

# Women and Dancing after the Restoration

by Anne Cottis

## The Background

After the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 women were permitted by law to represent their own sex on stage both as actresses and as dancers. But what of their reputation? In the 1660s Samuel Pepys enjoys the ladies on the stage because he has a legitimate opportunity to ogle at their legs when they are cast in male roles.<sup>1</sup> In 1750 Lord Chesterfield clearly distinguishes between the young daughters of the households of the best society and “. . . the disgraceful and dangerous commerce of prostitutes, actresses, dancing women, and that sort of trash”.<sup>2</sup>

English society at this time, between 1660 and 1760, is better equipped with printed material on the dance than at any earlier period. As some of this is of French origin we can begin to recreate with a reasonable degree of accuracy an European Baroque dance style. The repertoire of both the theatrical dance and the social dance shared the same choreographic ingredients, and it is from this dance style that classical ballet emerged.

But these writers, notators and choreographers were male and more frequent reference is made to a male readership as “The **Gentlemen** of the Innes of Court” or in “the **Dancing-Masters**” who would be studying the contents of the books for their own benefit. It is not until the 8th Edition of *The DANCING MASTER*, published in 1690 that the need for the Ladies to acquire “Quality” in the “Art of Dancing” is recognised by Henry Playford in the Preface. In 1711 Pemberton’s Preface to *An Essay for the further Improvement of Dancing* states that it was produced at the “. . . Request of several Masters that live remote from London”; the fact that all eleven dances in the collection are notated solely for women is not considered worthy of comment, although the second part of the collection is dedicated “. . . to Her Grace the Dutchess of Buckingham”. In 1720 Kellom Tomlinson re-published a collected edition of six of his dances and in dedicating it “To the Ladies” he says “Twere pity this Art should be a Secret to you, LADIES, whose Favour and Encouragement have nourished it, from its Infancy, to its present Perfection! I myself, lament the Prevalence of Custom, which has hitherto depriv’d you of learning to dance by Book; and (not withstanding all the Jest and Reflections which may be thrown upon me) am resolv’d to instruct such Ladies, whom I have the Honour to teach”. *The Dancing Master*, Pemberton’s *Essay* and Tomlinson’s *Collected Dances* contain notated dances whose choreographies had been performed on stage as well as in the ballroom.

An attempt has been made to redress this male domination by dipping into the writings of women of that period, as well as modern writers who have done much to publicise the writings of the “Fair Sex” which have been overlooked for a couple of centuries. Even so, the balance is very heavily weighted towards men writing about women and dancing. Two particular topics are highlighted: firstly, the education of women, and secondly, their appearance on the stage.

## Their Education

Let us look first of all at the kind of education a woman might expect at this time. Antonia Fraser, in *The Weaker Vessel*, says that “. . . women were not actually intellectually inferior to men – merely worse educated”.<sup>3</sup> We have already heard how Tomlinson has expressed himself willing to stand against custom in encouraging the ladies to become educated in

dance notation, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, when advising on the education of her grand-daughter in 1753, expresses the opinion that it is necessary “. . . to conceal whatever learning she attains, with as much solicitude as she would hide crookedness or lameness”.<sup>4</sup>

Charlotte Charke, born into a theatrical family in 1713 and writing in 1755 says, “My education was not only a genteel, but in fact a liberal one, and such indeed as might have been sufficient for a son instead of a daughter”.<sup>5</sup> She was placed in a boarding school at the age of eight where she remained for two years, and her studies included French, Latin and Italian, as well as Geography. After that she was allowed masters at home to complete her studies in Languages, Music and Singing, and Dancing. Her dancing master, she tells us, “. . . the celebrated Mr Grosconet . . .” had an “. . . easy sublime Taste in Dancing . . .” and performed “. . . the genteel Movement of a Singular, or Plurality of Figures, with becoming Gracefulness; . . .”.<sup>6</sup> She singles out Mrs. Booth, probably better known as Hester Santlow, as a distinguished example of his teaching, demonstrating a style of dancing in which the “. . . Design [was] form’d to please an Audience with the more modest and graceful Deportment with which Mrs Booth attracted and charmed the Hearts of every Gazer.”<sup>7</sup>

