

The Education to be derived from dancing in the eighteenth century.

Anne Cottis

Introduction

The starting point for this article is my reading of the Everyman edition of Lord Chesterfield's letters published in 1929. These letters were written by Lord Chesterfield to his illegitimate son, Philip Stanhope; the first is dated July 24th 1739 and the last December 27th 1765. The edition to which I refer contains other letters, some of which Lord Chesterfield wrote to his godson between 1765 and 1773. Chesterfield was born in 1694 and died in 1773. His motive for writing the letters was primarily educational:

I have pleasure in writing to you; and you may possibly have some profit in reading which I write...¹ and:

At this particular period of your life, and at the place you are now in, you have only little things to do; and you should make it habitual to do them well, that they may require no attention from you when you have, as I hope you will have, greater things to mind. Make a good handwriting familiar to you now, that you may hereafter have nothing but your matter to think of, when you have occasion to write to kings and ministers. Dance, dress, and present yourself habitually well now, that you may have none of those little things to think of hereafter, and which will be all necessary to be done well occasionally, when you will have greater things to do.²

This illegitimate son, Philip Stanhope, was born to Mlle du Bouchet in 1732 whilst Chesterfield was British Ambassador at the Hague, and the letters included in the Everyman edition were originally written when Philip was between the ages of six and thirty three. Chesterfield organised various tutors for his son and arranged his grand tour abroad — a normal practice for the education of a gentleman's son at that time. The letters aim to reinforce this direct learning experience and supplement both the formal and informal situations of his daily life; his ultimate hope was that his son would be able to make an early and positive beginning in his intended career in the diplomatic service despite the stigma of illegitimacy.

Observation and reflection are seen by Lord Chesterfield to be tools in the educative process when he writes:

From your own observation, reflect what a disagreeable impression an awkward address, a slovenly figure, an ungraceful manner of speaking whether stuttering, muttering, monotony, or drawling, an unattentive behaviour, etc., make upon you, at first sight, in a stranger, and how they prejudice you against him, though, for aught you know, he may have great intrinsic sense and merit. And reflect, on the other hand, how much the opposites of all these things prepossess you, at first sight, in favour of those who enjoy them. You wish to find all good qualities in them, and are in some degree disappointed if you do not. A thousand little things, not separately to be defined, conspire to form these Graces, this 'je ne sçais quoi' that always pleases. A pretty person, genteel motions, a proper degree of dress, an harmonious voice, something open and cheerful in the countenance, but without laughing; a distinct and properly varied manner of speaking: all these things, and many others, are necessary ingredients in the composition of the pleasing 'je ne sçais quoi', which everybody feels, though nobody can describe. Observe carefully, then, what displeases or pleases you in others and be persuaded, that, in general, the same thing will please or displease them in you.³

Chesterfield's son seems to have been blessed with a physical gaucheness and a shyness of manner in the best circles, which his father was frequently at pains to improve. I suspect that most of today's parents and teachers find themselves using repetition in the education of their young and Chesterfield is no exception, particularly in the matter of his son's awkward manner. How many of us also use the phrase 'whatever is worth doing is worth doing well'?

In truth, whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well; and nothing can be done well without attention: I therefore carry the necessity of attention down to the lowest thing, even to dancing and dress. Custom has made dancing sometimes necessary for a young man; therefore mind it while you learn it, that you may learn to do it well, and not be ridiculous, though in a ridiculous act."⁴

This opinion of dancing is not the most helpful one for the student of eighteenth century dance, so I have sought to reinforce my article with material from other eighteenth century sources. I make no apologies for including many, sometimes lengthy, quotations because it is that which gives the flavour of the period. I hope also to persuade you to seek out a copy of the Letters because there is much there which is sound common sense and still has relevance today.

I have grouped the material from the Letters under a variety of sub-headings, rather than pursue them chronologically, but have been unable to avoid some overlap.

