

Sport and Dance in 1599: Arcangelo Tuccaro's *Trois Dialogues de l'exercice de sauter, et voltiger en l'air*

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I came across this book as a remaindered copy of the 1987 facsimile edition of the British Library copy from the library of Henry Prince of Wales.¹ Prince Henry acquired the library of John, Lord Lumley, and added more than 1000 books, commissioning the surviving Catalogue of 1609. In the 18th century, George II donated this "Old Royal Library" to the nation, placing it in the newly founded British Museum. Intrigued by Tuccaro's title, I bought the book.

Tuccaro writes principally about gymnastics, floor work to be more precise, but I was rewarded to find that, of his 197 leaves, a great many are devoted to a debate about the merits and demerits of dance, nearly a third of the book. The digression was almost an art form in Renaissance times, but this seemed exceptional.

Tuccaro's *Dialogues*, published in 1599, stands among the earliest practical and theoretical works on gymnastics. Girolamo Mercuriale, a Venetian medical man, published *De arte gymnastica* in 1569, which ran through various editions in Venice and Paris until 1672, but he shows no interest in dance except to offer the advice that after evening meals, people are best off going to bed.² Likewise, Cristóbal Méndez' *Book of Bodily Exercise* of 1553 makes no reference to dance. However, Tuccaro seems fascinated by it.

These dialogues are far from unknown to scholars of dance, such as Professor Margaret McGowan. but their dance content has not become widely known. This paper will try to do two things. First, offer a brief account of Tuccaro's material on dance for English readers and then answer a simple question -- why would Tuccaro interpolate so much material about dance in a treatise that centres on his mastery as a gymnast? The relationship between sport and dance is still a contested area today; what might Tuccaro's *Dialogues* suggest about that relationship in the late sixteenth century?

Who was Arcangelo Tuccaro?

He is described as the "saltarin du roy", the King's acrobat or tumbler. Sandra Schmidt tells us much of what there is to know about him.³ Tuccaro was born in Aquila about 1535 and entered the service of the Austrian Emperor Maximilian II in 1564. In 1570 he accompanied Maximilian's daughter Elizabeth to her wedding to Charles IX in Touraine and lived at the French courts of Charles IX, Henry III and Henry IV. The structure of the *Dialogues* reinforces this courtly backdrop. The setting is the wedding celebrations of 1570, on the evening before the much respected Tuccaro is to demonstrate to the king and court his outstanding skills, "son art du saut voltigé en l'air" (his ability to leap and turn in the air Tuccaro's skills are illustrated in the 88 woodcuts that stud the second of his dialogues, the most famous and striking of these is Fig. 1, a large pull out leaf that survives in only a few copies. How astounding his illustrated trajectory is! (Note that the head down position of his roll is not illustrated.)

His Text

The first of the three dialogues is largely a debate between two noblemen, one Cosme who attacks dance, and Ferrand, a devoted friend of Tuccaro, who defends it. Other characters drift in and out as they walk together (in the peripatetic tradition), discussing how the ancients made use of gymnastic exercises and then moving on to rather abstruse philological questioning of terms such as “saltatio”, “tripudio” and “chorea” [11-12] where the topic of dance is introduced. Tuccaro himself is much anticipated, but does not appear until the second dialogue, when he lays out the detail of his art of tumbling. The third dialogue reflects on health and physical exercise more generally.

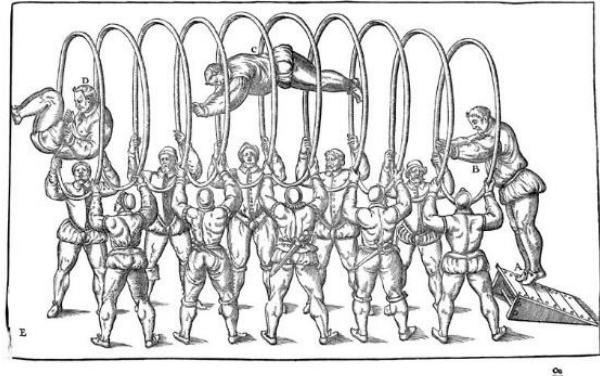


Figure 1. From a rare First Edition of 1599, published in vellum, with all 87 woodcuts and its large, original foldout.

