himself for so long in the toxic smoke that he fell into convulsions which "deprived him of the use of his limbs and sight," an affliction for which the Assembly later reimbursed him.⁸⁰ Many buildings in this area doubled as places of business and residences, compounding the devastation for people who lost both their personal and commercial belongings. Robert Pringle, another South Carolina Society member, ran around the first floor of his shop trying to collect his merchandise while his wife Jane ran around the second floor, trying to collect the family's belongings. She only stopped after her clothes caught fire.⁸¹ The fire was still burning the next day, when Lieutenant Governor William Bull issued a proclamation "enjoining all the inhabitants of the said town, and others, by themselves and slaves, to give all possible assistance for the speedy extinguishing [of] the said fire." When the flames had finally settled, they had claimed more than three hundred buildings and wreaked over a quarter-million pounds of damage. The city's fortifications—recently completed and crucial in a time of war with nearby Spanish Florida—were ruined. Many of Charles Town's tradesmen and merchants were left bankrupt and homeless.

⁸⁰ Qtd. in Walter J. Fraser, Jr., *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City* (South Carolina, 1989), p. 68.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

The Public Treasurer dispatched fifteen hundred pounds in immediate relief, and an appeal to the rest of the province garnered more. Aid poured in from other colonies, including Philadelphia, Boston, and Barbados; the crown dispatched a hefty twenty-thousand pounds to the cause. The funds were managed by the vestry at St. Philip's. Of the men involved in the collection and distribution of charity, members of the local social clubs figured heavily: James Crockatt, treasurer of the St. Andrew's Society, distributed one thousand pounds to the needy; James Abercrombie, his fellow St. Andrew's brother, was on the committee appointed by the legislature to assess loss. Society members were also heavy among the victims. In the report of the Council Committee charged with paying damages, several club members are to be found: Moses Audebert (South Carolina Society, fifty-one pounds), John Bee (South Carolina Society, one thousand pounds), George Ducat (St. Andrew's Society, forty-one pounds), Thomas Dale (St. George's Society, seventy pounds). Although many businesses and families in the city were devastated, the bonds of mutuality that channeled through Charles Town's clubs endured.

Whitefield's followers, meanwhile, saw the fire as a vindication and doubled down on their condemnation of Charles Town's entertainments. Josiah Smith sent a sermon to friends in Boston, who published it as *The Burning of Sodom*, in which he rejoiced at the fire's devastation, comparing it to "the terrible day of the Lord, which shall burn as an oven, when all of the proud, and all who do wickedly shall be as stubble, and the day that cometh shall burn them up."⁸² Smith adamantly blamed the fire on Charles Town's pride and vanity, mewling over "our costly furniture, our plate,

⁸² Josiah Smith, *The Burning of Sodom, with it's [sic] moral causes, improv'd in a sermon, preach'd at Charlestown South-Carolina, after a most terrible fire, which broke out on Nov. 18. 1740. And in a very short time laid the fairest and richest part of the town in ashes, and consum'd the most valuable effects of the merchants and inhabitants.*

china, pictures, and our rich paintings...all the affected lustre and gaiety of our dress, shelter'd under the name of decency and gentility, and making them a patronage to ambition!"⁸³ Smith also castigated Charles Town for its idleness, asking "What else led us into our balls, our dances, and night-assemblies, with their costly apparatus & large consumptions of time? Practices, to the last degree, criminal! ...And what deserves a particular attention, the very day of our conflagration, I am told, those assemblies were to begin at evening, and subscriptions drawn up for the support of them! –But Heaven beheld the impiety and spoke in fire and thunder against them."⁸⁴ Hugh Bryan, the wealthy local gentleman and follower of Whitfield whose later fall from grace introduces this chapter, published a letter in January in which he laid blame at the feet of local powerful men who "have delighted themselves in the foolish and vain Enjoyment of worldly Goods and Pleasures, nourishing and indulging themselves in the same Passions, Tempers and Delights with other Worldly minded Men" and prayed, "May He raise and quicken our filthy, sinful, sluggish Hearts, from their Lethargy of sensual Delights, to seek that Pearl of great Price his everlasting Righteousness."⁸⁵ Bryan's letter was likely ghost-written by Whitefield himself, and the two were arrested within the week. Bryan recanted and wrote a letter of apology to Lieutenant Governor Bull, at which point the two gentlemen were released.⁸⁶

By 1742, enthusiasm for the evangelical awakening was losing steam and its leaders were losing face. After the arrest of Bryan in January, Garden suspended

⁸³ Smith, p. 12.

⁸⁴ Smith, p. 14.