Bodily Carriage

I have already mentioned Chesterfield's low opinion of dancing but there are several instances where he recognises the importance of a genteel carriage in the education of a gentleman — perhaps his use of the phrase '*les bienséances*' or, loosely translated, a seemly deportment, gives a clue to its importance. Two of the major dance texts, by Pierre Rameau in 1725⁵ and Kellom Tomlinson in 1735⁶, devote several chapters to such subjects as '*Holding the Body*', '*Of Standing*', '*Of Walking*', '*Of the manner of Behaving Genteely at Formal Balls*', etc. In the following extracts from one letter Chesterfield's son is only about sixteen years old:

Next to be graceful speaking, a genteel carriage and a graceful manner of presenting yourself are extremely necessary, for they are extremely engaging; and carelessness in these points is much more unpardonable in a young fellow than affectation. It shows an offensive indifference about pleasing. I am told by one here, who has seen you lately, that you are awkward in your motions, and negligent of your person: I am sorry for both; and so will you, when it will be too late, if you continue so some time longer. Awkwardness of carriage is very alienating; and a total negligence of dress and air is an impertinent insult upon custom and fashion...

Women have great influence as to a man's fashionable character; and an awkward man will never have their votes... You should therefore give some attention to your dress, and to the gracefulness of your motions. I believe, indeed, that you have no perfect model for either, at Leipzig, to form yourself upon; but, however, do not get a habit of neglecting either: and attend properly to both when you go to Courts, where they are very necessary, and where you will have good masters and good models for both. Your exercises of

riding, fencing, and dancing, will civilise and fashion your body and limbs, and give you, if you will but take it, l'air d'un honnête homme.⁷

Three years later Chesterfield writes:

That easiness of carriage and behaviour, which is exceedingly engaging, widely differs from negligence and inattention, and by no means implies that one may do whatever one pleases; it only means that one is not to be stiff, formal, embarrassed, disconcerted, and ashamed, like country bumpkins, and people who have never been in good company; but it requires good attention to, and a scrupulous observation of '*les Bienséances*'; whatever one ought to do, is to be done with ease and unconcern; whatever is improper must not be done at all.⁸

In 1766, when he is writing to his godson, whom he addresses as 'My Dear Little Boy', he is just as much concerned with that aspect of his education:

A ploughman is by no means awkward in the exercise of his trade, but would be exceedingly ridiculous if he attempted the air and graces of a man of fashion. You learned to dance, but it was not for the sake of dancing; it was to bring your air and motions back to what they would naturally have been, if they had had fair play, and had not been warped in your youth by bad examples, and awkward imitations of other boys...

Nature may be cultivated and improved, both as to the body and the mind; but it is not to be extinguished by art; and all endeavours of that kind are absurd, and an inexpressible fund for ridicule. Your body and mind must be at ease, to be agreeable; but affectation is a particular restraint, under which no man can be genteel in his carriage, or pleasing in his conversation...⁹

F. Nivelon, in 1737, also begins his slim volume, which is addressed to both ladies and gentlemen, with illustrative plates and descriptions of a general nature. His first three plates are concerned with the ladies and their ability '*To Courtsie*', '*To Give or Receive*' and in '*Walking*' and then continues:

If you have attained that perfection you may begin to learn to dance.¹⁰

In 1712 John Weaver wrote the following about the kind of carriage Chesterfield is aiming for with his son:

The dancing so much esteem'd among us, and so necessary a qualification for gentlemen and ladies, whether taught privately or publikly, I shall call common dancing, and in which the English do not excell the ancients, but also all Europe, in the beauty of their address, the gentleness and agreeableness of their carriage, and a certain elegance in every part.¹¹

That Lord Chesterfield was himself a man of personal dignity and great poise is attested to by contemporary writers: his son must have had some problems in trying to come to terms with his father as such a noble model!

