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Attitudes towards Dance through the Ages: an Overview

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I was invited to give this paper for the Early Dance Conference, and specifically asked to present an overview of different attitudes towards dancing from classical antiquity to 1800. A daunting brief: to cover a period spanning more than 2000 years in 30 minutes! Needless to say, I have had to be very selective, so this paper will consider some of the views both for and against social dancing from classical antiquity until 1800, but after 1500 will focus mainly on social dance in England[1]. Of all the arts, dancing seems to have provoked the most extreme of reactions, ranging from praise by poets and teachers, to condemnation by church ministers and moralists. This ambivalence towards dance is found in ancient Greece and Rome, but it became increasingly virulent from the beginning of Christianity.

The influence of Plato

For the ancient Greeks, dancing was of divine origin. Plato believed that the divine gift of dancing was given to man by the Muses so that he could accompany them in their dancing, and refresh himself after his labour in the celebration of religious festivals (Plato,1926, I, ii, 653d-54a). Dancing was seen as an expression of the state of the soul: graceful and dignified dances produce beautiful and noble souls, whereas ugly and vulgar dances have an evil and debasing effect. Plato stresses that dance is learned by imitation; children should imitate the most virtuous and noble models and learn dances that will help develop physical strength and moral qualities (Plato, 1935, I, iii, 401b-c). He distinguishes between two kinds of dancing: the noble, which is suitable for free men and women, and the base or vulgar kind producing grotesque or comic effects which should be performed only by slaves and hired foreigners (Plato 1926, II, vii, 816). A strict dichotomy is maintained between the professional performer whose aim is to entertain, and the free leisured classes for whom the study of the liberal arts is the pathway to knowledge and virtue (Plato, 1926, I, ii, 653a-c).

So in Plato's works we find three main points: first, physical grace and movement as exhibited in dancing reflect the state of the soul; secondly, there is a dichotomy between noble and vulgar dance; and thirdly, free men and women must not imitate the vulgar movements of professional dancers, in other words, the gentleman amateur versus the professional. These ideas will be echoed again and again by dancing masters, moralists and satirists down the ages.

The early Fathers of the Church

The degenerateness of Roman entertainment and theatre, and spectacles of Christians slaughtered in the arenas, did little to endear dancing to the early Christian Church. From the time of the Church Fathers, dancing was associated with pagan ritual, feasting and licentiousness. Professional dancers were particularly stigmatised as being in league with pagan gods (relegated by the Church to the status of devils), in a subversive endeavour to preserve pagan rites. The Church's antagonism towards dancing is summed up in St Augustine's injunction: 'it is better to dig than to dance on the Sabbath' (Augustine, 1844, vol.37, p1172). In his major work *The City of God against the Pagans,* a hugely influential work throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, St.Augustine (354-430AD) cites dancing as one of the evils of a corrupt and wicked city (Augustine, 2003, p71). He began writing it in 413 AD, soon after Rome was sacked by the Visigoths in 410. Many Romans saw the Sack

of Rome as a punishment for abandoning their pagan religion and the dancing that went with it, so Augustine set out to show that the pagan gods were evil and the Christian City of God would ultimately triumph.

The early Fathers of the Church drew on many examples of dancing in the Old Testament, and dancing was generally acceptable if it was single-sex and performed with dignity. For example in *Exodus* Miriam and her maidens dance to celebrate the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea and escape from bondage in Egypt. The women dance to welcome David after his defeat of Goliath. And in the tragic story of Jephtah, his daughter and her friends come out dancing to greet him. In anti-dance polemic, these dances were justified because they were single-sex and danced with decorum, with few gestures and hardly any movement of the body. Male dancing such as David dancing before the Ark, is invariably described as strong and manly. It is not known how they performed their dances, but these examples will be cited in almost all the ensuing anti-dance polemic.

Of all the negative examples of dancing in the Old Testament, the adoration of the Golden Calf by the Israelites in Exodus 32 is one of the most frequently cited as proof of the evil and pagan nature of dancing. Another is Salome's dance that resulted in the beheading of St. John the Baptist. St.John Chrysostom (c.347-407) reinforced a tradition of vitriolic misogyny in his attacks on female dancers - a misogyny that continued through the Middle Ages into the 18th century (and beyond). Salome’s dance became a *topos* for female wantonness and demonic seduction, a constant reminder of woman’s responsibility for the Fall (Chrysostom, 1853, p64).

During the Middle Ages the public *caroles* of young men and women, but especially of young women, were constantly condemned. The *carole* was frequently referred to as the Devil’s procession that led straight to hell and damnation, and many examples in sermons refer to demons taking part in the dance. The holding of hands in the *carole* was condemned as a sin of physical contact (inciting concupiscence and hence, adultery). In sermons and treatises of the Seven Vices *caroles* are often attacked under the heading of *Luxuria* or Pride, since girls seduced young knights with their dancing, and distracted them from their rightful duty of warfare (a nice irony: it's better to kill than to *carole*). We see here the beginning of a fear that by dancing with women, men might become softened and 'feminized', and thus unfit for warfare - their primary duty.