⁸⁵ *SCG*, January 15, 1741.

⁸⁶ Lisa Smith, *The First Great Awakening in Colonial American Newspapers: A Shifting Story* p. 78. Bryan became a very public emblem of Whitefieldian excesses.

Whitefield's pastoral duties and the local *Gazette* began reporting on the book-burnings of radical evangelist James Davenport, an itinerant closely associated with Whitefield. Smith wrote another essay for the *Gazette* in April, struggling to spin the Bryan episode as an aberration, but he was undercut by LeBrasseur's suicide that summer.

Evangelicalism was on a decline across the colonies, one that Whitefield himself admitted in his journal: "I found...by letters that the work of God had went on in a most glorious manner for near two years after my departure...but then a chill came over the work, through the imprudence of some ministers who had been promoters and private persons who had been happy subjects of it."⁸⁷ But even though the fever of evangelicalism had broken in the colony, it left behind a network of emboldened revivalists and established a lingering strain of experiential religion in the colony. Smith continued to be an influential voice both in Charles Town and through his contacts in Boston and London. A new cohort of charismatic clergymen emerged in the next two decades, including William Hutson, Archibald Simpson, and William Richardson.⁸⁸ The number of Presbyterian churches in the colony swelled between 1740 and 1775 from eight to forty-eight, a rise that far outpaced the ratio of population growth in the same period.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Whitefield, *Journals*, November 27, 1744. Collected in Richard L. Bushman, ed. *The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-1745*. (Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 1970), p. 65.

⁸⁸ For an account of these ministers' careers—and a thorough accounting of Charles Town's post-Whitefield evangelicalism more generally—see Thomas J. Little's chapter "'Adding to the Church Such as Shall Be Saved': The Growth in Influence of Evangelicalism in Colonial South Carolina, 1740-1775." in *Money, Trade, and Power: The Evolution of Colonial South Carolina's Plantation Society*, ed. Jack P. Greene, Rosemary Brana-Shute, and Randy J. Sparks. (Columbia: South Carolina UP, 2001), pp. 363-382. ⁸⁹ Little, p. 368. Presbyterianism was closely involved in the evangelical movement throughout North America, especially through the efforts of the Tennent family, who set up a seminary to educate ministers in the emotive style of their conversion-based preaching. The school still survives as Princeton University.

The crusade against dancing and other elite entertainments continued in the colony, buoyed by the rise of previously marginalized classes of Charlestonians who found their voices in the public sphere. One such middle-class prophet was Sophia Hume, who in 1748 published *An Exhortation to the Inhabitants of the Province of South-Carolina* in which she explained her Quaker faith and offer guidance to a general audience.⁹⁰ Like Smith, Hume was a native of Charles Town (b. 1702), but owing to her gender and her station, she never received Smith's Harvard education and subsequently never adopted the grandiloquent tone of Boston's Puritan scholars.⁹¹ Her *Exhortation* proved popular in Philadelphia, where it was first published, and was re-printed across the Atlantic in Bristol two years later.⁹² In the course of explaining her own spiritual development, she abjured Charles Town's culture of finery:

Some plead for extravagance, vanity, and luxury in the absurd terms of an old proverb, that *those who win gold have a right to wear it*, and that they may apply their own money to what purpose they please: not considering, that all temporal blessings are only lent us, and that we can't properly call anything our own... Riches, metaphorically speaking, take to themselves wings, and fly away from one to another, and that we are as often snatched from them, as they from us.⁹³

⁹⁰ As of this writing, Sophia Hume awaits full-throated recovery. Where she has been written about by historians, she has been painted with the same brush as the evangelical firebrands who came before her. But, as I argue here, her tone was more moderate and easy than either the affected pomp of Garden or the impassioned zeal of Smith. What's more, her prose style was graceful, despite having received no formal education. Hume is known to have produced six books in her lifetime, a prodigious output for anyone in the colonies, let alone a middle-class woman. Though modern readers may be put off by her religious zeal, there is a colloquial forthrightness in her writing that distinguishes her from the more-celebrated female writers of New England, Mary Rowlandson and Anne Bradstreet. Her self-assuredly middle-class sensibility makes her a valuable avatar for any historian studying the South in this period.

⁹¹ An ad in the *Gazette* from her pre-conversion days suggests at least one literary influence: in September of 1734, Hume advertised that she had lost her copy of Eliza Haywood's *The Belle Assemblée* and offered a reward for its return (*SCG*, September 14, 1734.)

⁹² Printed in Philadelphia by B. Franklin and D. Hall, 1748; Printed in Bristol by Samuel Farley, 1750.