The Role of the Dancing Master

Although Chesterfield expresses a poor opinion of dancing he does value the contribution that both dancing and the dancing master can make towards his son's development by clearly directing him to acquire a certain bodily awareness. In 1745, when his son was about thirteen, his father wrote the following passage:

Now that Christmas breaking-up draws near, I have ordered Mr. Desnoyers to go to you, during that time, to teach you to dance. I desire you will particularly attend to the **graceful motion of your arms**; which, with the manner of **putting on your hat**, and **giving your hand**, is all that a gentleman need attend to. Dancing is in itself a very trifling, silly thing; but it is one of those established follies to which people of sense are sometimes obliged to conform; and then they should be able to do it well. And, though I would not have you a dancer, yet, when you do dance, I would have you dance well, as I would have you do everything you do, well.¹²

In an advertisement which appeared in the London Daily Post and General Advertiser dated January 3rd 1736 a comedy, *The Twin Rivals*, by Farquhar, was performed at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane. Its performance included entertainments of dancing, and the one mentioned in Act One was described as a new dance called the Venetian Gondolier and Courtezan; among the dancers was a Mons. Denoyer.¹³ It was common practice for dancers involved in the theatre to give private lessons in the houses of the wealthy, and it is quite likely that this was the same man who was hired by Lord Chesterfield to give lessons to his son.

The rules which Lord Chesterfield gives his son are, as he says:

...rules which my own experience and observation enable me to lay down and communicate to you with some degree of confidence...

Later in the same letter he abdicates some of his responsibility to the dancing master when he says:

I shall say nothing with regard to your **bodily carriage and address**, but leave them to the care of your dancing-master, and to your own attention to the best models; remember, however, that they are of consequence.¹⁴

A little more than a year later Chesterfield says:

Remember to take the best dancing-master at Berlin, more to teach you to **sit, stand, and walk gracefully**, than to dance finely. The Graces, The Graces! remember the Graces!¹⁵

Two years later, in 1751, while his son was in Paris he writes:

It seems ridiculous to tell you, but it is most certainly true, that your dancing-master is at this time the man in all Europe of the greatest importance to you. You must dance well, in order to **sit, stand, and walk well**; and you must do all these in order to please.¹⁶

These last three extracts were addressed to young Philip Stanhope between the ages of sixteen and nineteen. Was this the most usual time for a young gentleman to learn to dance, or had his father received more reports that he was still in need of acquiring a greater degree of grace or gentility of carriage? The role of the dancing master was seen as a vital figure in the education of this particular gentleman as, just one month later Lord Chesterfield is insisting that whatever else his son does in Paris, nothing must be allowed to interfere with his business with the dancing master.¹⁷

Other particular points upon which the dancing master was expected to be informative are revealed in the following extract:

But now, if you will be pleased to observe what people of the first fashion do with their **legs and arms, heads and bodies**, you will reduce yours to certain **decent laws of motion**. You danced pretty well here, and ought to dance very well before you come home; for what one is obliged to do sometimes one ought to be able to do well. Besides, *la belle danse donne du brillant à un jeune homme*. And you should endeavour to shine.¹⁸

Earlier in the century the dancing masters were obviously keenly aware of the contribution their teaching and writing was making towards the education of the 'Modern Fine Gentleman', and the 'Modern Fine Lady'.¹⁹ In 1721 John Weaver encompasses all the points which Lord Chesterfield requires from a dancing master when he states:

From the symmetry and harmony of all the parts of a body, of a regular proportion, Beauty arises. From a just position, disposition, and contrast of such proportionate parts Grace arises... How much then ought the art of dancing to be valu'd, which by a just disposition of all the parts, adds Gracefulness to this just accord, or symmetry of the members... For from a true knowledge of our art, rules are ascribed for a right placing, and situation of the head, for the flexion and extension, or turn of the neck; by which an air imparts itself throughout; and adds to the beauty of the face. A regular and natural carriage of the body, a just position of the feet in standing; with an unconstrained, contrasted motion in walking, gives Gracefulness to the shape.²⁰

and:

How healthful an exercise that dancing must be which we profess; because, the dancing taught by us to gentlemen and ladies, is not only a motion natural and easy, and without too much bending, or extension of all the joints, but the variety of motions make it still more agreeable; and as... by the natural love we have to change, a continuance of such motion seems to be less tiresome, and more pleasant, than walking.²¹