Mr Grosconet is probably a mis-spelling for the Mr. Groscourt to whom John Essex, in 1728, dedicated his translation of Rameau’s *Le Maître à Danser* and described as “. . . among the Masters of our Profession to be esteemed one of the first, . . .”.<sup>8</sup> “A just Cadence . . .”, “an handsome and agreeable Manner . . .” and “. . . an unaffected Deportment . . .” are some of the qualities with which his “. . . Scholars of both Sexes have distinguished themselves”.<sup>9</sup> John Essex also says of Groscourt, “. . . by your Example [you] have shown them what it is to be genteel Dancers”.<sup>10</sup> Essex, too, extols the dancing of Mrs. Booth whose “. . . Grace, Softness, and Address none can look on but with Attention, Pleasure, and Surprise”.<sup>11</sup> Mr. Groscourt, (Groscourt?) an eminent dancing master whose notated dance for three ladies was published by Pemberton in 1711, gives us an example of a Figure dance with a Boree followed by a Minuet.<sup>12</sup> The choreographic content of the Boree clearly shows relevance to its title – *An Ecchoe* – and is likely to have been well within the capabilities of someone with Charlotte Charke’s background.

In 1682, at the age of 16, John Evelyn tells us that his daughter Mary “. . . began to learn musick of Signor Bartholomeo and dauncing of Monsieur Isaac, reputed the best masters”.<sup>13</sup> He continues “. . . she daunced with the greatest grace I had ever seene, and so would her master say, . . . but she seldome shew’d that perfection, save in the gracefulness of her carriage, which was with an aire of spritely modestie not easily to be described. Nothing affected, but natural and easy as well in her deportment as in her discourse.”<sup>14</sup> “The justnesse of her stature, person, comeliness of countenance, gracefulness of motion, unaffected tho’ more than ordinary beautifull, were the least of her ornaments compared with those of her mind.”<sup>15</sup> Most of what we know about Mary Evelyn is written by her father on the sad occasion of her death at the early age of nineteen. He tells us nothing more of any other tutors or schools and the implication is that most of her education took place at home. The list of her accomplishments is considerable.

Both John Weaver, in 1712, and John Essex, acknowledge their debt to Mr. Isaac, Mary Evelyn’s dancing master. In

1728 Essex refers to him as “. . . the late Mr. Isaac . . .” and as having been “. . . the prime Master in *England* for forty Years together [having] taught the first Quality with Success and Applause.” The qualities which John Evelyn recognised in his daughter’s dancing can be seen in Essex’ description of Mr. Isaac as having “. . . an agreeable Figure, . . . a handsome Mein . . . an easy Address and graceful Deportment . . .” and finally “. . . without Affectation”.<sup>16</sup>

A different kind of education for women is revealed by Daniel Defoe in his novel *Moll Flanders*, published in 1722. At the age of three Moll, an orphan, was “. . . put to nurse . . .” with a woman who kept a little school, “. . . to teach children to read and to work”. Moll tells us that “. . . we were brought up as mannerly as if we had been at the dancing-school”.<sup>17</sup> Moll had become very skillful with her sewing needle by the age of ten and was then kept by her nurse to be her assistant and teach the younger children. At the death of this nurse Moll was taken by a gentlewoman to live with her family. This covers the period from the fourteenth to the eighteenth year of her life. She tells us that “. . . here I had all the advantages for my education that could be imagined; the lady had masters home to teach her daughters to dance, and to speak French, and to write, and others to teach them music; and as I was always with them, I learned as fast as they; . . . I learned by imitation and inquiry all that they learned by instruction and direction; so that . . . I learned to dance and speak French as well as any of them . . . But as to dancing they could hardly help my learning country-dances, because they always wanted me to make up an even number”.<sup>18</sup>