⁹³ Hume, p. 19.

She went on in her essay to take aim at both the Anglican Church, for its reliance on empty ceremony, and Charles Town's balls and assemblies, for being vain distractions from the holy life. As the evangelicals before her had done, Hume identified spiritual practice as a largely interior experience, and disavowed any external display other than pious humility. Hume had been raised in the Anglican Church and only converted to Quakerism as an adult. Of the Anglican liturgy, she related her own moment of realization: "I have found no room for ceremonies under the Gospel Dispensation, nor precedent for musick in the Christian Church. The Liturgy, or Form of Prayer, became quite useless to me, and singing David's psalms burdensome."⁹⁴ For Hume, ceremony was not just an empty practice, it was an obstacle to spiritual awakening, "for bodily exercise profiteth little; 'tis the spirit of Christ must quicken us for spiritual worship."⁹⁵ Other obstacles to spiritual awakening included those entertainments that encouraged the vanity and luxury that Hume forsook. She challenged her readers to:

...describe a woman, dancing at a ball, and adorn'd with all the luxury and pomp of dress, tending...to excite a passion I forbear to name; and Country Dances, some of 'em, you know, are condem'd by a writer much admir'd by the polite and fasionable part of the world; who peruse him, I have thought, to very little purpose: Examine, I say, the characters I have mentioned, and see if you can observe the least trace of Christianity in them: In short, a dancing, gaming, masquerading Christian, appears as great a contradiction, and sounds as harsh and uncouth in one's ears, as a polluted Christian...And tho' I don't find any direct prohibition of Cards, Plays, Balls, Assemblies, Masquerades, Musick-Gardens, &c. yet I observe they are indirectly forbid, as they have not the least tendency to promote God's glory; but, on the contrary, if you'll take my own experience for evidence, tend to hinder and prevent any taste or relish for Divine or spiritual enjoyments; the soul given up to sensual pleasure, lies sordidly groveling on Earth, when 'tis design'd to contemplate and enjoy more rational, as well as sublime and heavenly delights.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Hume, p. 35.

⁹⁵ Hume, p.38.

⁹⁶ Hume, pp.44-45.

For the most part, Charles Town's elites did not heed Sophia Hume any more than they had Josiah Smith or George Whitefield. Balls, plays, and other entertainments continued to be a key part of the upper-class lifestyle. Ann Manigault—the wife of Gabriel Manigault, public treasurer and one of the richest men in the colony—left a diary from the mid-1750s that suggests her loose regard for religious exhortation. Between November 1754 and November 1755, Ann Manigault attended two balls, three plays, and four social assemblies.⁹⁷ In the same span of time, she went “to hear Mr. Whitfield” three times and once to hear an unnamed Quaker preacher. Whitefield's damnation of theatres and dancing do not seem to have broken the stride of Manigault's social calendar, as her trips to hear his preaching are interspersed between bouts of theatergoing and dancing. For Ann Manigault, and likely for many others of Charles Town's elite, George Whitefield was just another show.

But even though Whitefield's ministry never stemmed the tide of dancing in Charles Town, the polite world increasingly turned away from dance instruction as a strategy for class positioning. Over the course of the next generation, Charles Town's ball rooms continued to be sites for entertainment and gaiety, but gradually became less poignant as sites for resolving questions of social and political influence. There was a disentangling of ball culture from the world of charities and civic leadership. Neither the Charleston Library Society nor the St. Cecilia's Society—both organizations that celebrated aesthetic and cultural life in the colony—ever held a ball as part of their

⁹⁷ Social assemblies (just noted as “assembly” in Manigault's journals) were occasions that often included music, dance, and food. i.e., Josiah Quincy: “Spent the evening at the Assembly. Bad music, good dancing, elegantly disposed supper, bad provisions, worse dressed.” (qtd. in Webber, p. 59).

activities. By the eve of the Revolution, patriots were critical of courtly dancing as being a suspiciously “British” activity. The imperial class markers of the early eighteenth century had been crowded out by a more explicitly “American” body of cultural practices. In Charles Town, the dancing carried on, but the music of oligarchic empire had stopped.

