A CONTINUING TRADITION?
MANIFESTATIONS OF THE GROTESQUE IN PURCELL AND HANDEL

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In his *An Essay Towards an History of Dancing* (1712), John Weaver divides 'Stage-Dancing' into three parts: serious, grotesque, and scenical.[1] The first required a 'certain *Address* and Artfulness ... [of] *Gesture...*'.[2] Gesture also played a role in grotesque dance. Here Weaver advised that 'the Master must take peculiar Care to contrive his Steps, and adapt his *Actions*, and *Humour*, to the *Characters* or *Sentiments* he would represent or express ...'. Indeed, Weaver tells us that each passion had its own 'peculiar *Gesture*'. By stating that the 'tunes' for the dances should be 'justly adapted to [the] *Characters*' represented, Weaver implies that music also had a representative function in these dances.[3]

Although describing characteristics of each type of dance, Weaver does not provide unequivocal definitions as such. Serious or genteel dancing,[4] has 'generally the same' steps as 'Common-Dancing',[5] and includes generic dances such as the chaconne or passacaille.[6] However, Weaver does not exclusively link the concepts of genteel dancing and generic music. As the concept of 'character' *is* unequivocally linked to grotesque dancing, I have considered *all* character dances as grotesque. So a shepherd dancing to a hornpipe is performing in the grotesque style, in character. I have taken 'gentility' back to its courtly roots, and have reserved this category for dances performed by stage courtiers or anonymous dancers performing in the masques within the dramatic operas, as the masque itself was originally conceived as a court entertainment. As the discussion below will reveal, serious dances are not always accompanied by generic music, and generic musical types are certainly found amongst the grotesque repertory.

Grotesque dancing is 'wholly calculated for the stage', and encompasses 'Historical Dances', which 'represent by *Action* what was before sung or express'd in Words', expressing sentiments or representing characters.[7] Scenical dancing, which 'explains whole *Stories* by *Action*' can be eliminated from our investigations, as there is no evidence to suggest that Purcell was working in this style.[8] Of the some 27 extant opera[9] dances by Purcell, 20 are clearly grotesque, for within their respective textual contexts, the *type* of character to appear, be it a shepherd or a fury, is clearly a focal point, for only general expressions of joy or malice are part of these dance scenes. Therefore these dances arguably depict characters rather than sentiments.

 Previously, music historians have concentrated their analysis of baroque dance music on the level of the phrase.[10] 'Gesture', which Weaver mentions in his discussion of both serious and grotesque dancing, is a term which applies quite comfortably to the movements of dancers. Can gestures be found in the music for dance? If so, how does musical gesture manifest itself in serious and grotesque dances? Are serious dances rhythmically simpler than their grotesque counterparts? Are the most complex rhythmic vocabularies reserved for certain types of characters?

The importance which Weaver attached to gesture suggested a fruitful avenue for assessing dance music of his time. As Weaver praises 'Mr. Joseph Priest of Chelsey', in

particular, for his skill as a grotesque dancer,[11] it seemed appropriate to attempt a gestural analysis of the theatrical music of Priest's sometime colloborator, Henry Purcell. In keeping with the theme, 'Continuity and Change', of the conference which inspired this present volume, some of the dances composed by Weaver's contemporary, George Friedrich Handel, will also be considered.

Music of the baroque era admits a finite number of durational values and intervallic gestures, organised into recognizable harmonic progressions, and from thence into phrases and entire pieces. In dance, small gestures, bends, rises, slides, hops, and so on, are combined and recombined to create a rich and varied step vocabulary, from which in turn phrases are created to form the dances themselves. But what unit of measurement can best draw out this parallel, seeking to uncover the gestures which shape the music? The unit of the bar is a relatively convenient observation point for making such an assessment, although gestures, or fundamental rhythmic building blocks, occur at smaller, sometimes at larger, levels.[12] Example 1 demonstrates how the units were calculated.
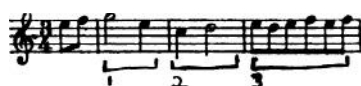
Example 1a) A rhythmic unit

Example 1b) A rhythmic unit, where the music has a consistent upbeat

Example 1c) A rhythmic unit, where the upbeat is inconsistent

For these calculations, each part was examined in turn, recording the rhythmic patterns found in every bar, omitting those which had already occurred. Rests, sounded and tied notes of the same durational value were considered as distinct.