The Material on Dance

Criticism of dance is presented first. Cosme’s arguments have a familiar ring. He is much in favour of bodily exercises, but only those of “power, valour and quality,” “*la vertu, valeur, & qualite*” [16v], those that benefit the fighting man. Neither “*la danse*” nor “*le bal*”, a recurrent verbal formula, is of any worth to such men. Such dance leads to sin and is a waste of time. He praises combat and the hunt and finds the origins of dance, of leaping and singing, in drunkenness amid the followers of Bacchus:

“Who can be unmoved witnessing the agitation of people who dance with such great diversity of movements, and not marvel at the folly of such men and women, who delight in these things, and not fail to flee them as fools and the totally mad.” [18 – 18v]

“qui est celui qui sans passion considerant l’agitation des personnes qui dancent avecq’une telle & si grande diversite de mouvements, ne s’esmerveille de la folie de tells hommes & femmes qui s’y delectent, & ne les fuye come personned folles & du tout insensees?”

According to Cosme, dance may be natural, but it has a vicious origin. All well-ordered Republics forbade dance and banished “*les sauteurs & balladins*” (in Cotgrave’s 1611 *French/English Dictionary* these are translated as leapers and dancers, and as lively dancers). Dancing is a bridge to Hell. [20] Cosme goes into some detail about the many occasions for sin that dancing provides:

“Maidens, married women, widows, young and old, find in it a thousand chances to sin and think about doing ill. All sorts of voluptuousness and shameful pleasures flow from it which incite and provoke them to act on their immodest desires. The reverences, the lascivious kisses, the embraces which they make when dancing one against the other and the clutching of hands, the hot and dissolute glances and other such gestures and

wild caresses are more than enough proof of the sinful and unworthy ways of dance.” [20v-21]

“Les pucelles, les femmes mariees, les veuves, ieunes, & vieilles y trouvent mille occasions de pecher & penser à mal faire. Toutes sortes de voputez & plaisirs deshonestes y affluent, qui les incident, & provoquent d’accomplir leurs desires impudicqs. Les reverences, les baisers lascifs, les embrassemens qui s’y font en sautant l’un contre l’autre, & s’estraignant les mains, les regards affectez & dissolus, & tels autres gestes, & caresses desbordees sont preuve plus que suffisante des façons vicieuses, & deshonestes du bal & de la dance que vous prisez tant.”

Cosme is an advocate of severe good government, one that would root out idlers, vagabonds and gamblers under the Roman custom of appointing a “Tribunus volutatem”, in more familiar terms perhaps a Master of the Revels, but one willing to cut out the rotten parts and administer physical punishment. [22, 23v] He feels that “the effeminate exercise of dance” [25v], “*cest exercice effeminé du bal & de la dance,*” should have no part in education. He has a good line in bombastic invective and, aside from a few interjections from Ferrand from time to time, he holds the floor, citing many many authorities both classical and Christian and, it must be said, returning to the same topics repeatedly. One sports historian briefly sighs, “The conversations are often long ... flooded with an insufferable verbal fury.”⁴

Ferrand begins his counter argument with the idea that dance in itself is neutral, “neither good nor bad but thinking makes it so” as Hamlet might say (II:ii). Like anything else, dance can be corrupted: “I don’t say that there are not some who lack the true understanding of this art and produce a thousand bits of monkey business, more like jugglers & clowns, than dancers.” [29], “*Je ne dy pas qu’il n’y ait quelques-uns qui par faute d’avoir la vraye cognoissance de cest art, sont mille singeries, ressemblans plustost aux basteleurs & bouffons, qu’à des balladins*”.