Epilogue

Gabriel Transformed

In 1779, Gabriel Manigault was seventy-five years old. He and his wife Ann had survived both their son Peter and his wife Elizabeth and were now in the process of raising their grandchildren. When the war with England had broken out several years earlier, Gabriel had shown his support for the cause in the way that only a wealthy patrician could—he had loaned the new state of South Carolina \$220,000. But now the threat of war was more pointed: General Augustine Prevost of the British forces was leading his army on a march towards Charleston. The Continental Army had marched south towards occupied Savannah, leaving Charleston vulnerable. A poorly-trained militia force under the command of William Moultrie was beating a path back from Purrysburg, continually shrinking as local men deserted the force to protect their homes and plantations. Gabriel was long past the age of military service, and at fifteen, his grandson Joseph was a bit too young. Nevertheless, the two men marched hand-in-hand from their Goose Creek mansion to the front line at the gates of Charleston. At the front, Gabriel refused the deference that had once been the birthright of his station; claiming that the city in which he was born would not fall without his own resistance, Gabriel took off his gentleman's apparel and put on the habiliments of a soldier. Though the men at the front—most of them left being of the middling sort—knew Gabriel as a towering figure, one of the last relics of the rice fortunes that had been so crucial to South Carolina's emergence as a refined British city, he was now just a frail old man camped on the edge of a war. At seventy-five years old, Gabriel Manigault—who had served the crown as public treasurer, assemblyman, and justice of the

peace; married the daughter of a cacique; made a fortune from British trade; and sent his son to study at the Inns of Court—was now a hero of the Revolution.

Gabriel's transformation from British gentleman to American patriot was chronicled by South Carolina historian David Ramsay, who in 1809 wrote the first American history of South Carolina. In an appendix, Ramsay offered "biographical sketches" of South Carolina's most notable patriots, most of them men Ramsay knew or knew of through first-hand acquaintances. These men included both Gabriel and his son Peter, who had fought the Stamp Act in the Commons House of Assembly before his untimely death. Peter's London friend Billy Drayton is also on the list, having written anti-British literature under the pen name "Freeman" and eventually being appointed the first judge of the U. S. District Court for South Carolina. Alexander Garden and Josiah Smith, enemies in life, were both posthumously hailed as patriots in Ramsay's book. Ramsay memorialized his subjects by appealing not to the imperatives of their own day—politeness, grace, and winsome sociability—but by invoking the imperatives of the new Republic—charity, honesty, and virtue. In his epitaph for Gabriel, Ramsay mitigated the man's opulent affluence by reminding readers of his benevolent heart: "In the course of more than fifty years devoted to commercial pursuits, he honestly acquired a fortune very little if anything short of half a million of dollars; though he had given away considerable sums in charity and liberality. His house and table were always open to his friends, and the civilities of hospitality were by him liberally and extensively bestowed on strangers."¹

¹ David Ramsay, *The History of South Carolina, from its First Settlement in 1670, to the Year 1808, in Two Volumes*, Volume II (Charleston: 1809), p. 502. Ramsay's encomium for Gabriel Manigault may have been genuine: the man who was sometimes perceived as frosty and stern by his peers was also known as a hero to the middling class. What is significant about Ramsay's memorial is that Gabriel is heroicized for his charity, not his riches, while other affluent gentlemen of his generation are excluded from the narrative.

While the Manigaults and the Draytons transformed themselves from British aristocrats to American patriots, there were other Charlestonians who clung to the shibboleths of gentility that had characterized South Carolina's golden age. Thomas Pike, who had enjoyed a decade of success as a Charles Town dancing master, had cast his lot as a Loyalist to the British cause. During the early years of the Revolution, Pike lived in Philadelphia and worked as a British spy, sending supplies, support, and intelligence to Loyalist pockets throughout the colonies. Pike had made good on the longstanding suspicion that dancing masters were well-positioned to act as spies, though it is poetic irony that Pike's subterfuge sprang from his deep allegiance to British identity, not from any Catholic, continental, or otherwise cosmopolitan impulse. Pike was arrested in 1777 and was placed under house arrest in Winchester, Virginia, with a group of seventeen Quakers who were held in contempt for not swearing the loyalty oath. Alexander Graydon, an acquaintance of Pike's from Philadelphia, went to visit Pike in Winchester and wrote in his memoirs of the ridiculous figure Pike cut, in his red coat and laced hat, surrounded by plain-clad Quakers in flat-brim hats. Never one to isolate himself, "friend Pike" was at meeting twice a week, lacey hat and all. Here was the elegant dancing master, an avatar of a bygone genteel age, surrounded by people who shunned dancing and self-display.

The image of Pike in his lace and crimson surrounded by dour Quakers is a comic one; the image of Gabriel among the soldiers, poignant. As in any stage drama, Gabriel's sentimental conversion turns on virtue recognized, while Pike's comedy is borne of priggish inflexibility. Even though Pike made a vocation out of transforming bodies and attuning comportment to social expectations, his gentility had hardened into something he could not shed. Gabriel, on the other hand, doffed his genteel grace when he removed his silk coat, taking on the body of a soldier. The unmaking of the graceful body reverberated across the colonies during the Revolution.