Determining the number of 'units' within a given dance provides a means of quantifying the rhythmic complexity of its music. Analysing all of Purcell's operatic dances in this way, and ranking the dances according to the total number of units found, produces the results shown in Appendix 1, with the seven simplest dances including four character dances and three genteel dances. Three of the rhythmically straightforward character dances were written for rustic or pastoral characters, which suggests the music was meant to reflect the universally-held image of these 'types' as 'simple' folk. The dance for the Cold People from *King Arthur* consists of only two rhythmic units, which in themselves are almost totally composed of repeated quavers performed in a tremulous manner (see Example 2). Such gestural economy places the focus on the movement style itself. Here some form of characteristic dance gesture is clearly evoked through the music.

Example 2. Dance for the 'Cold People', from Purcell's *King Arthur*

A further example of a starkly-conceived character dance is Handel's 'Entrée de Mori' from *Ariodante*. Here, an iambic or 'short-long' gesture occurs no fewer than 94 times in 48 bars (Example 3). The rhythmic vocabulary, when measured in units, is somewhat richer than might first appear, for Handel manages to place this iambic gesture, in its several manifestations, within 13 distinct rhythmic units (Example 4). Thus we see how two generations of composers, working in different musical and dramatic idioms, used repeated gestures to establish certain character types.

Example 3. Iambic gestures in Handel's 'Entrée de' Mori'

Example 4. Rhythmic units in Handel's 'Entrée de' Mori'

Characteristic dances form the majority of Purcell's repertoire, and therefore demonstrate differing degrees of rhythmic complexity. The six dances with the greatest abundance of rhythmic units are all character dances, depicting Green Men, Heroes, Butterflies, Chairs, Nymphs, Furies and Furies. The Nymphs, despite their simple pastoral pedigree, are disguised creatures intent on seducing King Arthur from the path of goodness and righteousness, hence a bit of rhythmic complexity suits their devious purpose. If the dances are ranked according to the ratio of rhythmic units set against the total numbers of bars (Appendix 2), the passacaille for the seductive nymphs loses considerable ground in the ranking, for it is one of the longest pieces to be considered, being constructed over a repeated ground bass.

When assessing rhythmic complexity according to a unit/length ratio, only one of the genteel dances is ranked amongst the most complex. Generic dance types (which can be performed in character) also tend to be relatively simple. The exception, dances which can be classified as *entrées grave*, are rhythmically quite complex.[13] As the extant theatrical notations suggest that this was a very virtuosic dance, their musical complexity could well be a reflection of a choreographic tradition.

Most of the dances examined contained some form of repetitive gesture, normally at the level of the beat (for example, a dotted quaver followed by a semi-quaver) or the half-bar (usually a dotted crotchet followed by a quaver).[14] The exceptions include the one of the dances for Shepherds and Shepherdesses from Purcell's *King Arthur*, which maintains a fairly constant progression of crotchets throughout rather than breaking into more distinctive patterns (Example 5). This type of simplicity is suitable to the characters depicted.[15]

Example 5. Dance for Shepherds and Shepherdesses, from *King Arthur*

Further exceptions include the dance for Monkeys from *The Fairy Queen* (Example 6), and Purcell's dance for Witches from *Dido and Aeneas* (Example 7). In the first, a preponderance of cross-rhythms prevents the dominance of any single gesture while creating a suitably playful atmosphere. The Witches are rhythmically quite erratic, which esumably reflects their function as forces of darkness and chaos.