Surely Lord Chesterfield would have approved of John Essex too, when, in 1722, he was addressing young ladies about the importance of first impressions in the following words:

...to take pains in education... diligently mind the instructions of her master, to have nothing disagreeable in her step, or uncomely in her approaches; but be able to enter a room with a good grace, and to quit it with an easy deportment.²²

Let us return to Lord Chesterfield's phrase, 'decent laws of motion',¹⁸ and look particularly at John Weaver's, 'Anatomical and Mechanical Lectures upon Dancing'. Weaver devotes the final chapter of this to 'Rules and Institutions for Dancing', and writes:

... 'tis impossible to be master of any art without the theory; since upon that foundation 'tis, that the practice must be built... greater improvements may be deriv'd to our profession, which will not only a little add to its Reputation, but also be of universal benefit to all lovers of elegance and politeness.²³

Weaver's purpose in publishing the above text in 1721 was with a view to gaining greater respectability for the art of dance from a broader spectrum of society. There is material here for today's student of dance which is not, as yet, easily accessible. The following specific points from

the 'Lectures' help to give finer detail in identifying what rules were laid down at that time. Weaver indicates that:

1. The joints, presumably ankle and knee, should be a little bent, because fully flexed or extended joints are strained and without grace.
2. In first position the angle between the heels will be 'somewhat obtuse'.
3. A short second is five inches and a long second seven or eight measured from heel to heel.
4. A short fourth position is less than six inches and a long one greater.
5. The short fourth is the most graceful position for standing.
6. Ordinary walking proceeds by way of fourth position.
7. Fifth position is only necessary for rising or 'the termination of some few steps in dancing'.
8. The most graceful standing positions for men are a long or a short second, or a short fourth; for a lady they are first, a short second, or a short fourth.
9. The sink in dancing should always be made on a flat foot.²⁴

Although this dance text precedes Lord Chesterfield's letters, dancing masters later in the century were still concerned to prevent their pupils from falling into the apparent sin of affectation and the Letters, too, constantly refer to this state as something to be avoided at all costs. Chesterfield had already begun his career as a politician in 1721 and must surely have been established as one of those 'lovers of elegance and politeness' to whom John Weaver refers. The **phrases underlined** in the quotes in this section were all accepted by the dancing masters as part of their responsibility.

Exercise and Pleasure

Other attributes of dancing for which the dancing masters accepted responsibility were its value both as an exercise and as a diversion. Lord Chesterfield writes to his son, on several occasions, letters which are concerned with a well balanced education. He writes:

Business whets the appetite, and gives a taste of pleasures, as exercise does to food; and business can never be done without method, it raises the spirits for pleasures; and a spectacle, a ball, an assembly, will much more sensibly affect a man who has employed, than a man who has lost, the preceding part of the day...²⁵

and:

Divide your time between useful occupations and elegant pleasures. The morning seems to belong to study, business, or serious conversations... From sitting down to dinner, the proper business of the day is pleasure... Plays, operas, balls, suppers, gay conversation in polite and cheerful companies, properly conclude the evenings...²⁶

Chesterfield warns his son against excess of pleasure when the activity engaged in during the evening should not be allowed to continue into the small hours, otherwise it would interfere with his studies the following day. In 1722 John Essex advocates seven hours of sleep as being sufficient for men, while for some unexplained reason, 'young ladies may dispense with six',²⁷ he also advises his young ladies to be industrious and ensure a life of sufficient variety. Some of Essex' writing is also concerned with the 'Abhorrence of Idleness', but Lord Chesterfield

doesn't seem to have felt the need to write to his son in this vein.

The greater specialisation of knowledge today can lead to a narrowness of interests of which Lord Chesterfield may have disapproved, as well as our ability to be too easily distracted. He advocates a single-minded approach to the activity which is being pursued, whether it be work or pleasure. He writes:

A man is fit for neither business nor pleasure, who either cannot, or does not, command and direct his attention to the present object, and in some degree, banish, for that time, all other objects from his thoughts.²⁸

He continues to illustrate this point by stating the inappropriateness of the man at a ball trying to solve a problem by Euclid, and the man at home in his study suddenly thinking of a minuet.