Although Ferrand is careful to link his defence of dance to “*gentlemen of honour, title and repute*” [27], “*ces Gentils-hommes en tel titre, honneur, & reputation,*” he is not above criticising even their performance:

“there are some to be seen among the ladies and gentlemen who do not always observe the true gestures and movements performed by masters of the art and sometimes dance like clerks, with so little rhythm and proportion that one could say they deserve censure...they make the ornament and nobility of the ball and dance squalid, who can only bring scandal to their neighbour”. [29v], “*il y en a plusieurs, voire des Gentils-hommes & Damoyelles, qui n’observent pas tousiours les mesmes gestes & mouvements que ceux qui sont maistres de’art, & quelquesfois font de tels pas de clerc, avec si peu de mesure, et de proportion, que l’on ne peut dire qu’ils ne soyent dignes de blasme & reprehension...ils rendent l’ornement, & gentillesse du bal & dela dance infame, qui ne peut apporter que scandale au prochain.*”

Here Cosme breaks in with blazing imagery. Dancing is like welcoming “burning brands that one shouldn’t touch and clasp to one’s breast ... one becomes soiled, blackened and burnt, but especially burnt since the men and women who dance heat themselves little by little to the point of embracing.”[30], “*des charbons ardents que quelqu’un auroit manié & mis dans son sein...autrement faire qu’il n’en soit taché, noircy, & charbonné, mais plustost bruslé, ainsi que les hommes & femmes qui cancent s’eschauffent peu a peu iusques à tant qu’ils viennent a s’embrazer.*”

Immediately, Ferrand neatly turns this burning brand imagery against Cosme by pointing out that, like fire itself, dance is natural and necessary, even if sometimes good and sometimes bad. Here Ferrand is aligning himself with a strand in Renaissance thought discussed by Alessandro Arcangeli in *Recreation in the Renaissance – Attitudes towards Leisure and Pastime in European Culture c1425-1675*. He notes that many did not join either the “killjoys” or the “merrymakers”, but responded in more various ways, balancing the two. He cites Mulcaster and Samuel Bird on making good use of dance and other pastimes for children and adults. This view prevailed at the Stuart court, set out by James I in his *Book of Sports* (1618) and later succinctly endorsed by Richard Burton. Arcangeli cites Burton, “I will subscribe to the King’s declaration...those May-games, wakes and Whitson-ales, etc. if they be not at unseasonable houres, may justly be permitted. Let them freely feast, sing and dance, have their poppet playes, hobby-horses, tabers, croudes, bag-pipes ... and what sports and recreations they like best.” James endorsed honest pastimes that built good sound relationships among his people.⁵ Similarly, Ferrand argues that any abuses were not “the intention or idea of those who over the ages distilled to an excellent beauty and perfection the art of dance,” “l’intention ny conception de ceux qui ont par succession de temps reduict a une excellente beauté & perfection cest art du bal & de la dance.” He values dance because “it keeps one healthy, refreshes the spirit, makes the body agile and fit, develops grace and keeps people’s energies in their heartiest vigour.” [33], “il a sans doute en foy la vertu de conserver la santé, de recreer l’esprit, de rendre le corps agile & dispos, de composer la grace, & aussi de maintenir les forces des personnes en leur plus gaillarde vigueur.”

The social, even civilising, benefits of dance are preferred by Ferrand to Cosme’s vigorous “manly vaults” [34], “vos sauts virils”. He paints a picture of feast days, when a man relaxes with his wife, his sister, his cousins and other near relatives and friends. “It would be a barbarous cruelty to makes strangers of one’s friends and forbid women all pleasure and revelry with their husbands and companions. [34-34v], “ce seroit une cruauté plus que barbare d’ainsi s’estranger de ses amis, & interdire aux femmes tout plaisir & esbats avec leurs maris & leurs compagnes”. This leads Ferrand to speak of the public good that comes from the dancing that he claims to be the best of the bodily exercises. It makes people “healthier, better humoured and improves the beautiful powers of the soul.” [34v], “plus sains & mieux disposez, pour estre puis apres plus propres aux belles fonctions de l’ame”. Dance provides “the sweetest and best tempered exercise as much for peace as for war,” [34v] “il n’y a exercice plus doux, & plus moderé que celui-là, soit pour la paix, soit pour la guerre”. Since body and soul must be balanced and relief offered to strenuous effort, Ferrand sets in first place among all exercises the use of music and the custom of dancing for pleasure and recreation [34v].