While British officers continued to produce genteel entertainments like Philadelphia's Meschianza of 1778, the Continental Congress had suppressed all "theatrical entertainments, horse racing, gaming, and such other diversions as are productive of idleness, dissipation, and a general depravity of principles and manners."² The momentum of anti-dancing rhetoric in the mid-eighteenth century made it likely that polite balls were implicitly under the category "other diversions." The new generation of American leaders had divested their webs of political and commercial power from the world of ballrooms and minuets.

Gabriel's transformation was the last in a series of transformations in the Manigault family, transformations which, considered together, tell the tale of South Carolina in the eighteenth century. Gabriel's father transformed himself from a French Huguenot refugee to a wealthy Lowcountry merchant, and Gabriel's son transformed himself from the privileged-but-provincial son of a rich colonial family to a cosmopolitan London gentleman. It was Gabriel, born between two Peters and outliving them both, who lived to see South Carolina cut itself off from the British Empire, who lived to see the crown he served in public office for most of his life openly denounced, who lived to see the ports that used to carry away his merchandise and bring back profits and English luxury goods in return filled with warships flying a new, American flag...it was Gabriel who transformed his loyalty to country into a loyalty to state.

But while the three-act saga of the Manigaults in America played out in South Carolina's elite forestage, the lives of their two-hundred-and-seventy slaves filled the offstage spaces of the Carolina Lowcountry.³ The transformation of colonial genteel bodies into American virtuous

²"Monday October 12, 1778," Worthington Chauncy Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress: 1774-1789*, Volume XII. 1778, 34 vols. (Washington D.C., Library of Congress Government Printing Office, 1904), p. 1001. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage> Retrieved March 3, 2014

³Ramsay notes that in a period of thirty-eight years, Gabriel Manigault's slaves increased in number from eighty-six to two hundred and seventy, and that they did so "without any aid from purchases, other than replacing twelve or fourteen old slaves with the same number of younger ones." This explanation is offered as evidence of Manigault's "good treatment" of his slaves. His argument does not sit well with this modern reader. (Ramsay, p. 502.)

bodies left open the question of whether Africanized slave bodies were capable of any such similar transformation. Could slave bodies absorb the virtues of the new Republic? Were they capable of the same “sensibility” of thought and feeling that was the new hallmark of the American citizen?⁴ And what if they were? What might that mean for the slave labor system and its future in the new American economy?

Samuel Jennings’s 1792 painting

Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences

grapples with these questions. This allegorical painting, which Jennings painted on

commission from the Library Company of

Philadelphia, is also sometimes called *The*

Genius of America Encouraging Emancipation

of the Blacks. The painting depicts the

figure of Columbia, avatar of liberty,

offering a pile of books (“Philosophy,” “Architecture,” and another unlabeled book) to a small group of emancipated slaves. These emancipated slaves, who abnegate themselves gratefully to the white female figure, are surrounded by symbols of civilized white erudition: books, a lyre, Corinthian columns, a globe, a Roman temple, and an artist’s palette. The female black figure holds a hand to her heart, to suggest the depth and emotional quality of her gratitude. She is in this sense sentimentalized, capable of a “fellow-feeling” that marks her as worthy of citizenship.

At the same time, the extremity of the freed slaves’ deference calls to mind portraits such as

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FIGURE U: *Liberty Displaying the Arts and Sciences*, Library Company of Philadelphia

⁴ On “sensibility” in early America, see Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the America Revolution*. (Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 2009).

Charles Bridges's image of William Byrd III, which I discussed in Chapter Three. The four black figures in the right of the frame gaze adoringly at the white figure at the left, a white figure who dominates the composition with her glowing skin and her gracefully bent posture. The black image is once again offered here as a spectator to the white image, a prop in someone else's performance.

In the center background of the painting, a group of freed slaves dance around a liberty pole. Here is *The Old Plantation* revisited: one can see the same blend of European and West African clothing, another banjo-like instrument, another female dancer waving a white scarf. As in *The Old Plantation*, these figures would seem to be in their sphere of volition, but once again they are dominated by visual reminders of white hegemony. Here, the plantation house has been replaced by allegorical representations such as the Roman temple, but the controlling power of white meanings still exerts its totalizing effect over the dancing figures. Jennings meant this painting to be a statement in support of abolition, but the gesture towards an amalgamated utopia that he offers in this painting is one in which blackness is subsumed by whiteness, where black dances anchor themselves around a white liberty pole.