Lord Chesterfield recognises the value of dancing as having a contribution to make towards healthy exercise although, in this respect, dancing probably has a smaller contribution to make than riding or fencing. He writes to his son in Italy saying:

I desire that you will apply yourself diligently to your exercises of dancing, fencing, and riding, at the Academy; as well for the sake of your health and growth, as to fashion and supple you.²⁹

The dancing masters take the contribution of their subject as a healthy exercise seriously. It is acknowledged by John Weaver, 1721, when he writes:

How much ought the art of dancing to be valued... which,... by the exercise arising from it, contribute so much to the preserving of health?³⁰

And John Essex, in 1722, argues that dancing is not only useful, but absolutely necessary, because it 'strengthens the fibres' and 'confirms the tone of the parts'.³¹ Both Weaver and Essex make further claims for the remedial effects dancing can have on physical defects and postural bad habits, Essex going a stage further in his claim that even though it is impossible to cure some defects it may be possible to disguise them.

The Importance of the Arms

I have already referred to Lord Chesterfield's general view, where one of the functions of the dancing master which he respected was his ability to instruct in the 'graceful motions of the arms'. His son's handwriting he describes as 'shamefully bad, and illiberal'. He therefore commands his son to get a good 'writing-master'. Further in the same paragraph he stresses the importance of a good, natural carriage of the arms:

From hand to arms the transition is natural; — is the carriage and motion of your arms too? The motions of the arms is the most material part of a man's air, especially in dancing; the feet are not near so material. If a man dances well from the waist upwards, wears his hat well, and moves his head properly, he dances well.³²

John Weaver, writing about Stage Dancing in 1712, goes even further in recognising the relative importance of arms and feet when he says:

The feet, and steps which seem to claim the greatest share towards the perfection of this Art, will not, as I shall shew, appear so material a qualification towards

the masterly performance of it, as the Address of the body, and just and regular Movements of the arms; neither is it so difficult to obtain an excellency in the former, as in the latter; for whereas the feet require only agility, and constant practice, to arrive at the utmost perfection; the Motions of the body and arms require a judgement, and knowledge in several arts, to qualify them for a just performance; for it is by the Motion of the body and arms, that he must express the Design, and form the Imitation; for this Address, and Motion of the body, is not, as some are willing to believe, an air, or manner, natural to some; but it is a perfection acquired with judgement, and altogether artificial; and to arrive at this perfection requires a long experience gain'd from the instructions and observations of good masters; a constant practice, and diligent application; join'd with a genius, and disposition very particular; and indeed, whoever designs to be excellent in this Art, must make it his chief aim and application.³³

Certainly other dancing masters were aware of the importance of the use of the arms in genteel society. Kellom Tomlinson,³⁴ in 1735, devotes one chapter to '*the Movement of the Arms in Dancing*', at the end of which he regrets the inadequacy of words and recommends the employment of the very best of dancing masters to give each dancer personal instruction. Earlier, in the same book, he goes to some trouble to include the arms in his description of that most popular eighteenth century dance — the minuet. Pierre Rameau,³⁵ in 1725, having already mentioned the use of the arms within Part I of '*Maître à Danser*', devotes the whole of Part II to the disposition of the arms, with many illustrations to support the text. The first chapter in Part II is headed '*A Discourse on the Arms and the Importance of Knowing how to Move them Gracefully*'. He, too, recognises the value of the personal instruction of the dancing master, who can do much to help the individual achieve the style most appropriate to his physical limitations. The final paragraph in this chapter establishes the fact that Rameau was writing with a two-fold purpose — to further the education of both young people and dancing masters.