By leaf 37, Ferrand is developing the idea of dance as beneficial to the human soul by discussing its place in Neoplatonic thought. This is the area of his text that Professor McGowan considers in her book, *L’Art du ballet de cour en France 1581-1643*.⁶ I reproduce Ferrand’s comments again here at somewhat greater length. He cites Socrates’ opinion that the art of dance was “divinely born with the creation of the world and came into existence with all the ancientness of love itself.” [36], “il fut avec la generation du monde nay divinement, & venu en evidence avec toute ancienneté de l’amour mesme.” An echo of the Orphic Hymns and numerous other Hermetic sources, this idea can be found in contemporary Elizabethan literature, most notably in Spenser’s *Fowre Hymnes* and in Sir John Davies’ *Orchestra*, as Professor McGowan notes. Ferrand draws out this idea about the origins and movements of dance. He wants his reader to remember:

“the weighty opinion of several ancient Greeks & others who have theorized about the invention of balls and dance and the leaps that one makes within them. They affirm equally that they were discovered in imitation of the movement and rotation of the heavens of the different progressions, ahead and sideways and back, and the diversity of the conjunctions and aspects of the planets. All these things...are justly imitations and representations in the dance, especially the diversity of movements made in opposition one to the other by those who dance...and the backward turn which is performed in dance is nothing other than the imitation of the retrogradation of the planets. There are plenty of passages which represent holding one foot still and moving the other, like errant stars [i.e. the planets] when they are, according to the Astrologers, in their degree [i.e. in a subdivision of a zodiacal sign]. And the leaps which one uses in dancing are nothing but the shooting stars one finds in the heavens. The alternate conjunctions one makes after a proportionate separation in dance and then the lovely and diverse retreats, ahead and to the side, which one performs with so much grace are the same conjunctions and oppositions, triangular and quadrangular, indeed hexangular, which interpose almost every day between the planets in their celestial sphere.” [36v]

“la grave opinion de plusieurs anciens Grecs, & autres qui ont philosophé sur l’invention du bal & de la dance & des sauts entrecoupez qu’on y fait. Ils afferment mesmes qu’ils ont esté trouvez à l’imitation du mouvement & tour des cieux & des progrez divers, droits & obliques, des retrogradations & diversitez des conionctions & aspects des planettes. Toutes lesquelles choses...sont iustement imitees & representees au bal; d’autant que la diversité des mouvements faicts à l’opposite l’un de l’autre par ceux qui dancent, n’est qu’une generale imitation du divers mouvements des cieux, & le retour qu’on fait en arriere au bal & à la dance n’est autre chose que vouloir imiter honnestement la retrogradation des planettes. Il y a plus, que les passages qui font representez tenants un de leurs pieds arrestez & remuants l’autre: c’est comme une similitude des estoilles errantes, quand ells sont, suyvant les Astrologues, en leur degré. Et les voltes dont on use en ballant, ne sont autre chose que les espies qu’on tient estre és cieux, les conionctions alternatives qu’on fait apres une separation proportionnee du bal & de la dance: & puis ces belles & diverses retraictes, droictes & obliques, qu’on exerce avec tant de grace, sont les mesmes conionctions & oppositions triangulaires & quadrangulaires, voire sexanguilaires qui interviennent quasi tous les iours entre les planettes en leur spheres celestes.”