This dissertation has suggested the crucial role the body played in South Carolina's formation as one of the British Empire's most refined cities during the eighteenth century. As planters and merchants translated rice to profits, dancing masters translated planters and merchants into cosmopolitan gentlemen. I have further suggested that the construction of an elite white body was in some ways aggravated by the "Africanized" body that slaves were constructing as a site of community formation across the South Carolina Lowcountry. Lastly, I have demonstrated that a burgeoning tide of criticism would wear away at the power structures

that the genteel elite built, replacing the imperative for refined, graceful comportment with an imperative for modest humility.

I hope that my work will offer scholars of the British Colonies, the American Revolution, and the Early Republic a helpful context in which to think about bodies in performance as a site of nation- building, as the modes of genteel comportment were challenged, reformed, and adapted within the crucible of sociopolitical upheaval. For South Carolinians in the mid-eighteenth century, the body was a site of sharp conflict, as various factions sought a share in controlling the vocabulary through which bodies might mean. At stake was the character of Charles Town itself, and the question as to whether a young city rich with commerce, brisk with social activity, and crowded with human slavery could coordinate itself into a city of grace.

APPENDIX

The Dancing Master, A

Satyr London, 1722

Of all the plagues with which poor England's cursed,
 Or ever was, the Dancing Tribe's the worst.
 The Lice and Frogs that punished Egypt's pride,
 Devouring locusts, and the Bloody Tide;
 The dreadful pestilence that Athens swept,
 And of her glorious Sons that City stripped;
 E'en barbarous Nero ne'er inflicted more,
 Or martyr'd saints worse punishments deplore;
 Not Jesuits' malice joined with Priestly Zeal,
 Was e'er so dang'rous to a Commonweal;
 Not France has suffered, from infectious steams,
 Or Britain more from vile pernicious schemes,
 Than we of this unhappy Iron Age,
 From the low runnings of th'Ungodly Stage.
 From thence are whipped the Manners-making Crew,
 To lead the town a Dance entirely new.
 Strange as it is, their crime was Impudence,
 For want of shame declares a want of sense;
 Their education's vile and so's their birth,
 And they the Dregs and scum of all the Earth.

In a Dark Cellar first the Rat is born,
 Of Father, Mother, and of help forlorn;
 'Tis spew'd into the world, the Parish nurse,
 Fosters it up, and makes it ten times worse:
 Small Beer and Cabbage is the Infant's food,
 And Nurse's milk by Royal Bob made good;
 The Rickets past, and Galligaskins on,
 Straight is the little urchin's course begun,
 His pretty parts he shows ten thousand ways,
 That tell the fortune of his future days.
 Quickly he knows the arts to rise and thrive,
 To file and sink and through your pockets dive.
 Tir'd of the Beadle's lash and beating hemp,
 Puts off the filcher and assumes the pimp.
 Old fribbling lechers past their youthful lust,
 Their vigor lost still leaves a tasteless gust;

Old bawds of standing gravity and fame,
 Staunch in their trade and lovers of the game;
 Rakes of all sorts, and whores of every size
 He serves by turns each their merchandize.
 And now he learns to bully, dance and fence,
 Thus he acquires a stock of impudence.
 Next on the stage his active parts he shows,
 And Vice in all its horrid shapes pursues.
 The piece thus finished, furnishes the town
 A *Dancing Master*—of no small renown.

Others from Bogs, and Fens, and Highlands come,
 And on their heels and impudence presume.
 Ign'rant of Nature, they would give her law,
 And lines and marks, to circumscribe her draw.
 Large is their boast, and mighty their pretense,
 To mend your manners and direct your sense.
 To know the world they'll direct your hopeful son,
 But thro' a course of lewdness lead him on,
 'Till by the pox, and whores, and bites he is undone.
 Your daughters, taught by virtue's strictest rules,
 Curse the remembrance of their Dancing Schools.
 Lost to their friends, they mourn the loss of fame,
 The loss of honor, innocence, and shame.
 Abandon'd to the world, they range for bread,
 Turn prostitutes, are pox'd, and quickly dead.

From France arrive, with fluttering airs and hopes,
 Others, who will teach you how to dance on ropes,
 Fly in the air, or stand upon your head;
 And can you, ladies, e'er be better bred?

Satyr, be bold and lash this cursed herd,
 Recount their worthies and their acts record.
 Strip off their peacock finery, deface
 Their borrowed grandeur and affected grace,
 Draw them at length, and in their proper shapes,
 Monkeys, baboons, and horrid grinning apes.
 Strong be thy colors, lasting be thy paint,
 Fade not the one, nor be the other faint;
 The picture finish'd, ugly will appear,
 As thy sweet self, and ten times uglier.