That dancing lessons took place in adult life we learn through the diaries of Samuel Pepys in the 1660s. He had married his wife Elizabeth when she was only fifteen, and in her early twenties he decided that her over-familiarity with the servants could be avoided if they found a companion for her. Samuel’s first choice was a young woman, Gosnell, whose singing was good and who “danced finely”. Gosnell left after five days because she had been mis-led into thinking that they would be making frequent attendances at Court and at the theatre – she later appeared on stage. Another companion, Ashwell, is referred to as having a very fine carriage and was already an accomplished dancer on her arrival. Samuel Pepys’ next action is to hire a dancing master for his wife – one Pembleton. After Elizabeth’s first lesson Samuel expresses his fear that she is unlikely to “. . . do any great good at it, because she is conceited that she do well already, tho I think no such thing.” A few days later, having observed a lesson in progress, he has changed his opinion and says “. . . I think after all she will do pretty well”. Pepys becomes suspicious about the behaviour of his wife with the dancing master and this is probably why so many small details are revealed which help us to build up a picture of Elizabeth’s dancing lessons. The time of day for the lessons varies as does the number of lessons in the day: sometimes they are in the morning, sometimes after dinner, and sometimes in the evening. These lessons take place in April and May 1663 and are frequently on consecutive days. The types of dances learned are described by Samuel with the words “. . . and there we danced country dances, and single, my wife and I”. Although this statement is capable of several interpretations one possibility is that “dancing single” indicates the more formal dance we see notated and danced at balls.

Both Samuel and Elizabeth were taken by friends and neighbours to see dancing at schools and we know that many of these existed and that young ladies were surprisingly allowed to make their own way there. It was at a fashionable boarding school for young ladies, run by Josias Priest and his wife, that the first production of *Dido and Aeneas* took place in about 1689. This opera, with music by Purcell and a libretto

by Nahum Tate, was choreographed by Priest. It includes dances for characters such as Nymphs, Shepherds and Shepherdesses, Ladies of the Court, Drunken Sailors as well as an Echo Dance for Enchantresses and Fairies.<sup>19</sup>

In 1722 John Essex published *The Young Ladies Conduct, or Rules for Education, Under several Heads*. He believed that, for ladies, reading and discourse were essential, but it was possible to do without a foreign language. In a chapter devoted to the importance of modesty and chastity Essex warns that a “. . . light Carriage and Deportment, are certain Indications of a loose and roving Mind, too much addicted to Folly and Bagatelle”.<sup>20</sup> In the chapter devoted to Industry and the Abhorrence of Idleness he outlines a balanced programme of activity including:-

- a) reading and writing with meditation, reflection and contemplation;
- b) sometimes walking, dancing, singing or playing musical instruments, or any “Modest or Decent Exercise”; and
- c) “fitting or honourable Work or Labour”.<sup>21</sup>

John Essex, as well as Soame Jenyns in his poem *The Art of Dancing*, has much to say on the “. . . Indecency and Extravagance of Dress; the Lowering of the Stays behind and before, even to the Stomach; the Discovery of the Breast and Shoulders: Now do you imagine, LADIES, that Men are so cold to Love, as to want these Invitations; you are mistaken”.<sup>22</sup> Both men advise against the “. . . too great Extravagance of the spreading Hoop”, Soame Jenyns mourning his “. . . shins bruised black with many a wound”.<sup>23</sup>

The key section in this work of John Essex is Chapter Seven. This considers “. . . Exercise and Recreation, proper towards Forming and Preserving the Body in a State of Health, Beauty and Vigour; as Walking, Dancing, Musick, and other innocent Amusements”. He advises his Ladies to:-

- rise immediately upon waking;
- perform the necessary acts of devotion;
- employ an hour or two in Reading some pious, serious, or useful Book;
- reflect upon what you have read;
- prepare to guard against the known temptations of the day;
- and consider how you may carry out the days employment to “. . . the greatest Advantage to your selves [and] the Satisfaction of your Friends and Instructors”.<sup>24</sup>

Mary Evelyn, some forty years earlier, appears to have achieved all these objectives admirably. Essex acknowledges the importance of first impressions and recommends the young lady to “. . . take Pains in her Education . . .” [and] diligently mind the Instructions of her [dancing-]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”.<sup>25</sup> There is a very close correspondence between John Essex’ writing in 1722 and the writings of later French and English dancing masters.