Particular Qualities Desirable for the Educated Gentleman

Lord Chesterfield admits to being a perfectionist in his ideals for his son but is not adverse to using praise where it is due. In the quotations from the following letter we are given a homily for the acquisition of the qualities of softness and gentleness:

You are, I know, exceedingly improved in your air, address, and manners, since you have been in Paris; but still there is, I believe, room for further improvement, before you come to that perfection which I have set my heart upon seeing you arrive at; and until that moment I must continue filing and polishing... Mankind, as I have often told you, is more governed by appearances, than by realities; and with regard to opinion, one had better to be really rough and hard, with the appearance of gentleness and softness, than just the reverse... An air, a tone of voice, a composure of countenance to mildness and softness, which are all easily acquired, do the business;... Your heart, I know, is good, your sense is sound, and your knowledge extensive. What then remains for you to do? Nothing but to adorn those fundamental qualifications, with such engaging and

captivating manners, softness, and gentleness, as will endear you to those who are able to judge of your real merit, and which always stand in the stead of merit with those who are not... let your manner, your air, your terms, and your tone of voice, be soft and gentle, and that easily and naturally, not affectedly.³⁶

John Weaver, writing in 1712, describes the 'Common Dancing' as having a peculiar softness. He is really setting out to define 'Serious Dancing', but says that the steps of both are generally the same. It is the softness of common dancing which would reduce its effectiveness if performed on a stage, and, conversely:

Stage dancing would have a rough and ridiculous air in a room, when on the stage it would appear soft, tender and delightful.

In the following paragraph he outlines further qualities which are essential and says:

...that a man must excel in it in order to please. There are two kinds of movements in this kind of Dancing; the Brisk; and the Grave; the Brisk requires Vigour, Lightness, Agility, Quicksprings, with a Steadiness, and Command of the Body; the Grave, (which is the most difficult) Softness, easie Bendings and Risings, and Address; and both must have Air, and Firmness, with a graceful and regulated Motion of all Parts.³⁷

He continues to warn the reader about the difficulties of attaining perfection in this kind of dancing, and advises him to practice in front of a large mirror so that he can properly 'distinguish the proper from the improper'.

Soame Jenyns' poem, 'The Art of Dancing', published in 1729, conveys something of the quality of the dancing in the following extracts:

In the smooth dance to move with graceful mien,
Easy, with care, and sprightly, tho' serene;
To mark th' instructions echoing strains convey,
And with just steps each tuneful note obey;
With nicest art to tread the circling round;
Where use the lowly sink, or nimble bound,
I sing.³⁸

Perhaps Lord Chesterfield would have been in agreement with Soame Jenyns in the sentiments expressed in the following lines:

In vain we learn to trace a certain round,
And know exactly where to sink and bound;
In ev'ry movement there must still be seen
A nameless grace, and a becoming mien:
In vain a Master shall employ his care
Where nature once has fixed a clumsy air;
Rather let such, to country sports confined,
Pursue the flying hare, and tim'rous hind.³⁹

The Minuet, followed by differences in the expected behaviour of both sexes.

Fortunately for us the dancing masters have left much information about the different dances which were common at the time, because the only one to which Chesterfield refers is the Minuet, and then only to illustrate other points. I have already referred to the one which he uses to demonstrate the need to concentrate attention on one thing at a time. On the second occasion when reference is made to the Minuet, the letter is concerned with comparing the different relationships between father and son, and that of two friends. Only the

intimacy he has established with his son provides the authority for unreserved freedom, and therefore complete honesty. He lacked the courage to do more than drop hints to a friend who, by attempting to follow fashion, made himself ridiculous — the hints were to no avail! The quote from this letter is included because most of the other selected passages are written in more serious vein. This friend;

...had a scrag neck, of about a yard long; notwithstanding which, bags being in fashion, truly, he would wear one to his wig, and did so; but never behind him, for, upon every motion of his head, his bag came forwards over one shoulder or the other. He took it into his head too, that he must, occasionally, dance minuets, because other people did; and he did so, not only extremely ill, but so awkward, so disjointed, so slim, so meagre, was his figure, that, (even) had he danced as well as ever Marcel did, it would have been ridiculous in him to have danced at all.⁴⁰

