

# Introduction

*Bill Tuck & Barbara Segal*

If there is one theme that links nearly all of the papers in this conference then it is the role of dance in providing a social identity. ‘You are what you dance’ might be taken as the slogan (a more meaningful attribute than ‘you are what you eat’ or, perhaps more appropriate for our consumer society: ‘you are what you consume’). Every culture has its

dances, though these may change from age to age. And it is these dances that, in some sense, define the culture: When we think of the Regency period it is the quadrille that brings to mind a visual image with which to identify this particular time and a particular segment of society – an emerging middle class practising their new-found rules of etiquette and polite behaviour (Fig.1).



**Fig. 1** Le Moulinet or - Practising Quadrille Dancing at home for fear of accidents at the Ball [London 1817]

It has long been known that the French ‘danse noble’ style spread to all the European courts during the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, but we are less familiar with the details of the impact this had upon social practices among all classes. In the opening paper of these Proceedings, Clara Rico outlines the way in which French court

dance – and the minuet in particular – spread into the upper society of Spain during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, though not without strong reaction from some sections of society that called for a return to a more ‘Spanish’ tradition. This followed the installation of the French Bourbon monarch Phillip V in 1700,

replacing the previous Austrian Habsburg monarchy, and led to a freeing up of the complex etiquette inherited from this earlier tradition.

A similar theme is presented in the paper by Helena Kazárová in which the banning of a dance is described. We are used to hearing of dancing being banned for religious reasons, but in this case it was for political reasons that a particular dance was banned. The emergence of Czech nationalism in the 1740s and the move to break away from the Austrian Habsburg empire of Maria Theresa became associated with the Czech folksong “*Kate has, Kate has,*” and an associated dance. In the turmoil following the War of the Austrian Succession, both song and dance were banned. Tracing the course of this now subversive work gives a fascinating insight into the role of dance as a political statement.

A similar story emerges in the case of Poland, which for many years suffered from external domination during which much of the aristocracy fled to France, while others were part of an internal cultural migration which strove to preserve the traditions of Polish culture while under the oppression of foreign forces. The rediscovery of this buried heritage provides a rich trove for Marianna Jasionowska’s exploration of the role dance played in defining the aristocratic life of 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century Poland.

When dance becomes a religious vocation, an all-consuming profession tied into the core beliefs of an entire community, then any threat to this role has consequences far beyond its impact on a single individual. This is explored in a fascinating paper by Tiziana Leucci on the temple dancers of India and the effect that the political changes brought about at Independence had on a whole way of life. With the abolition of the princely courts, the dancers lost their traditional patronage and most were forced to leave the profession, many being reduced to penury. This also forced a move from temple to theatre as locus for performance, along with a radical transformation of the training structure. With this change, so too changed the expectations of the audience, along with the role of the dancer, who was no longer seen as intrinsic to

the act of worship but simply as an entertainer. While the traditional choreographies may remain, the performance context has altered radically, along with the whole way of life of the performer.

That dance played an important role in defining the necessary accomplishments of a gentleman in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century England is, of course, a familiar story. In particular, the Inns of Court, as the place where much of the gentry received their final education, became the locus for dance instruction and performance. The *Old Measures* became the standard repertoire and defining dance style for this large and very important group of people – not all of whom were destined to become lawyers – and Jennifer Kiek’s paper provides some fascinating detail about these dances so ‘full of state and anciencey’.

The other side of the law is represented by Jennifer Thorp’s paper “Murder, Theft and Wrongful Arrest”. The records of courts of law are a valuable archive of information about the seamier sides of life – and that includes the impact that the law may have had upon the lives of dancers. There is much to be discovered about the involvement of dancing masters, for example, in cases of fraud, forgery or contractual disputes, but the concern here is with records detailing the involvement of dancers in violent crime and theft – either as victims or perpetrators (although they do seem to have appeared more often in the role of victim than of felon!). One insight that such records give into the lives of dancers and dancing masters, is just how difficult it was for them to overcome the ambivalence with which they were treated by the gentry, who simultaneously both needed and despised them. Dance as a cultural identifier is not always without problems!

This issue of social equality and dance is also addressed in the papers of Diana Cruickshank and Madeleine Inglehearn. Does the formal class equality of the ballroom – all couples in the longways set of a country dance being equal (unlike the conventions on who dances the minuet, say) – extend beyond this domain? The answer that Diana Cruickshank gives is decidedly negative – the ballroom

cannot be seen as any great force for democracy, nor did it serve as a social leveller in which the lower orders might mingle freely with their 'betters'. The standard repertoire of 'country' dances of this period (1650 to 1750) – as published by Playford, Bray, Walsh and the rest – was not the product of country folk, nor even known to them as far as one can tell<sup>1</sup>. The importance of dance as a definer of social class is explored and born out by these papers in the same way that dance as a national or political identifier is examined in the earlier ones – the conclusion being that whatever your class, culture, political allegiance or nationality, dance is likely to be a strong identifier.

The role of dance as a defining feature in the life of a specific individual is explored in a most entertaining way by Catherine Bowness. Master Paul Treby, a Devonshire gentleman of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century has left behind a diary full of interesting anecdotes detailing his adventures on the dance floor, and much else beside. This gives us a fascinating insight into just how important dance could be to the character definition of a 'gentleman' in this period.