WALKING, Essex writes, should:-

- be a modest, free and graceful motion,
- give an opportunity for the young lady’s “. . . Air, Shape, and choice in Dress to be agreeably expressed, . . .”
- show the fine turn of the head and neck,
- have an uprightness of body,
- show a decorum of the feet, and finally,
- if you can walk well instruction and application will enable you to dance well.

But he also says that there are many who dance well who cannot be taught to walk well, “. . . I mean with such a decent Grace and Freedom, as scorns all Affectation”.<sup>26</sup>

He next informs us that dancing is both an exercise and a diversion and has even more advantages in Education than the other Arts and Sciences because:-

- improvement can occur in every lesson if you have a good master;
- young children with a weakness or a physical defect ought to be the first to have lessons in order that the dancing master be given time to attempt to make the defects less visible if it is impossible to effect a cure.<sup>27</sup>

He is here addressing the young lady as a pupil in her own right as well as anticipating her future role as a wife and mother, when she will need to consider the advantages to be gained by her own offspring if they are taught to dance as soon as they can walk. He concludes that dancing is not only useful but absolutely necessary. He adds a caution “. . . that it be always performed with Modesty and Moderation . . .”. Dancing can be pleasing to spectators and performers alike but if it continues for too long it loses its beauty and fatigues the spectators looking “. . . too much like Vanity or Affectation.”<sup>28</sup>

This section began with Charlotte Charke and what she has to say about her own education; mens' comments about the education of the ladies follows; in conclusion we turn to a lady writing to her daughter about the education of her grand-daughters. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was born in 1689, and the following information has been gleaned from letters written to her daughter between 1749 and 1753. She writes:

“. . . Ignorance is as much the fountain of vice as idleness, and indeed generally produces it. People that do not read or work for a livelihood have many hours they know not how to employ, especially women, who commonly fall into vapours or something worse . . .”<sup>29</sup> She expresses her reluctance to give advice but writes that “People commonly educate their children as they build their houses, according to some plan they think beautiful, without considering whether it is suited to the purposes for which they are designed. Almost all girls of quality are educated as if they were to be great ladies . . . You should teach yours to confine their desires to probabilities, and to be as useful as is possible to themselves . . .”<sup>30</sup> Lady Mary comments on the inadequacies of her own education which she says consisted of “. . . superstitious tales and false notions . . .”, and further that “. . . Almost all girls are bred after this manner . . .”<sup>31</sup> She likens the education of a woman of quality to that of a prince, and illustrates this with the example of learning to dance and only absorbing the superficial elements (“exterior parts”) which are the requirements of so-called “good breeding”.<sup>32</sup> The Countess of Bute must have written to disagree with her mother about the importance of the genteel arts as a later correspondence informs us that “. . . The sort of learning I recommended is not so expensive, either of time or money, as dancing, and in my opinion likely to be of much more use to Lady Mary (her eldest grand-daughter), if her memory and apprehension are what you represented them to me”.<sup>33</sup>

“. . . To say truth, there is no part of the world where our sex is treated with so much contempt as in England . . . But I think it the highest injustice . . . that the same studies which raise the character of a man should hurt that of a woman. We are educated in the grossest ignorance, and no art omitted to stifle our natural reason . . .”<sup>34</sup> Antonia Fraser has said the same for women in the seventeenth century, but we are now in 1753 with Lady Mary saying “The same characters are formed by the same lessons, which inclines me to think (if I dare say it) that nature has not placed us in an inferior rank to men . . .”<sup>35</sup>

One small point to bear in mind is the use of the title ‘Mrs.’ This was usually applied to all respectable unmarried females and pronounced Mistress, while the title ‘Miss’ was reserved for the kept woman – unless it was applied to a young girl. For example, Hester Santlow is referred to as Mrs Santlow in cast lists etc. before her marriage to the actor Barton Booth.