**Example 6. Dance for Monkeys, from *The Fairy Queen***

**Example 7. Dance for Witches, from *Dido and Aeneas***

Presumably the use (or lack of) of a recurring gesture could have been reflected in the choreography.

To conclude, we can now consider two of Purcell's richest rhythmic creations, his dances for Furies in *Dido* and in *Dioclesian*. These are fascinating examples because they show distinct rhythmic approaches to the same character type (Example 8). Typical rhythmic units from *Dido*'s Furies are followed by a selection from *Dioclesian*. The music for both is rhythmically very active, and demonstrates subtle variations at very small levels of subdivision. On a larger level, the music for *Dido* is simplified by a fairly constant stress on beats one and beats three, which gives it both coherence and drive (when sufficiently pronounced, this can be considered as a type of gesture). Tied notes are far rarer than in the *Dioclesian* example, where the beats, and their larger subdivisions, are often obscured.

Example 8. Rhythmic units from Purcell's dances for Furies
a) 'Echo Dance of Furies', from *Dido and Aeneas*
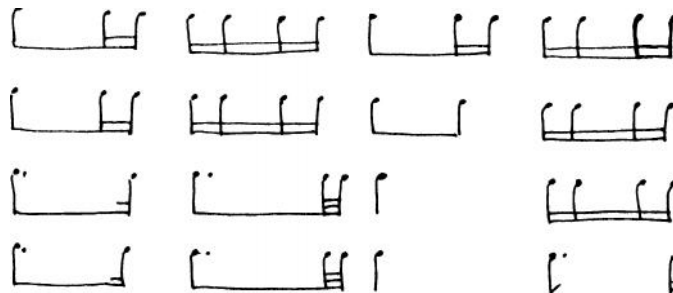
b) 'Dance of Furies', from *Dioclesian*
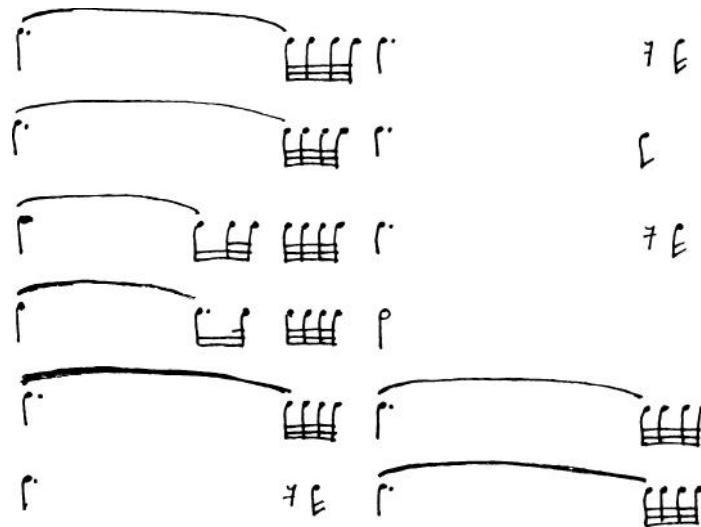
The music for the *Dioclesian* Furies is divided into six distinct sections, thus no single gesture predominates (Example 9).

Example 9. Purcell's 'Dance of Furies', from *Dioclesian*

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Handel's 'Entrée des Songes funestes' would have been written for a similar type of character. Here, as in the *Diocelsian* example, Handel employs distinctively different rhythmic units in each reprise. In the first, beats one and three are strongly emphasized, with the drive to the beat often being achieved by a demisemiquaver flourish. The second reprise is less emphatic, being comprised chiefly of semiquaver runs, with longer note values marking some of the downbeats. Its music is similar to that for the Furies in *Dido* (Example 10).

Example 10. Handel's 'Entrée des Songes funestes'

These three dances all clearly depict similar character types, but the varied approaches to rhythm found are arguably deliberate, and again, would have influenced or perhaps reflected the choreography.