From Irish bog, see Master G—y trot,
 His art and movement he from thence has got.
 So prim, so nice, so featly gay, is seen

The moving statue, and the bright machine.
 The leg so straight, most regularly plac'd,
 With head reclin'd, sets off the taper waist.
 Quaint is his language, and his speech precise,
 In courteous phrase it falls—not over-wise,
 Affected Humor solid dullness veils,
 And wisely thus the inner man conceals,
 Observe him dancing to a various tune,
 The light pretender you'll discover soon.
 In vain the sounding violin directs,
 A measure nimble, easy, unperplex'd,
 Measure nor time the blundering blockhead keeps,
 Yet through the dance with wond'rous ease he trips.
 Thus *Salmon's* drummer briskly beats his tune
 So long as working wheels within can run,
 Ceas'd be the wheels and soon the hero's done.

But see the next, a fop in scarlet hue,
 Struts forth in velvet, for your nearer view:
 The dangling fringe bedecks the waistcoat fine,
 And spangling gems the pretty fingers bind.
 And thus equipp'd, he moves through his jabb'ring flock
 Like puppet Hero, or a dunghill cock.
 Big with the honors, and the homage paid
 By fiddlers, children, and by Moll, his maid;
 Flutters along the floor with antic gait,
 Fond to be seen, and would be something great.
 From Scottish kings, his pedigree will show,
 And boast of blood a thousand years ago.
 From High to Lower lands at length he hopped,
 Upon the English stage at last he dropped.
 There the vile insect ev'ry night was seen,
 A *Scaramouche* or wrig'ling *Harlequin*;
 A matter now, and of no common rate:
 Behold the turns of his revolving fate!
 Now he can teach the movement of the feet,
 To kiss, salute, all *a-la-mode visite*.
 Learned in the languages of ancient times,
 Of good old prose, or in more modern rhymes,
 The Greek and Latin authors are his friends,
 And always ready at his finger's ends,
 Their name's no more. ---
 Proud of himself, the fop assumes an air,
 With men of merit, merit durst compare.
 His merit! Known to every Whore in town,
 And is indeed peculiarly his own.

Tom G—m is the vain, conceited elf,
Well known to all the world, except himself.

See! At long distance swagg'ring T—l's mien,
Swol'n with fat ale, and Holland's gin.
Belches and oaths promiscuously fly,
Grate ev'ry ear, set ev'ry face awry;
The men asam'd, the ladies fly the room,
Faint with the vapors of his strong perfume.
Not but friend T—l's a companion too,
And with his equals notably will show,
How well he can become the Porter's Crew.
The full-mouth'd oath comes rattling thro' his throat
Curses he coins at home, and gets by rote,
Lodg'd in the upper regions of the house,
Contemptuously looks down on mortal us.
A settl'd fog o'ershadows all his room,
He gropes for bed amidst a horrid gloom.
A lighted tube, ('tis something strange and new)
Serves for his candle, fire, and supper, too.
Full pots, now empty, straggling round are seen
Like guns dismantled on a Ravelin.
His paper's windows, and his tatter'd bed,
Such Mother Wyb—n, living never had;
Vermin and bugs below the satyr's note,
And furniture not worth a Harry's goat,
Be-speak the Rake-hell, bully, and the filthy sot,
First pens and other implements to write,
Next pumps and files exposed are to sight,
For here you learn to scribble, dance, and fight.

There's Bully S—ys, tho' diminutive
In sense, and person, yet makes shift to live.
His stock of heels and understanding's small,
But in assurance over-tops them all.
A master, too, he is, or would be thought,
From top to toe, without a single fault,
'Tis true indeed, for he is of a piece
View him from bottom to his graceless
Phiz, If thro' the whole you should one beauty find;
A miracle! by Nature not design'd,
Abroad a Coxcomb, and at home a fool,
Fit for no use, no, not a *Dancing-School*.
To all his scholars, he's a standing jest,
And thro' the town a Noodle is confessed.