Men and women were repeatedly condemned for committing sacrilege by dancing in church buildings and churchyards, and sermons often refer to dancers suffering divine retribution[2]. But such warnings were largely in vain. The difficulties of enforcing such prohibitions were compounded because the clergy often took part in the dancing or turned a blind eye to Sabbath-breakers. Sebastian Brant, for example, attacked priests, clerics and friars for dancing, as well as monks who danced in their monastery dormitories ‘lepynge to play the fole’ (Brant, 1494, fol.116^{r}). And even nuns joined in the dance, as we see in an illuminated Book of Hours c.1300 which shows a nun with her gown hitched up under her girdle, dancing to a tune played by a friar. The clergy often hired out clothes for maygames and sponsored dancing and church-ales in order to raise money for the Church. In 1544 an appeal was made to Henry VIII to suppress church-ales ‘in the which with leaping, dancing and kissing, they maintain the profit of their church’.

Courtly Love and Chivalry

As ideals of courtly love and chivalry were popularized by the troubadours during the 11th and 12th centuries, young men were expected to display their strength and agility in dancing, and not exclusively in martial sports and competitions. From the late thirteenth century ladies began to attend tournaments and dancing became an essential part of the festivities[3] (in England their presence is first noted at the Kenilworth Round Table of 1279). From this time tournaments were repeatedly condemned as

diabolical temptations to sin, encouraging all of the Seven Deadly Sins, especially gluttony, murder, vanity and adultery. Dire warnings were given about the dangers to the soul and the hellish torments to be suffered by those who took part in dancing.

However, such gruesome warnings apparently did little to dampen the widespread love of tournaments and the dancing that invariably took place in the evenings following the jousts, usually after the banquet. For the knight or aspiring squire, the desire to please his chosen lady was synonymous with his honour. Geoffroi de Charny writes in his manual of chivalry, *Livre de Chivalerie* (ca.1352) that a knight who desires such honour should excel in the 'fairest games and entertainments' and should not cease to 'joust, to converse, to dance and to sing in the company of ladies and young women'.

The fifteenth century and Castiglione

In the first extant Italian dance treatises, dancing masters such as Domenico (1455) and Guglielmo Ebreo (1463) were anxious to give to dancing the status of a liberal art on a par with music, rather than merely a frivolous pastime. They stress the intellectual foundation of dancing: dance is a rule-governed science based on rational principles. Guglielmo points out the antiquity of dancing and its therapeutic value, both physical and mental. Dancing, he writes, is a physical expression of the effects of music on the soul. From Domenico onwards all dancing masters and educationalists distinguish between the graceful and elegant dancing of the upper ranks, and the abandoned and vulgar dancing of the lower orders, echoing Plato's distinction between noble dancing for free men and women and vulgar dancing suitable only for slaves and professionals. Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (1508, pub.1526) established a courtly ideal of physical grace and *sprezzatura*, an unaffected nonchalence and simplicity in which art should conceal all effort (Castiglione, 1561, pp46-7). He warns against imitating the complicated and quick steps of the dancing master, for these are considered unsuitable for a gentleman unless he is dancing in a masque. He must always remain the noble amateur (Castiglione 1561, p.90). His book became almost a second Bible for English gentlemen and aspiring courtiers.

Sixteenth-century England

During the 16th century in England, as life became more and more centred on the Court after the long wars of the previous century, dancing was an essential accomplishment. In the Tudor court it was probably unrivalled as an indoor courtly pastime and enjoyed widespread royal patronage[4]. Musicians were employed to provide more dance than any other kind of music. Dancing was a necessary and morally beneficial part of a gentleman's education, as Sir Thomas Elyot was to argue in his *Boke Named the Governour* (1531), the first book on education to be published in English, and highly influenced by Castiglione's *Cortegiano* that was in circulation in England in 1530, 31 years before it was translated into English by Sir Thomas Hoby (1561). Elyot supports the Platonic idea that dancing is an imitation of celestial dance and an expression of the movements of the soul (Elyot, 1531, I, p218). The figures of the dance express virtues and noble qualities: in his moralization of the steps of the bassedance, for example, the reverence is the root of prudence, the brawl signifies maturity, the reprise, circumspection (Elyot, 1531, I, pp241-268). The dancing together of a man and a woman is a symbol of concord and marriage (Elyot, 1531, I, p233-236).

Later in the century Richard Mulcaster, headmaster of Merchant Taylors School, was a keen promoter of the practical benefits of dancing on the grounds that it is a useful exercise that gives good health, honour and strength (Mulcaster, 1581, p75). In his view dancing has remarkable therapeutic powers: it gets rid of stiffness in the joints and 'palsilike trembling of the legs and thighs'; helps digestion and 'rawnesse of humours'; is the best thing for 'aching hippes, thinne shankes, feeble feet'; and is beyond compare for 'delivering the kidneys or bladder from the stone' (Mulcaster, 1581, p72). Thoinot

Arbeau's *Orchesographie* also offers practical justifications for dancing:

> dancing is practised to reveal whether lovers are in good health and sound of limb, after which they are permitted to kiss their mistresses in order that they may touch and savour one another, thus to ascertain if they are shapely or emit an unpleasant odour as of bad meat. Therefore, from this standpoint, quite apart from the many other advantages to be derived from dancing, it becomes an essential in a well-ordered society (Arbeau, 1588, p12).