By examining dance music at the level of the bar, we can further our appreciation as to how it was constructed, isolating patterns or approaches to rhythm which seem connected to the dances themselves and their functions within the drama. When analysed in this way, Purcell's dance music reveals some significant patterns, which, presumably, would have reflected the choreographies of individual dances.

REFERENCES
1   Weaver, J. *An essay towards an history of dancing*. London: Jacob Tonson, 1712, pp. 158–9, repr. Ralph, R. *The life and works of John Weaver*. London: Dance Books, 1985, pp.650–51.
2   Weaver praises Monsieur Desbargues in this regard, *Essay* p. 164, ed. Ralph p. 658.
3   Weaver pp. 164–67, ed. Ralph pp. 658–64.
4   In his *The History of the Mimes and Pantomimes* (London: Printed for J. Roberts and A. Dod, 1728), Weaver applies the term 'genteel' to his former category of 'serious' dancing, broadening the latter to include grotesque dancing (apart from characters derived from the *commedia dell'arte*) as well (*History*, pp. 55–6, ed. Ralph pp. 731–32).
5   *Essay* p. 162, ed. Ralph p. 655.
6   *Essay* p. 164, ed. Ralph p. 658.
7   *Essay* pp. 164–66, ed. Ralph pp. 658–62.
8   *Essay* p. 168, ed. Ralph p. 665.

9   At present, this study has considered the dances attached to Purcell's dramatic operas, *Dioclesian*, *King Arthur* and *The Fairy Queen*, as well as the dances for his all-sung opera, *Dido and Aeneas*. The dances from *The Indian Queen*, which cannot definitively be attributed to Henry Purcell, and those from his incidental music for plays, have been omitted.

10 See, for example, Little, M. and Jenne, N. *The dance music of J.S. Bach*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, which concentrates on categorizing dances according to perceived patterns of motion and repose within the phrase. Semmens, R. Dancing and Dance Music in Purcell's Operas, In: Burden, M. (editor) *Performing the Music of Henry Purcell*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, pp. 180–96, 282–85, considers the regularity and length of the phrases in his assessment of the music.

11 *Essay* pp. 166–67, ed. Ralph pp. 662–64.

12 Throughout, I prefer to refer to the rhythmic material found within a bar as a 'unit', reserving the term 'gesture' for normally smaller groupings which recur so frequently within a piece as to be considered a 'defining' element.

13 The *entrées grave* are the only dances for which generic labels have been added where not provided in a primary source (but see also Semmens, pp. 282–85). Purcell never names these dances, so the source of the label is at least consistent.

14 Chaconnes and passacaglias were not considered, as changes of rhythmic figures upon each repetition of the ground bass is arguably an inherent part of their construction.

15 See also the previous discussion of pastoral characters.

Appendix 1.   Henry Purcell – Rhythmic Units within Dances, ranked by total number of units

G = genteel   C = character
All numbers are references from Zimmerman, F. *Henry Purcell (1659-1695): an analytical catalogue of his music*. London: Macmillan, 1963.