In this passage, Ferrand immediately spotlights the jumping, “des sauts,” inherent in dancing, thus linking it intimately with the topic of gymnastics so soon to be discussed. The details of his defence of dance cover both couple dancing and dancing in sets of various sizes, all justified by their imitation of the celestial motions of the heavens. In Neoplatonic thought, such imitation could only result in infusing the dancers with the qualities of the higher realms. For English-speaking early dancers, an accessible source outlining Ficinian thought about benefitting mind and body through the imitation of planetary motion can be found in Angela Voss’s article “The Natural Magic of Marsilio Ficino”⁷.

Seemingly daunted by such high philosophizing, at this point Cosme begins to cede the argument, claiming that the “torrent of Ferrand’s eloquence has shipwrecked his case” [37] “le torrent de vostre eloquence ne vint à me faire faire naufrage en pleine mer.” His rhetorical fire has been quenched. Moreover, it seems he is very aware that Ferrand is a good friend of Arcange, whose respect Cosme covets. He describes Tuccaro as “gifted with all the graces and

perfections needed for the most beautiful exercises in the world”, the greatest master of all gymnasts, [37] “doué de toutes les graces, & perfections requises aux plus beaux exercices du monde.” Cosme grows increasingly concerned that they are going to miss the King’s celebrations and Arcangelo’s demonstrations, but Ferrand replies that he knows the King’s movements and they have plenty of time. Quite evidently, Tuccaro and his friends are on the inside in this court, very much more so than Cosme.

Ferrand blandly continues on with his argument in favour of dance, citing Pindar’s epithet for Apollo, the “le sur-sauteur,” the one who dances or leaps over all. Even Jupiter exercised the art of leaping and dancing with men on earth. Ferrand’s lists go on as he claims that the practice of leaping/dancing (“sauter” has now replaced the formula of “la danse et le bal”) existed before the flood, in the ante-diluvian world so beloved of the Neoplatonists. It was part of the mysteries of the Etruscans and practised by the Greek heroes such as Achilles. The skills of the ancient Greek god Proteus are praised in a long passage stating that:

“His strength and agility came from nothing more than his practice of leaping/dancing...he could imitate different forms and movements, like the speed and intensity of fire, the cruelty of the lion, the agility of cats, the suddenness and dexterity of leopards, so well that people thought he was either god-like or enchanted, that he could transform himself into so many different forms. Just as we now see today many leaps retain the names of these allegorical transformations, such as the leap of the cat, of the monkey, and the lion, the gliding of the fish and many others” [38v], “*la force & agilité de Prothee, ne venoit d’autre chose que de s’estre fort exercé à sauter, & y avoir fait tel profit qu’il pouvoit imiter diverses formes, & mouvements, comme la promptitude and vehemence du feu, la cruauté du Lion, l’agilité des Chats, l’impetuosité & dextérité les Leopards; de sorte que le peuple estimoit qu’il y eust en luy quelque divinité ou enchantement, pour se transformer ainsi en plusieurs & diverses forms; comme nous voyons encores aujourdhuy que plusieurs sauts retiennent les noms de ces transformations allegoriques, comme le saut du Chat, du Singe, & du Lion, les glissements des poissons, & tels autres.*”

These mimetic and athletic qualities of dance have, of course, never disappeared and are still valued. While writing this paper, I was amused to read a review of a programme of short ballets at Sadler’s Wells; entitled “Soaring Jumps and Turns”. It praised “soaring jetés and lightning whips and turns” as well as “Aszure Barton’s assured *Fantastic Beings*, featuring all manner of slinky, sensual creatures (plus the occasional prowling sloth), and Jerome Robbins’s provocative *The Cage* in which a group of predatory female insects seek out mates before gruesomely devouring them.”⁸ The years peeled away...