However, he does warn that the volta has its dangers for young ladies, since her partner lifts her in such a way that she frequently exposes her petticoats or naked thigh unless she keeps a tight hold of her skirts. The volta was frequently condemned by moralists; Jean Bodin, for example, declared that the volta was brought to England from Italy by 'night-dancing witches', 'night-dancing' suggesting not only witchcraft but also prostitution (Scott, 1584, p.33). But however much moralists might condemn dancing, it was by now an essential part of a gentleman's education. Caroso declared that dancing 'is so essential to one of good breeding, that when it is lacking it is considered a fault worthy of reproof' (Caroso, 1600, p87)), and Lord Herbert of Cherbury recommended that dancing be taught before riding the great horse or fencing because it 'fashions' the body, gives a good posture, and develops 'souplesse', as the French call it, so that all movements are comely and graceful. The better French masters, he adds, also teach how to enter and leave a room full of people; how to bow gracefully according to the rank of the person greeted; how to manage one's hat, and 'many other things which become men' (Herbert of Cherbury, 1599, p37).

With the closure of church schools that went hand-in-hand with the Dissolution of the Monasteries, many new grammar schools were founded. The new administration could no longer rely on the nobility alone but needed new men of talent (it was indeed for these future administrators that Elyiot wrote his book). This led to increasing social mobility and the need for courtiers and aspiring courtiers to be able to dance both socially and in masques. Dancing was one of the ways in which to gain the attention and even the affection of the monarch. Owen Tudor was said to have gained Queen Katherine's affection in a dance by "falling by chance with his head in her lap"[5]; Sir Christopher Hatton attracted the attention of Queen Elizabeth I by his dancing and later became Lord Chancellor; the Duke of Buckingham appeased James I's irritation at a masque by his virtuoso display of capers; and, if Shakespeare is to be believed, Henry the Eighth fell in love with Anne Boleyn during the dancing at a masque (Shakespeare, *King Henry VIII*, (1613, I, iv). Indeed, Philip Stubbes complained that dancing was considered a virtue and an ornament, and the only way to get promotion and advancement (Stubbes, 1583, Sig.Oi[r]).

The Reformation

Mulcaster and Arbeau's practical approach to dancing is deliberately intended as a defence of dancing against the increasingly virulent anti-dance polemic that accompanied the Reformation during the 16th century, and which became increasingly political. This polemic went hand-in-hand with the huge proliferation of dancing schools and dancing masters. Juan Luis Vives in his *Instruction of a Christian Woman* remarks: "there are now dancing schools in Christian countries but that is no wonder seeing also we have houses of bawdrey" (Vives, 1541, fol.46[v]). Men who danced were constantly accused of effeminacy, and even sodomy, as expressed by Philip Stubbes in his *Anatomie of Abuses:*

> If you would have your sonne, softe, womanith, uncleane, smooth-mouthed, if you would have him, as it were, transnatured into a woman, or worse, and inclined to all kinds of whoredom and abhomination, let him to dauncing schoole (Stubbes, 1583, sig.Ov[r]).

Again we see the view of dancing as a means to the effeminization of men, and the moral degeneration that was assumed to accompany such effeminizing.

Of all the reformers, John Calvin was one of the most violent in his condemnation of dancing. In his view the reign of the Devil was associated inextricably with dancing which, he declared, is nothing but an enticement to whoredom (Calvin, 1574, p374). The sixteenth-century polemic can be grouped into four broad and overlapping areas. First, the view that men and women are born wicked and are inevitably tempted to concupiscence when they see or take part in mixed dancing. All the senses are assailed: in seeing lascivious movements, in hearing wicked songs and in touching. Cornelius Agrippa of Netteheim writes: 'They daunce with disordinate gestures and with monstrous thumping of the feete, to pleasante soundes, to wanton songes, to dishonest verses' (Agrippa, 1530: fol.31^{v}). The custom of kissing one's partner at the end of the dance was continually attacked. Erasmus informs us that when the minstrels make a sign to end the dance, if anyone does not kiss his partner he will be 'taken for a rusticall or uplandyshe vyllayne, without any good maners or nurture' (Erasmus, 1488, fol.42^{r}), and Vives writes that kissing is especially common in England and France, as if the dancers' purpose was 'to stere up their bodily lusts in suche cold countries' (Vives, 1541, fol.46^{v}). In Philip Stubbes' view man's nature is quite sinful enough without dancing:

> it hath no need of allurements and allections to sin (as dancing is) but rather of restraints and inhibitions from the same which are not there to be found, for what clipping, what culling, what kissing and bussing, what smouching and slabbering one of another, what filthie groping and uncleane handling is not practised everywhere in these dauncings? (Stubbes, 1583, sigs.Mviiir-Mviiiv).

In treatise after treatise, dancing is depicted as an orgy of depravity and sexual licence, and human nature as incapable of restraint or discrimination.