At the least we have more evidence that the Minuet was a very popular dance. Hold the image of Chesterfield's friend dancing the Minuet, wearing his bag 'to his wig', as you read the following extract which Hogarth had published in 1753:

The ordinary undulating motion of the body in common walking (as may be plainly seen by the waving line, which the shadow a man's head makes against the afternoon sun) is augmented in dancing into a larger quantity of **waving** by means of the minuet-step, which is so contrived as to raise the body by gentle degrees somewhat higher than ordinary, and sink it again in the same manner lower in the going on of the dance. The figure of the minuet-path on the floor is also composed of serpentine lines, varying a little with the fashion: when the parties by means of this step rise and fall most smoothly in time, and free from sudden starting and dropping... The other beauties belonging to this dance, are the turns of the head, and twist of the body in passing each other, as also gentle bowing and presenting hands... all which together, displays the greatest variety of movements in serpentine lines imaginable, keeping equal pace with musical time.⁴¹

It is appropriate here to highlight some of the differences which eighteenth century society demanded in the behaviour and education of the different sexes. Hogarth's premise is that these curving, serpentine, wavy lines contribute more towards beauty in the human figure, and the angular, distorted lines sometimes used when dancing on the stage are a cause for ridicule and are a legitimate cause for comedy on the stage. Hogarth continues:

...such uncouth contortions of the body as are allowable in a man would disgust in a woman; as the extreme graceful, so very alluring in this sex, is nauseous in the other; even the minuet-grace in a man would hardly be approved, but as the main drift of it represents repeated addresses to the lady.⁴¹

Lord Chesterfield's letters are addressed to and concerned with the education of a gentleman, and the place of women in his son's life doesn't cause him too much concern, although he is aware of their influence, as we have already seen. He hopes there is a decent young woman in his son's life and isn't tempted by 'drabs', as some of his young English contemporaries appear to have been:

...(who) take up with the disgraceful and dangerous commerce of prostitutes, actresses, dancing women,

and that sort of trash; though if they had common address, better achievements would be extremely easy.⁴²

Chesterfield is writing about his son's fortune in being fluent in French, which will give him greater access to the households of the best French society, when conversation and acquaintance with respectable young ladies would be his to initiate and command.

The life of the young ladies for whom John Essex was writing in 1722 seems, by contrast, incredibly narrow. Although young ladies could be encouraged to learn foreign languages, reading and discourse were even more essential — foreign languages could be dispensed with. For the young lady, dancing was not only useful but absolutely necessary; she was cautioned to perform with 'modesty and moderation'. She was expected to be industrious in cultivating her mind to prevent her from becoming a 'bare animated piece of clay', and the list of virtuous qualities she was expected to be mistress of is quite formidable. Perhaps the greatest difference between the sexes of that period is highlighted in the following quotation from John Essex, and goes some way towards amplifying Hogarth's quote about role differentiation when a couple is dancing the Minuet. Essex writes that:

... the passions and humours of men being as different and changeable as their complexions... Nature has given to different sexes, different qualifications, that so by mutual society and friendship, the defects of each may be the better supply'd...

The ladies' role was:

...to soften and divert those troubles and cares which ruffle the tempers of mankind, and to which they are naturally expos'd by their affairs and business in the world.⁴³

For today's reader, educated in a society striving for equality between the sexes, this kind of role for a young lady is particularly difficult to accept.

Notation

Lord Chesterfield, in sending his son abroad for his education, is doing more than just following fashion; he is expressing his belief in the value of studying in living situations. He remarks on the reliability of life experiences, and that the capacity for observing and practising the subtleties and nuances of these direct experiences will broaden his son's education and fit him for his intended role in society:

...the conceited cloister philosopher knows nothing of life from his own theory; his practice is absurd and improper, and he acts as awkwardly as a man would dance who had never seen others dance, nor learned of a dancing-master, but who had only studied the notes by which dances are now pricked down as well as tunes.⁴⁴

In reconstructing notated dances today's student has this same lack of a living model — two-dimensional artefacts will always create problems for a three-dimensional art form. It is surprising, in view of the opinion Lord Chesterfield had of dancing, that he uses dance notation to illustrate a more important point — he obviously kept himself extremely well informed with regard to anything going on around him.