Let us now look at the appearance of women upon the stage, in particular at breeches parts, and in selected produc-

tions designed for both the amateur and the professional performer.

### Women Upon The Stage

During Charles II's exile England was living under an ordinance forbidding stage plays. In April 1662 Sir Thomas Killigrew was granted a patent for a theatre in Drury Lane. It is this patent which legitimised the introduction of women on the stage. New plays should contain no “. . . passage offensive to piety and good manners” and old plays were to be “corrected and purged” of any “. . . profane obscene and scurrilous passages.” By such reformations, it was hoped, the womens parts could be performed by women and the plays “. . . esteemed not only harmless delights but useful and instructive representations of human life”.<sup>36</sup> This enabled female parts, originally performed by young boys, to be played by some-one of the appropriate sex. Very often the playwrights had sought to make the acting easier for these young boys in their female characters by enabling them to appear disguised as young boys. If this female character is now played by some-one of her own sex, an actress wearing breeches becomes a legitimate public spectacle for a predominantly male audience.

A newly written play could also exploit these cross-dressed roles, and Dryden gave Nell Gwynn an opportunity for showing off her pretty legs as well as being wooed for the fine beauty of her face, in the role of Florimel which he created for her in his play *Secret Love or, The Maiden Queen*. This play reveals the characteristic lack of inhibition in sexual relationships prevalent at Court at this time. It is also unusual in having as many as eight females in the cast and only three males. Dryden created an irreverent, impious and sprightly character in the part of Florimel – a maid of honour, and the Queen's ward. Pepys attendance at Dryden's play produces a Diary comment describing Nell “. . . as a mad girl, then best of all when she comes in like a young gallant, and hath the notion and carriage of a spark the most that ever I saw any man have. It makes me, I confess, admire her.”<sup>37</sup> At the beginning of Act V Florimel enters alone dressed in “Man's Habit”.<sup>38</sup> Her opening lines establish that she is still intent on turning Celadon (a Courtier and a bit of a rake) into a constant lover. Her efforts to establish herself as a gallant include the following phrases:-

- a very janty Fellow . . .
- toss about my empty Noddle . . .
- walk with a courant Slur . . .
- at every Step peck down my Head.

Celia, Olinda and Sabina then enter and the disguise is proved a success. ‘Monsieur’ Florimel now begins to challenge Celadon and a lively verbal battle ensues until Olinda says “. . . you shall decide your Quarrel by a Dance.” Base (sic) and treble fiddles just happen to be passing and Florimel commands them to “. . . play me a Jigg, you shall see how I'll baffle him.” And the judgement of Olinda and Sabina goes to Florimel. Although her disguise is discovered a little later she remains in breeches for the rest of the play.

Nell Gwynn had a counterpart, in more ways than one, at the Dukes Theatre. Pepys tells us, five days after seeing *Secret Love*, that he is again at the theatre. The most memorable part of this play, at the Dukes theatre, comes in the epilogue when “. . . little Mis Davis did dance a Jig after the end of the play; so that it come in by force only to see her dance in boy's clothes; and the truth is, there is no comparison between Nell's dancing the other day at the King's house in boy's clothes and this, this being infinitely beyond the other.”<sup>39</sup> This does not prevent Pepys from seeing *The Maiden Queen* on at least two other occasions and continuing to admire Nell in the part of Florimel. There are several other references to

females dancing in male clothes in Pepys diaries.