Secondly, the long tradition of the association of marriage and dancing: the custom of meeting a marriage partner at the dancing place and of dancing at weddings. During the Tudor period there was a changing attitude towards marriage. The closure of the monasteries and the abolition of a celibate clergy went hand-in-hand with the Protestant idealization of married love and domestic life. Dancing should play no part at weddings or the finding of a marriage partner because it arouses lust and not love. But dancing was too firmly established for that purpose: in 1623 Robert Burton writes that girls learn to dance, sing and play the lute before they can say the Pater Noster or learn the Ten Commandments; 'Tis the next way their parents think to get them husbands...and by that means from earliest years their thoughts run to wantonness' (Burton, 1963, p.708). In his *Dialogue Between Custom and Veritie concerning the Use and Abuse of Dauncing and Minstelrie* Fetherstone's Minister tells the young man that he should look for a wife at sermons and lectures and not at the dancing place (Fetherstone, 1581, Cig.C8$^{R)}$.

A third area of contention was the association of dancing with pagan rites and hence popery. The obvious phallic symbolism of the maypole was condemned as idol worship. Maygames were condemned for encouraging sexual licence during the night-time excursions into the woods to gather branches when many girls became pregnant. At the Assizes of 1632, for example, 'many' were indicted for murdering illegitimate children conceived after church ales[6]. Philip Stubbes gives a lively account of Maygames, morris-dancing, and the Lords of Misrule dancing in the churchyard and in the church with their pipers pipeing, their drummers thundring, their stumps dauncing, their bels jyngling, their handkerchiefs swinging about their heds like madmen, their hobbie horses and other monsters skirmishing amongst the route' (Stubbes, 1583, Sigs.Mii^{r}-Mii^{v}). Unwittingly Stubbes reveals a fascination for such dancing that somewhat undermines his professed horror.

The fourth and perhaps the most serious cause of contention was the issue of dancing on the Sabbath. Throughout Elizabeth and James's reigns numerous bills restricting recreations

on Sunday were discussed by Parliament but always rejected by the monarchs. In general, dancing and other recreations were tolerated on the Sabbath provided they did not take place during Divine Service. But the question of Sunday sports came to a head in 1617 when James entered Lancashire on his return from his progress in Scotland. He was met by a group of angry laymen complaining that the county magistrates had forbidden lawful recreations on Sunday. Accordingly he drew up his *Declaration* in which he stated that sports, dancing, May games, Whitsun Ales, Morris dancing and the setting up of Maypoles were to be allowed on Sundays but 'without impediment or neglect of divine service'[7]. The *Declaration* was published the following year and became known as *The Book of Sports*. Its enemies referred to it as the 'Dancing Book', a 'Churchmen's *Maskaradoe* in the Dances that these Times were guilty of[8]. Thomas Fuller considered it to be the major cause of the Revolution. In 1633 Charles I reissued James's *Book of Sports*, rekindling the whole issue of dancing, Maygames, Church-ales and pastimes. Finally, in 1643, Parliament ordered that the *Declaration* be publicly burned by the hangman in Cheapside. By the 1640s the traditional holiday festivals such as May-games and church-ales were finally banned by Parliament, but it seems that dancing moved indoors and continued to be a major pastime. During the Interregnum John Playford first published *The English Dancing Master, and* there were new and enlarged editions in 1652 and 1657 during the Commonwealth period. The illustration on the frontispiece shows a dancing school with a man and a woman in the foreground and a Cupid between them still firing young people's hearts, but with a lyre rather than a bow and arrow. It is evident that the dancing school and dances were still important places for young people to meet each other. Playford also published a book of courtly dances in 1655, *Court Ayres*. The Court might have been dispersed, but much of its culture remained throughout the Interregnum. Dancing was certainly not neglected by Puritans. Indeed, when Bulstrode Whitelock led an embassy to Sweden in 1653 he greatly impressed the queen by his elegant dancing at a ball. She told him that she had always believed the English regicides to be low-born 'mechanicals'; but she could now see that some of them were gentlemen. However, the ban on May-games appears to have been effective: at the Restoration Charles II was heralded as the bringer of May (he landed at Dover on 25 May 1660); maypoles were erected 'in abundance' and morris dancing returned - sights which, according to one report, had not been seen for twenty years[9].

The eighteenth century

William Prynne's *Histriomastix* (1633) - an almost hysterical attack on every conceivable pleasure, particularly dancing - perhaps marks the height of the anti-dance polemic. His criticism of Queen Anne dancing in Court masques went too far[10] and resulted in his ears being cut off. After the Restoration of Charles II, there was a marked degeneration in manners; satire, both in plays and in publications, seems to have taken the place of church criticism. A good example is Ned Ward's scurrilous pamphlet *The Dancing-School* published in 1700, in which the narrator, wanting a sexual partner, visits the dancing-school as 'the best Rendezvous of willing Tits' that a man could find (Ward, 1700, p4). His *Secret History of Clubs* (1709) contains an even more scurrilous exposé of public dancing places. In Chapter XVIII, 'Of the Weekly Dancing Club: or, Buttock-Ball in St Giles', he gives the following description of a country dance:

> When a Set of Dancers were wantonly engaged in their Shake-Tail Exercise, it was well worth the while of a Sitter-by to observe their several Motions. One ill-shap'd Clown, with Mill-Post Legs, much fitter to tread Mortar than to stump it about after the celebrated Tune of *Greensleeves and Pudding Pyes*, would be turning about his fat Partner, dripping hot, with wadling like a Cow, without Step or Figure. Another, with an affected air, as stiff and as formal as a Moving Wax-Work Figure, would be very busie in recovering his Mate, who, for Want of Skill, made as many wry Steps in her Dancing, as she had done in her Modesty; and

> would give her such Tugs to him, and then such Cast-offs from him, as if, like a loving Husband, who has a handsome Wife that Cuckolds him, he was neither pleas'd with her, or without her (Ward, 1709, pp167-168).