From this it is but a short step to addressing the question of how to represent different kinds of people on the stage. This issue is explored by Anne Daye in her paper on "Satyrs and Bawds" – how the common people (at least in their fallibility and veniality) were represented on the stage of the Stuart masque. To quote Anne, "the satyrs and fauns of *Oberon* are stereotypes of feckless and ungoverned men and boys who achieve a measure of civilisation by the arrival of Prince Henry as Oberon". The anti-masque became the means for this representation, in contrast to the masque proper which showed the elegant dancing of the nobility. Along with the burlesque antics of bawds and satyrs, one had Morris dancers – representing the herdsmen and farmers of an imaginary Arcadia. It has been suggested by other authors, in fact, that the origins of the 'English Country Dance' itself may lie in these anti-masque representations of 'country folk'.<sup>2</sup> In our case the audience was invited by Anne to participate in recreating some of

these representations of bawds and satyrs, with suitable grimaces and outrageous postures (much as one sees in the old Morisco figures). In a later workshop Hazel Dennison considered the problem of representing the 'common man' in dance. In this case – using sources such as Arbeau's *Orchesography* and Lambranzi's *Theatrical Dancing* – the challenge, once again, was to "examine dance as a signifier/definer of social status".

Going back further, into the Tudor Court of Elizabeth and the associated Inns of Court, we find what may seem to us an even stranger interpretation of the true meaning of dance: *To the Renaissance mind the dance essentially represented harmony in its capacity as a reflection of heavenly order. It was held that the dance arose through an imitation of the movements of the stars and planets.*<sup>3</sup> This is the theme explored by Darren Royston, the link between the Elizabethan obsession with Astrology (think of Dr Dee) and its equally strong interest in dance (think of Christopher Hatton, one of the Queen's most powerful servants and a member of the Inns of Court). In his rise to power in the court of Elizabeth, Hatton made much of his ability to dance. It represented a state of order, parallel to that of the court and reflecting the order observable in the heavens.

The ways in which dancing is used symbolically to suggest a "transcendent heavenly order and its chaotic opposite" – particularly in the works of Chaucer and Spenser – is explored further in Sharon Butler's paper "Choreographies of Order and Chaos".

Finally we come to the practicalities of actually performing early dance repertoires in a modern context. How do we try to make sense of these very diverse forms of dance from a great range of times and societies? And how do we present them in a meaningful way to a modern audience, without losing entirely their original cultural or symbolic significance? Pretty floor patterns, charming music and colourful costumes are all very entertaining, but it would seem a pity if early dance was seen as nothing more than an elegant parade of antique forms.

The final papers of this collection address this general problem from two different points of view. Bill Tuck is concerned with the question of staging early dance as a form of music theatre – with strong narrative lines, characterisation, dialogue, and all the usual paraphernalia of a full-scale theatrical production. He and partner Barbara Segal were recently privileged with the opportunity of creating a piece for the Moscow Renaissance Music Festival and had the resources of musicians and dancers from the Moscow Conservatory at their disposal. Their joint production *The Masque of Time* addresses many of the themes presented at this conference: the role of dance as cultural identifier; symbolism, court politics and conflict – much in the manner of a Stuart masque. The argument is made that, far from being merely of antiquarian interest, the masque is a viable theatrical form for modern ‘participative’ theatre, particularly in the way that it encourages the involvement of both professional and amateur performers.

This theme is considered further in the final paper, in which Maxine Horne investigates the role of early dance in the present political climate, with its calls for an integrated “big society”. To quote the author: “[early] dance is a social activity with educational and health benefits”. It seems not unreasonable therefore to ask what its place might or should be in a future society organized on the lines of the government’s ‘big society’ vision. To a large extent this question still remains open.

It is a curious fact that the English, unlike the Scots, say, or Irish, have never sought to exploit their ‘national’ dances as a form of cultural identity, except perhaps in the form of irony. The current neglect of dance as a valuable part of our national heritage is often quite striking, as witness the concern voiced by the Morris dancing fraternity that there appeared to be little interest in incorporating anything from this area into the great national showcase represented by the 2012 Olympics. In the event, there was a somewhat brief appearance in the closing ceremony and scattered attempts elsewhere. Our dance identity has largely vanished underground into the esoteric confines of Quadrille Club or

local dance societies seeking to recreate an idealised past, whether ‘Regency’ or ‘Baroque’. Perhaps this is just another effect of globalisation, in which any local form of dance is easily swamped by the viral forms transmitted through global media such as YouTube. In the public imagination, ‘Gangnam style’ or the ‘Harlem Shake’ drown out, at least for a time, any general perception of what dance should be. Perhaps it is time to adopt the farmers market rather than the supermarket model, as regards dance: ‘Think global – dance local’, might do very well indeed as a catchphrase!

### Editorial policy

In order to get this collection out in reasonable time our policy as editors has been that ‘done is better than perfect’ (as they say, apparently, at Facebook): we have interfered as little as possible with the words of the authors; so long as the meaning is reasonably clear we accept the text as it stands. Likewise we have not tried to check the all too numerous references; any errors here are the responsibility of the respective author. Spell-checking, formatting and the general layout of these proceedings, for all their deficiencies, are however entirely our responsibility.

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> There is a telling passage in Oliver Goldsmith’s novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* in which the vicar is rather surprised to learn that the local country girls – though acknowledged as brilliant dancers at ‘the jig and roundabout’ – are ignorant of ‘country dancing’

<sup>2</sup> See for example, Keith Whitlock, ‘The English Dancing Master 1650/51 as Cultural Politics’, in *The Folk Journal* (EFDSS) Vol7 No 5 (1999)

<sup>3</sup> Roy Strong, *Renaissance Spectacle and the Theatre of Power*, 1973