Eighteenth century opinions about the art and science of notating dances were varied. Most of the dancing masters

were in favour of its development, and John Weaver was encouraged to translate Feuillet's *Orchésographie* in 1706. Opinions expressed by the general public were extreme. Soame Jenyns, in his poem 'The Art of Dancing', has nothing but praise both for the lasting power of a dance and its ability to be communicated, on an international basis, on a par with the sister arts of painting and song. He writes:

Long was the dance art unfixed and free,
Hence lost in error and uncertainty:
No precepts did it mind, or rules obey,
But ev'ry master taught a different way:
Hence, ere each new-born dance was fully tried,
The lovely product, ev'n in blooming, died:
Tho' various hands in wild confusion tossed,
Its steps were altered, and its beauties lost.⁴⁵

A letter in the *Spectator*, attributed to Addison, disguises in the form of a dream, a dissection of a beau's head. It describes one of the cavities of the skull as being stuffed with various 'trumperies', including 'pricked dances'. The owner, before his death at thirty-five years old, 'had acquitted himself tolerably at a ball or an assembly!'⁴⁶

Conclusion

Perhaps it was because Lord Chesterfield's son was naturally lacking in the fine qualities demanded of the educated gentleman and courtier that the letters focus on the seemingly superficial. I have, in any case, distorted the material by selecting mostly that which is relevant to dancing. Despite all the care which his father took in writing the letters the son became no more than a mediocre politician. Today's young people are not quite so rigidly affected by class, and can afford to experiment with a choice of career — they are not necessarily forced to seek to attain the unattainable, but have greater opportunities to pursue their gifts, rather than constantly striving to reach perfection in a life which is not suited to their particular attributes.

The function of dance and dancing has also change significantly, and we no longer have one style which is supposed to suit all ages, at all stages of their development. Children are spared the difficult task of conforming to adult social dance forms, and it is recognised that each stage of growth reaches a maturation point which prepares for a succeeding period of growth. We still acknowledge the value of dance as exercise and recognise the feelings of well-being which result from participation in it. Its role in developing poise and self-esteem is recognised, but today's dancer can devote as much energy to creating new forms of dance as they can to participating in dances which are re-creations. Neither is there any one specific and acceptable style; the freedom of clothing and custom allow for a multitude of forms — on the stage, in the ballroom, and in the disco.

In order to allow for growth, although our ultimate goal is different, we still need to strive for perfection in our own lives, and a balance between work and leisure. In the words of Chesterfield:

Though you dance well, do not think that you dance well enough, and consequently not endeavour to dance still better. And though you should be told that you are genteel, still aim at being genteeler. If Marcel should, do not you be satisfied. Go on; court the Graces all your lifetime.⁴⁷

Although our subject and its ultimate goal may differ our sentiments may well be similar.

That Lord Chesterfield practiced what he preached, and was an excellent model throughout his long and full life, is acknowledge by a contemporary who was politician, gentleman and poet. Soame Jenyns wrote the following lines in 1770, on seeing the Earl of Chesterfield at a ball in Bath:

In times by selfishness and faction sour'd,
When dull importance has all wit devour'd;
When rank, as if t'insult alone design'd,
Affects a proud seclusion from mankind;
And greatness, to all social converse dead,
Esteems it dignity to be ill-bred:—
See! Chestefield alone resists the tide,
Above all party, and above all pride,
Vouchsafes each night these brilliant scenes to
grace,
Augments and shares th'amusements of the place;
Admires the fair, enjoys the sprightly ball,
Deigns to be pleased, and therefore pleases all.
Hence, tho' unable now his stile to hit,
Learn what was once politeness, ease, and wit.⁴⁸

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29. Letters, p 101, 15:5:1749.
30. See 20, pp 89 and 90.
31. See 22, p 82.
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