We have yet to reach the time when the Court ceases to be the centre of artistic life, as several of the royal residences made regular provision for theatrical activities. There are records which show the various uses made of the Hall Theatre at Whitehall with carpenters frequently at work either in flooring over the pit for dancing at balls, or removing all the boards and storing them away below the stage to leave it free for a performance of some kind. After the accession of William and Mary there were many balls in the Hall Theatre but few plays. One particular event which took place here in 1675 was the Court Masque of *Calisto*, written by J. Crowne. It represents, in its performers, a mixture of amateurs and professionals. The amateurs were “. . . several Persons of Great Quality” chiefly among them being the Princesses Mary and Anne, daughters of the Duke of York. The singers and some additional dancers were supplied from the public theatres. Crowne praises “. . . the Dancing, Singing, Musick which were all in the highest Perfection, the most graceful Action, incomparable Beauty, and rich and splendid Habit of the Princesses, whose Lustre received no moderate increase from the beauties and rich Habits of the Ladies who had the Honour to accompany ’em . . .”<sup>40</sup>

Crowne belittles his writing on several occasions using as an excuse the fact that he completed it in “. . . scarce a Month . . .” as had been requested. He also says “. . . True, it was not performed, till some months after the time first decreed, but that hapned from the discretion of those on whom the Dancing [Josias Priest] and Musical parts [Nicholas Staggins] depended, who found it required time to do anything in Perfection . . .”<sup>41</sup> He was limited specifically to a cast of seven ladies only two of whom could appear in ‘Mens Habits’. Both of the Princesses are cast as chaste young nymphs; the breeches parts are Jupiter (played by Lady Henrietta Wentworth) and Mercury (played by Mrs Sarah Jennings, Maid of Honour to the Dutchess).

Crowne explains that among the errors he has wilfully committed he has “. . . in the Prologue represented the River Thames by a Woman, and Europe by a Man, contrary to all Authority and Antiquity”. “The graceful motions and admirable singing of Mrs Davis, did sufficiently prove the discretion of my choice”.<sup>42</sup> These parts were represented by the professionals and Moll Davis is now cast as the River Thames, probably dressed in petticoats. When the “Curtain is drawn up” the description suggests that a tableau is revealed in which a Nymph representing the River Thames is leaning on an urn and attended by two other nymphs – Peace and Plenty: “Near Her are the four Parts of the World seeming to make offerings to her.”<sup>43</sup> (These parts are all played by male actors.) Later in the prologue we read of “An Entry of Shepherds and Nymphs, Dancing round the Thames, etc. as they stand in their Figure.” The next statement tells us that “. . . Here the Princesses and the other Ladies danced several Sarabrands with Castanets. A Minouet was also danced by his Grace the Duke of Monmouth.”<sup>44</sup> Later still Crowne directs Moll Davis as the Thames to turn to the King and Queen and address them with the following words:-

- The God & Goddess too of this bless’d Isle!  
Chaste Beauty in Her Aspect shines,  
And Love in His does smile.<sup>45</sup>

(This at a time when she had recently born Charles a child!) There follows an Entry of Rural Gods and Nymphs who dance to honour the King and Queen at the conclusion of the prologue.

The text follows and is organised as though it were a five act play, but a chorus follows each of these acts and it is in these that a variety of dances occurs each with its unique set of costumes. John Crowne comments that a further difficulty had been imposed on him in this Entertainment in writing the

Choruses as “I was obliged to invent proper Occasions, to introduce all the Entries; and particularly, for the closing of all for an Entry of Africans.”<sup>46</sup>

Documents in the Public Record Office quoted in other sources inform us that the professional dancers who participated in the choruses numbered twelve, all men, eight of whom were French and four English. All of the dancers receive £5 except Mr. Isaack who was to receive £10, words next to whose name could be interpreted as ‘extra attendance’. The Mr. Isaac referred to earlier who is known to have taught the two princesses to dance was probably employed to give them extra dance tuition, in the same way that Mary Betterton was employed to coach them in their acting roles.