Type	Opera	Performers	Dance	Metre	Units
1)C	*King Arthur*,17b	Shepherds, Shep'esses	Hornpipe	3/2	2
2)C	*King Arthur*,24c	Cold People	————	¢	2
3)**G**	*Prophetess*,36	2 Youths	————	3/4	5
4)**G**	*Dido*,7b	Courtiers	————	3/4	6
5)**G**	*Prophetess*,34	4 Women	Canaries	3/8	7
6)C	*Prophetess*,25	Country-folk	————	3/4	7
7)C	*King Arthur*,15a	Shepherds, Shep'esses	————	3/4	10
8)C	*Fairy Queen*,24a	Haymakers	————	6/4	13
9)C	*Fairy Queen*,15	Followers of Night	[entrée grave]	¢	15
10)**G**	*Dido*,13	Courtiers	————	3/4	17
11)C	*Dido*,30	Sailors	————	C	19
12)C	*Fairy Queen*,10	Fairies	————	6/8	19
13)C	*Fairy Queen*,46	Monkeys	————	6/8; ¢	21
14)**G**	*Fairy Queen*,41	Solo	[entrée grave]	¢	22
15)C	*Fairy Queen*,19	Fairies	————	¢	22
16)**G**	*Prophetess*,37d	2 children	————	¢	23
17)C	*Prophetess*,16	Figures from Wall	Chaconne	3/4	26
18)C	*Fairy Queen*,51	Chinese Man, W'man	Chaconne	3/4	28
19)C	*Prophetess*,32d	Bacchanals	[entrée grave]	4/4	30
20)C	*Dido*,34a	Witches	————	4/4;3/4;2/2	31
21)C	*Fairy Queen*,20	Green Men	[entrée grave]	¢	31
22)C	*Prophetess*,29	Paspe for Heroes	————	3/2	32
23)C	*Prophetess*,20b	Butterflies	————	¢	32
24)C	*Prophetess*,17	Chairs	————	6/4	42
25)C	*King Arthur*,30a	Nymphs, sylvans	Passacaglia	3/4	44
26)C	*Dido*,22	Furies	————	4/4	59
27)C	*Prophetess*,14b	Furies	————	¢	70

Appendix 2. Henry Purcell – Rhythmic Units within Dances
Ratio of units/bar, from simplest to most complex

G = genteel   **C = character**

All numbers are references from Zimmerman, F. *Henry Purcell (1659-16 95): an analytical catalogue of his music*. London: Macmillan, 1963.

Type	Opera	Performers	Dance	Metre	Units/Bar Ratio
1)**G**	*Dido*,7b*	Courtiers	————	3/4	6/80
2)C	*King Arthur*,17b	Shepherds, Shep'esses	Hornpipe	3/2	2/16
3)C	*King Arthur*,24c	Cold People	————	¢	2/13
4)C	*Fairy Queen*,51	Chinese Man, Woman	Chaconne	3/4	28/112
5)C	*Prophetess*,16	Figures from Wall	Chaconne	3/4	26/85
6)**G**	*Prophetess*,36	2 Youths	————	3/4	5/16
7)**G**	*Dido*,13	Courtiers	————	3/4	17/50
8)C	*King Arthur*,30a	Nymphs, sylvans	Passacaglia	3/4	44/131
9)C	*King Arthur*,15a	Shepherds, Shep'esses	————	3/4	10/24
10)**G**	*Prophetess*,34	4 Women	Canaries	3/8	7/16
11)C	*Prophetess*,25	Country-folk	————	3/4	7/16
12)C	*Fairy Queen*,15	Followers of Night	[entrée grave]	¢	15/24
13)**G**	*Fairy Queen*,41	Solo	[entrée grave]	¢	22/31
14)C	*Fairy Queen*,46	Monkeys	————	6/8; ¢	21/32
15)C	*Dido*,34a	Witches	————	4/4;3/4;2/2	31/40
16)C	*Fairy Queen*,24a	Haymakers	————	6/4	13/16
17)C	*Prophetess*,17	Chairs	————	6/4	42/46
18)C	*Fairy Queen*,10	Fairies	————	6/8	19/20
19)C	*Prophetess*,14b	Furies	————	¢	70/71
20)C	*Fairy Queen*,19	Fairies	————	¢	22/20
21)C	*Dido*,30	Sailors	————	C	19/16
22)C	*Prophetess*,20b	Butterflies	————	¢	32/28
23)C	*Prophetess*,32d	Bacchanals	[entrée grave]	4/4	30/24
24)**G**	*Prophetess*,37d	2 children	————	¢	23/15
25)C	*Fairy Queen*,20	Green Men	[entrée grave]	¢	31/20
26)C	*Dido*,22	Furies	————	4/4	59/26
27)C	*Prophetess*,29	Paspe for Heroes	————	3/2	32/13