How different to William Hogarth's description of country dancing which he uses to illustrate his serpentine theory of beauty![11] Nevertheless, despite the satire, the status of dancing was considerably enhanced during the eighteenth century. There are several reasons for this change: First, the growing prosperity that accompanied the expansion of overseas trade; a vastly expanding middle-class; the growth of an affluent consumer society; and the increase in leisure. Hand-in-hand with economic and social changes went the changing attitude towards marriage and the increase in the number of venues for dancing. Other reasons are Beauchamp's invention of a dance notation, first published in Feuillet's *Chorégraphie* in 1700. Choreography, such an ephemeral art, could now be written down and preserved like music, and circulated among dancing masters throughout the country. John Weaver's work, especially his *Essay Towards an History of Dancing* (1712) was also of immense importance in enhancing the status of dancing-masters, since Weaver showed that dancing masters could be intelligent and scholarly, and not simply have their 'wit distilled into their heels'.

John Locke (1632-1704), the leader of the English empirical school of philosophy, also played a large part in the changing attitudes towards dance. He wrote a series of letters to his friend Edward Clarke, advising him on bringing up his children, especially his son. These letters were published in 1693 as *Some Thoughts Concerning Education.* He begins with a quotation from Juvenal: '"A Sound Mind in a sound body" - is a short, but full Description of a happy State in this World. He that hath these two, has little more to wish for...' (Locke, 1693, p.19) . He frequently refers to dancing as a means to good deportment and manners, and declares that: 'nothing appears to me to give Children so much becoming Confidence and Behaviour, and so raise them to the Conversation of those above their Age, as *Dancing' (*Locke, 1693, p.46). He stresses the importance of physical exercise in addition to 'study and books'. His views on dancing and choosing a good dancing master are worth quoting in full:

> Dancing being that which gives graceful motions all the life, and above all things, manliness and a becoming confidence to young children, I think it cannot be learned too early, after they are once of an age and strength capable of it. But you must be sure to have a good master, that knows, and can teach, what is graceful and becoming, and what gives a freedom and easiness to all the motions of the body. One that teaches not this, is worse than none at all; natural unfashionableness being much better than apish, affected postures; and I think it much more passable to put off the hat, and make a leg, like an honest country gentleman, than like an ill-fashioned dancing-master. For, as for the jigging part, and the figures of dances, I count that little or nothing, farther than as it tends to perfect graceful carriage (Locke, 1693, p162).

For Locke the most important aspect of learning to dance is the acquirement of gracefulness, manliness and unaffected self-confidence, whereas the actual dance choreographies are secondary. Locke's book was the most important book on education throughout the 18th century. It was translated into almost every European language and influenced not only educationalists such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Kant and Pestalozzi, but innumerable dancing masters. John Weaver quoted Locke's treatise in his *Essay Towards an History of Dancing* (1712, repr. Ralph, 1985, pp425-8), and in his *Treatise on the Art of Dancing* (1762), Gallini quotes Locke's views on dancing at length (Gallini, 1762, pp140-2).

Locke's influence is also evident in Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son* (1774), especially his views on dance as a means to graceful deportment and manners. In November 1748 Chesterfield sent a copy of Locke's book to his seventeen-year-old son Philip Stanhope, while he was on an extended tour of Europe (Chesterfield, 1998, p.116).

The previous September he had reminded him to work hard at his dancing, and his views follow Locke's closely:

> Do you mind your dancing while your dancing-master is with you? As you will be often under the necessity of dancing a minuet, I would have you dance it very well. Remember, that the graceful motion of the arms, the giving your hand, and the putting-on and pulling-off your hat genteelly, are the material parts of a gentleman's dancing. But the greatest advantage of dancing well is, that it necessarily teaches you to present yourself, to sit, stand, and walk genteelly; all of which are of prime importance to a man of fashion (Chesterfield 1998, p.99).

Chesterfield must surely have possessed a copy of, or been familiar with, Nivelon's *Rudiments of Genteel Behaviour* (1737, repr. 1755), which has delightful illustrations showing first a woman in various postures and then a man in postures such as standing, bowing, taking off his hat, giving or receiving[12], and giving his hand to his partner in a minuet, all accompanied by written instructions. Chesterfield constantly exhorts his son to attend to what he called the 'Graces', which included not just physical grace but attractive manners and an amiable disposition. Unfortunately it seems that his son was decidedly awkward: 'he stoops excessively', he complains in 1751 (Chesterfield, 1998, p241). In letter after letter Chesterfield urges the boy to find the best dancing-master in each city he visits: '*Les manieres et les Graces* are no immaterial parts of [his education]; and I beg that you will give as much of your attention to them as to your books. Everything depends upon them' (Chesterfield, 1998, p146). While in Paris Philip studied with the famous dancer Marcel[13], and Chesterfield promises his son that when he returns to England he will resume lessons with his old dancing-master, Desnoyers[14], who, he writes, has the same status in England as Marcel has in France (Chesterfield, 1998, p230).