It should be born in mind that after 1660 the theatre was responsible for a spectrum of entertainment in which there was greater emphasis on dancing, instrumental and vocal music, and the actors/performers were trained in a variety of skills which would have included dancing. Charlotte Charke’s family background gave her access to these skills. Her father, Colley Cibber, was one of the joint managers of Drury Lane with Barton Booth and Robert Wilks. Her mother – an actress and singer originally – and her brother Theophilus ten years her senior, must also be considered as key influences in her endeavours to seek her independence on the stage. Her sister Elizabeth (Mrs Brett) was an actress whose daughter Anna (Charlotte’s niece) made her debut dancing with the Drury Lane company. The famous actress Anne Oldfield encouraged Charlotte in her first performance on the stage.<sup>47</sup> When Charlotte married in 1730 it was to Richard Charke who, Fidelis Morgan tells us, “. . . began his career as a dancing master, but by 1729 was leader of the orchestra at Drury Lane”.<sup>48</sup> Their daughter Catherine, who also became an actress, was born about ten months later. Charlotte played a variety of roles, both male and female, between 1730 and 1737, the characters she played in *The Beggars Opera* for example include Lucy, Mrs. Peachum and Macheath. She is also known to have performed a dance with her niece Anna called *The Black Joke*. At one point she played a male role in Congreve’s *Love for Love* in which she would have been expected to dance on the man’s side in the country dance that takes place towards the end of the final act. The hero, Valentine, agrees that a dance has “. . . everything that looks like joy and transport”.<sup>49</sup> This dance appears in all editions of *The Dancing Master*, from the 9th edition in 1696 to the 18th edition in 1728 as well as in Walsh’s *Compleat Country Dancing Master*.

Charlotte was something of a rebel and having blotted her copy book at both major theatres when the Licensing Act of 1737 came into power she was forced to seek her living elsewhere. She describes her husband as having “. . . an unconquerable fondness for variety . . .”<sup>50</sup> in his ladies and accordingly she separated from him keeping their child with her. He seems to have been rather an improvident gentleman and when they first separated his visits usually coincided with his reduced finances. When the Licensing Act made Charlotte’s financial security even more difficult she had to take deliberate steps to prevent her husband from getting any of her money by the expedient of putting everything into the name of a “. . . widow gentlewoman who boarded with me”.<sup>51</sup>

As actors and actresses usually provided their own costumes for the roles they were playing Charlotte was frequently to be found dressed in male attire. It was also likely that she was safer moving about in public disguised as a man, and as such has appeared to have scandalised theatre historians. But she tells us that “. . . I did not prostitute my person or use other indirect means for support that might have brought me to contempt and disgrace.”<sup>52</sup>

In 1749 Charlotte was endeavouring unsuccessfully to earn

her livelihood as a strolling player but when one Devon audience turns out to consist of a front row filled with drunken snoring butchers and the next row filled with their wives who "... having more vivacity than the males, laughed and talked louder than the players,"<sup>53</sup> it is not surprising that the leading actress, Mrs. Elrington, should set out to take liberties with the text so that they could find the energy for continuing, fulfilling the conditions of the booking in order to receive payment. The play was *The Beaux Stratagem* with Elizabeth Elrington playing Mrs. Sullen and Charlotte Mr. Archer. Mrs. Elrington makes a surprise entry in a drunken scene in Act III scene iii between Archer and Scrub, seizing Scrub's tankard to drink a health and then calling for the butler to appear with his fiddle. Charlotte tells us that Mrs. Elrington then insists that they dance a minuet together. To be able to ad lib a minuet, in front of an audience, can have been no mean feat – involving as it did the fiddler and his tune, as well as the dancing couple. Charlotte Charke, in the breeches role, would have had all her steps on clear view to those members of the audience who were awake.

Charlotte Charke is also credited with being the model for one of the beautiful engravings to be found in Francis Nivelon's book entitled *The Rudiments of Genteel Behaviour* which was published in 1737.<sup>54</sup> The first part of this is devoted to the ladies. A copy of Plate 3 (illustrating Walking) is attached to the second edition of Charlotte's *Narrative* with the addition of her name by hand. The attainment of this erect, poised, yet relaxed and graceful deportment Nivelon considers essential for a proper dancing style. In walking, as in dancing, the front foot is turned out, and Nivelon's words emphasise the importance of a straight knee.

These are just some of the qualities deemed to be important for women and dancing between 1660 and 1760, and those ladies selected do not appear to have fallen into the trap of idleness described by John Essex as "... no more than a bare animated piece of beautiful Clay".<sup>55</sup>

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