W—r has understanding, parts, and sense,
 And knows right well to gather up the pence,
 To hook subscribers in, and lectures read,
 And on anatomized bodies feed.
 Three guineas is his price, nor bates an ace,
 And you must set your hand or be an ass.
 But, sir, I cannot apprehend your drift.
 “No matter, read, and you will make a shift,”
 But, with your leave, your book will very soon,
 At any shop, be sold for half a crown,
 “And are my labors of such small esteem?
 My works but riddles, Or my life a dream?
 Or have my indefatigable pains,
 Been but to raise your credit and your gains?
 Has not the stage from me receiv’d applause?
 And all the world decided in my cause?
 Are these the thanks for all my gen’rous love?
 Are these the principles on which you move?
 Have I long labor’d in this painful birth,
 To be the trodden lumber of the earth?
 Oh, my poor children! My unhappy wife?
 You tasteless comforts of my hateful life!
 What friends, abandon’d wretches, will you seek?
 Hard is the parish ‘lowance, eighteen pence a week,
 But gentlemen, I’ve done;” I scorn to beg:
 So made a gentle bow, and then a leg.
 Sat himself down, yet kept a heedful look,
 Soon, with pleasure, saw them thunder-struck”
 Give me the pen, says one, shall it be said
 That so much pains and learning are unpaid;
 In haste another strait supplies his place,
 With nimble fingers and a pitying face.
 Some skewer’d out their marks, and some their names
 Some to raise his, but most their mutual fames.
 The numbers full, the yellows tumble in
 So bright a harvest *W—r* ne’er had seen;
 Happy if not a tavern cou’d be found,
 Or bawdy-house in fifty miles around.
 But him, as others, stars malignant rule,
 And make the man of sense a wretched fool
 Tho’ always rubbing off, still runs a score,
 Tho’ always getting, he is always poor.
W—r, be wise, a while behold the Ant:
 See her industrious care for future want.
 View there on yonder honeysuckle tree,
 The wondrous pains of that laborious bee.

For winter she that luscious store provides,
 And in her cavern all her treasures hides.
 When winter comes, she lives at home in peace,
 Wantons in luxury, and sleeps at ease.

Subscription is the modest way they take,
 To cram their purses and your pockets rake;
 For ev'ry charge, they'll tax you half a crown,
 So much they'll tax you, every mother's son.
 They'll buy you candles, and your fire find
 Amazing friendly! How exceeding kind!
 For ev'ry pound in your behalf is spent,
 Hundreds on hundreds they will make percent.
 Ladies, the boards are hard, they'll hurt your feet,
 I've got a green cloth, ev'ry way complete.
 Full good eight pounds it cost, I must confess;
 And what is that, 'tis but your crowns a piece.
 In ev'ry entrance there is still the same,
 And thus he merrily runs on his game.
 This Master C—y will make you know,
 If you refuse, expect a stormy brow
 An *Irish* skip kennel he lately was,
 And now a haughty, supercilious ass.
 "Ladies, behold that shining mirror there,
 That looking-glass is my peculiar care.
 Beauty's fair image there you may unfold,
 And each a Venus in her self behold.
 To give it, ladies, I cannot afford,
 Therefore, your money, I am at a word."
 Chloe at that with indignation grows,
 And ev'ry beauty in her anger shows.
 Sir, I condemn your project, and your glass,
 Tho' I'm a woman, I am not an ass.
 Impose on whom you will I dare refuse,
 And at your peril, your ill manners use.
 To dance is all my business here with you,
 For that I'll pay, whatever is your due.
 But C—y, impatient of replies,
 Knit his dark brow, and furious were his eyes,
 Chok'd with his passion, long in durance pent,
 At last, in spluttering nonsense gave it vent.
 But such his language, such his manners were,
 Such was his treatment of the blooming fair,
 That the good Satyr blushes to deride
 What ev'n his *Irish* modesty should hide.

Next faggot *L—l* claims a gentle note,
 Tho' ridiculed, he must not be forgot.
 The Joiner's business was his father's trade,
 A joiner, too, the booby should be made;
 But other thoughts filled his capacious crown,
 And turned his intellects quite upside down.
 Have I not parts, says he? These parts I'll scan,
 For surely I may be a gentleman.
 Straight he assumes his fulsome, awkward airs,
 And merit with the first of quality compares;
 Tucks Bilbo to his side, and cocks his hat,
 Then lac'd his clothes, for there is much in that.
 What if he's splay-footed and ungentleel,
 That's Nature's fault, and sore against his will.
 So stiffens up his face, displays his arms,
 And to a *dancing-master* straight transforms.

Good Heav'n! That such a wretched, worthless crew,
 Should lead the town with nonsense, noise, and show.
 Blast them, kind Heav'n, and drive them from the
 world, And let thy angry thunderbolt be hurl'd
 Right down upon them, save us from the worst
 Of punishments that ever nation cursed.
 Their insolence, profaneness, and their crimes,
 Too big for just description, or for rhymes,
 Call loud for vengeance, vengeance may they feel,
 In the unfathomable depth of *H—ll*.

FINIS

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