Philip died in 1768, but by that time Chesterfield had begun corresponding with his young godson, another Philip Stanhope (and, it seems, equally lacking in physical grace), who became his heir (these letters were not published until 1890). He repeats the same advice about the importance of dancing well, and in 1768 his godson began taking lessons with Desnoyers, whom he refers to as 'the Priest of the Graces' (Chesterfield, 1890, p278). Interestingly, he tells his godson that he doesn't expect him to be as good as Marcel or Desnoyers, but that it is absolutely essential to be able to dance a pleasing minuet (Chesterfield, 1890, p116). This suggests that there was still considerable overlap between theatrical and social dancing, especially in the performance of the minuet. Even as late as 1793, 'young women of condition' were advised not to try to dance like professional dancers. The reason given is not that it would be unbecoming, but that they would need to spend too much time practising, time which should be 'spent on useful domestic employment, as well as to the adorning of their minds' (Honoria, 1793, pp100-101). The author tells an anecdote about a young man who went to study in Paris with Vestris and was told by him never to dance a minuet, 'Because, Sir,...you dance too well for a gentleman' (Honoria, 1793, pp101-102). We are still seeing the influence of Castiglione and the constant warnings not to imitate the dancing master.

Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son* was an immediate best-seller, praised in its time for providing a complete manual of education, but despised by Dr Samuel Johnson for teaching 'the morals of a whore and the manners of a dancing-master' (Boswell, 1791, I. p159), although he later modified his view: 'Lord Chesterfield's Letters to His Son, I think, might be made into a pretty book. Take out the immorality, and it should be put in the hands of every young gentleman' (Boswell, II, p36). But it was quickly satirized, especially Chesterfield's emphasis on the Graces at the expense of classical education, notably by William Woty in *The Graces: A Poetical Epistle from a Gentleman to his Son*, published anonymously in 1774:

> With all his open manliness of mind,
> Where solid sense, and sterling wit are join'd,
> In life, poor *Classic* never could advance,
> The reason's plain...poor *Classic* could not dance" (Woty, 1774, p10).

This was followed in 1776 by *The Fine Gentleman's Etiquette; Or, Lord Chesterfield's Advice to his Son, Versified*. By a Lady, which includes the lines:

> Your dress to correct, and your carriage to mend,
> Let *le Tailleur*, and what's more *Marcel* stand your friend;
> *Marcel*, I'm persuaded, will soon teach you how,
> To turn out your toes, and to make a good bow;
> Nor do I despair, but he'll fathom outright,
> Your arms too, and legs, which are both in sad plight:
> Attend on his lessons, with diligent care,
> Of him you'll aquire, *tous les Graces*, *les manieres* (Anon., 1776, p10)

Despite such mockery Chesterfield's *Letters to his Son* was considered as a valuable conduct book, and had a huge influence during the rest of the 18th century and beyond. It was essential reading for any socially-aspiring young man, much as Castiglione's *Cortegiano* had been throughout the sixteenth century.

Lord Chesterfield has only praise for Marcel and Desnoyers, but the dancing master had long been the butt of criticism and satire. As we have seen, Castiglione warned against affectation and imitating the quick movements of the dancing master. Fast movements by either sex were thought to be undignified and to betray a light and frivolous mind, or an uncontrolled or vicious temperament[15]. Lord Chesterfield advises his son to do everything 'in Menuet time, speak, think, and move always in that measure, equally free from the dullness of slow, or the hurry and huddle of quick time" (Chesterfield, 1890, p178), and in *The Young Ladies Conduct*, John Essex warns young women that their outward behaviour should be serious and composed, for 'a light [wanton] Carriage and Deportment, are certain Indications of a loose and roving mind' (Essex, 1722, pp46-47). The anonymous author of *A New Treatise on the Art of Dancing* published in 'The Lady's Magazine' in 1785, who describes himself as an 'Old Master of Ceremonies', devotes a large part of his treatise to warning parents of the dangers to their children of imitating affected dancing masters. He writes of a very successful dancing master who makes 'himself appear like a monkey at his own ball, by dancing and wriggling with his rump in a scarlet coat trimmed with silver, a swarthy complexion, clumsy legs, and affected movements.' (Anon, 1785, p.49). In the anti-dance polemic dancers were frequently compared to apes because of their skill at imitation and their ridiculous antics. This comparison is expressed by Richard Braithwait in 1630 when he rebukes those who 'use those mimicke tricks which our apish professants use'. Some dancers are 'so supple and pliable in their joynts, as you would take them to be some Tumblers; but what are these but Jacke-an-Apes in gay clothes?' (Braithwait, 1630, p114). Parents must choose carefully since it is essential to dance well. The author of the *New Treatise* writes:

> It has been universally allowed, that *Dancing* is one of the most useful accomplishments a well-bred person can be possessed of. No gentleman or lady can be said to be qualified for a court, an assembly, or even any public line of life, without some knowledge of this art: a man or woman, cannot even walk with any degree of the graces (as the late Lord Chesterfield terms it) without having been taught at least the rudiments of Dancing (Anon., 1785, p.45).

He gives four reasons why dancing is an essential accomplishment: it is good for the health; it develops the body and gives a graceful deportment; it is an innocent recreation that keeps young people away from the fashionable vice of card playing; and it is absolutely necessary for young ladies and gentlemen to find marriage partners (Anon., 1785, p.57).

As we have seen, dancing was always closely associated with courtship and marriage. By

1700 the ideal of marriage based on love and respect had replaced the feudal concept of marriage based on the acquisition of wealth, property or political power, although financial considerations were still of prime importance. Since young people needed the opportunity and the time to get to know each other, a national marriage market for the gentry developed at the numerous balls during the London, Brighton and Bath seasons, and at inns and assembly-rooms in towns and watering places throughout the country.

Indeed, the coming-out ball became an essential *rite de passage* during the 18th century for girls of good family, enabling them to be introduced into society. The aim was to find an eligible husband as quickly as possible, preferably during their first season[16]. In her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) Mary Wollstonecraft poured scorn on the custom: 'What can be more indelicate than a girl's *coming out* in the fashionable world? Which, in other words, is to bring to market a marriageable miss, whose person is taken from one place to another, richly caparisoned...' (Wollstonecraft, 1992, p213). Criticism was frequently levelled at the emphasis on dancing at the expense of more academic subjects in young women's education. In her treatise on education first published in 1798, Maria Edgeworth writes that many modern mothers believe that 'the young ladies who dance the best are usually most *taken notice* of in public; most admired by the other sex; most likely, in short, not only to have their choice of the best partner in the ballroom, but sometimes of the best partner for life' (Edgeworth, 1798, p23). Dancing and other such accomplishments 'are supposed to increase a young lady's chance of a prize in the matrimonial lottery'. Nowadays, she adds, so many girls are accomplished that 'the market is likely to be overstocked, and, of course, the value of the commodoties must fall' (Edgeworth, 1798, p16). Such views echo Ned Ward's satire on public dancing clubs at the beginning of the century, in which he refers to the women who attend such places as:

> 'those obliging Ladies who delight to expose their Ware and Commodities to Sale at all Publick Market-Places' (Ward, 1700, p172). In effect Edgeworth's criticism points up the central role of dancing in 18th-century social life, at a time when marriage was still the only honourable way of life for girls of good family. As Sir Thomas Elyot once wrote, 'by the association of a man and a woman in daunsinge may be signified matrimonie' (Elyot, 1531, I, p85).

Conclusion

Throughout this long period we find several ideas originating with Plato that were adapted for Renaissance courtiers and popularized by Castiglione: the idea that the way in which someone dances reveals the soul or the character of the dancer, hence the need to dance in a graceful and restrained manner and to avoid fast movements; the dichotomy of dance suitable for the gentry and nobility contrasted with dances of the lower classes; and the constant warning not to imitate the fast movements or technical skill of the professional dancer or dancing master, particularly those who display affectation. The stress on the affectation of dancing masters becomes more and more associated with effeminacy, so that dancing is central to the 'feminization debate'[17] during the 18th century. The fear that dancing could make men 'soft' and effeminate not only by the influence of women that dancing promoted, but also by the movements and posture that dancing could develop, seems to be one of the reasons for the constant ridicule aimed at so-called 'effeminate' dancing masters. Throughout the early period we find repeated references to the 'manly' dancing in the Bible when men and women danced separately. By the 18th century educators and dancing masters such as Locke and Weaver stress that dancing is a manly art that develops courage, as if deliberately counteracting the association of dance with effeminacy[18]. The fear of the potential feminizing effect of dancing goes back to the traditional role of men as warriors. Whereas in ancient Greece dance was an essential part of religious worship, and men performed dances such as the Pyrrhic dance as a form of military training, social dancing

gradually lost this specific function and became a courtly exercise focused on women – whether courtly love or marriage market - and leisure. As we have seen, during the 18th century dancing achieved a very high status indeed, a status that certainly reflects the popular view of this period as the 'Age of Elegance', and also as a period when manners became increasingly 'softened' and feminized.

Postscript

As a post-script, I'd like to comment that by now one might have expected the anti-dance polemic to have died a gradual death. However, I recently came across a condemnation of line dancing by the Free Presbyterian Church in Ulster issued through the Moderator, Ian Paisley, and dated 15 February 2008. It states that:

> Line dancing and other worldly practices are now freely indulged in by professing Christians at wedding receptions and other social occasions. Line dancing is as sinful as any other type of dancing, with its sexual gestures and touchings. It is sensual, and not a crucifying of lust but an excitement to lust. No Christian who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit should engage in it. It aids and abets fleshly lusts which war against the soul[19].

The language, the sentiments, the outrage, echo back through the ages to the early Church Fathers. For some, it seems, dance can never be a joyful pastime, or even tolerated as a useful form of exercise. Plus ҫa change, plus c'est la meme chose!

Notes

1. The section on 18th-century dance is longer in this paper than the one I had time to give at the conference.

2. Cf. Alessandro Arcangeli, 'Dance and Punishment', *Dance Research*, (1992), pp.30-42.

3. Cf. Larry D. Benson, 'The Tournament in the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes & *L'Histoire de Guillaume Le Marechal*' in *Chivalric Literature: Essays on relations between literature and life in the later middle ages*, eds. Larry D.Benson and John Leyerle (Michigan, 1980): pp.1-24 .

4. Cf. John Stevens, *Music and Poetry at the Tudor Court.* Oxford, 1961, pp.244-245.

5. The anecdote of Owen Tudor was also cited by John Weaver, *An Essay Towards an History of Dancing*, p26.

6. Cf. Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (1964), p90

7. James I, *The Kings Majesties Declaration to His Subjects concerning lawful Sports to be used* (1618), p7

8. A. Wilson, *The History of Great Britain, Being the Life and Reign of King James the First* (1653), pp105-6

9. *The Autobiography of Henry Newcome*, ed. R.Parkinson 1852, p121

10. William Prynne, *Histriomastix. The Players Scourge, or Actors Tragedy*. 1633. Cf. Index: 'Women: skill in dancing no signe of their honesty'; and 'Women-Actors, notorious whores'.

11. Cf. William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty.* 1753, ed. with an Introduction and Notes by Ronald Paulson, Yale University Press, New Haven and London. For a stimulating essay on Hogarth's *Analysis* and why dance rarely figured in contemporary aesthetics, see Annie Richardson, "An Aesthetics of Performance: Dance in Hogarth's Analysis of Beauty" in *Dance Research* Vol.20, No.2, Edinburgh University Press, 2002, pp38-81

12. In Nivelon's illustrations both the woman and the man are giving what looks like a fan. While advising his son on his behaviour with women Lord Chesterfield says, "You had better return a dropped fan genteelly, than give a thousand pounds awkwardly". (Chesterfield, 1980, p226)

13. *Marcel*: Marcel was a French dancer who died in 1759 and who taught in Paris. He was Gallini's dancing master, and Gallini refers to him as 'my ever respected master' Gallini, 1762, pp.172-173. He was apparently a mediocre dancer, but an excellent teacher who

earned large sums of money preparing the upper classes for presentation at Court and teaching minuets to dance in the *grands bals parés.* He is reputed to have exclaimed 'Que de choses dans un menuet!', which became proverbial. He claimed to be able to read a person's character and even their country of origin simply by observing their walk and body movements. Cf. *Biographie Universelle Ancienne et Moderne*, 45 vols. Paris, vol. 26, pp 459-461

14. *Desnoyers*: This is probably the George Desnoyers (?1700-1788), famous virtuoso dancer who frequently performed at Drury Lane during the 1720s and 1730s, and who regularly partnered Hester Santlow. Cf. Moira Goff, *The Incomparable Hester Santlow. A Dancer-Actress on the Georgian Stage* (Performance in the Long 18th Century: Studies in Theatre, Music and Dance, Ashgate, 2007) pp126, 141-2, 146, 158. He appears in *Les Plaisirs de L'Arquebuse*, published in Paris in about 1780, a collection of contredanses choreographed by dancing-masters and dancers including Marie Allard, Landrin and Denis. In Anthony L'Abbé's, *A New Collection of Dances, Containing a great number of the best ball and Stage Dances* (1727?) there are three dances performed by Desnoyers: a Spanish Entrée, an Entrée, and a Turkish dance. He was also one of the subscribers. He was dancing-master to the royal children, and created a masque which they performed in 1769, and he was much involved in the court circle: in 1773 he was confidant of Princess Caroline. Cf. *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800*, ed. Philip H. Highfell et al. Southern Illinois University Press, 1975, vol.4, p332. He is the Desnoyers depicted with La Barbarina in William Hogarth's *Charmers of the Age*, which is also reproduced in miniature in *Taste in High Life* and in Plate 2 of *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753). This is the only known portrait of him.

15. Cf. Fermor, Sharon, On the Question of Pictorial Evidence. *Dance Research,* vol.V, no.2, Autumn 1987: p.25 and note 17

16. Cf. Françoise Carter, Jane Austen, Dancing and the Marriage Market. In *Terpsichore 1450-1900. Proceedings of the International Dance Conference Ghent, Belgium* (2000), pp161-168. For the coming-out ball cf. Audrée-Isabelle Tardif, Eighteenth-Century Origins of the Social Debut in England and its Relation to Dancing. In *Terpsichore 1450-1900.* Proceedings of the International Dance Conference Ghent, Belgium, 2000, pp151-160

17. I am currently working on the 'feminization debate' in the 18th century in relation to social dancing and dancing masters.

18. As if to emphasize the manliness of dancing, as well as its classical credentials, Weaver included a Pyrrhic dance in his *Loves of Mars and Venus,* 1712

19. 'The Burning Bush. A Protestant Witness in a Day of Apostasy', Friday, February 15, 2008. See http://www.ivanfoster.org/main.asp

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