Ferrand takes on Cosme on his own ground to conclude his argument, speaking of “*les sauts, le bal & la danse*”, all together and reiterating his claim that dance is essential in peace and in war. [39] He offers examples of how dance can make soldiers more agile and eager to confront their enemies by recounting tales of the war dances of the ancient Greeks such as the Spartans’ Pyrrhic dance: “They never began battle without dancing, in tune with the harmony and measure of flutes” [40], “*ne commençoient iamais la bataille, sinon qu’en ballant & dançant, imitants la consonance & mesure des flustes.*” When Cosme objects that all this is well out of date, Ferrand cites the authority of Socrates to show that “leaping and the dance”, “*le saut, le bal & la danse*” [40v] are the most beneficial means of readying men for warfare and offers Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484-1558) as a contemporary example, who has leaped and danced in full armour many times before the Emperor Maximilian. Scaliger is right to claim that “jumping

and wrestling are very ancient exercises and dance is no less ancient.” [41], “*le saut & la luicte soyent tres-anciens exercices, si est-ce que le bal & la dance ne le sont pas moins*”.

Tuccaro continues to be praised: “everyone admires him, for his dexterity, address and vivacity as he brings back to life these lovely exercises, not wanting these rare and excellent practices from antiquity to be buried and forgotten in shadowy silence,” [41-41v], “*chacun l’a en admiration, ayant par sa dextérité, promptitude & vivacité, comme resuscité ces beaux exercices, ne voulant que des thresors si rares & excellents de l’antiquité fussent ensevelis & mis en oubly par un morne silence.*” In true Renaissance style, Tuccaro is reviving, and perhaps even surpassing, the skills of the ancient world by returning to and reawakening its oldest sources of knowledge.

With one final Neoplatonic flourish, Ferrand brings in the great Hermetic philosopher, Hermes Trismegistus, among his authorities, as he cites Homer:

“leaping in time to music is more a true gift of grace from the Heavens than from the earth, a gift worthy of man and no other animal, man who is a God, among all the living creatures, but mortal (as Trismegistus says).” [42], “*Homere dit que le saut fait avec mesure conforme au temps proportionné des cadences de musique, est plustost un vray don, & grace des Cieux, que de la terre, don digne de l’homme, & non d’autre animal qui est entre tous les animaux vivants, (comme dit Trismegiste) un Dieu, mais mortel.*”

By now, Cosme has given up his fiery spirit of opposition, and is looking for a diversion, eager for the arrival of Tuccaro’s young assistants who are going to demonstrate. Ferrand reproaches him for seeking an escape from their discussion and threatens him with Tuccaro’s displeasure. Again Cosme reiterates how much he wants to keep Tuccaro’s good opinion and see the demonstrations. Long rambling and rather repetitive discussions follow until Baptiste brings the news that the King is finally arriving and the dialogue comes to a close.

Why is so much dance material here at all?

Having looked fairly closely at the content of the sections on dance, I return to my initial question. Some answers can be found in the two fullest treatments of Tuccaro to date: Sandra Schmidt’s 2010 article, “Sauter et voltiger en l’air”, already cited, and Alessandro Arcangeli’s article, “Renaissance Dance and Writing: the Case of Arcangelo Tuccaro” (2011).⁹

One strong reason for the dance material’s inclusion lies in the humble origins of Tuccaro himself. Sandra Schmidt focuses on the social perception of the kind of movement (gymnastics or tumbling) that Tuccaro is engaged in. She makes it clear that tumblers were pretty low in the social hierarchy, citing Garzoni’s *La piazza universal* which mentions Tuccaro by name among marketplace entertainers in Italy, praising his art briefly, then dismissing it “as vain as the others, ... performed and watched by ignoble people.” Fig. 2 gives a flavour of the kind of carnival atmosphere suggested by Garzoni.



Figure 2. *Roman de la Rose* miniature (Bibliothèque de l'Université, Valence)

Schmidt also cites Castiglione's witness to the low status of certain physical exercises, "such as vaulting on the ground, rope-walking and the like, which smack of the juggler's trade and little befit a gentleman."¹⁰ Certainly, the low and even comic status of such head-down poses, can be seen in Fig. 3. Comic animals in MS illustrations also assume this form, as in Fig. 4.



Figure 3. Detail from the *Rutland Psalter* (c1260) BL Add MS 62925, f73r

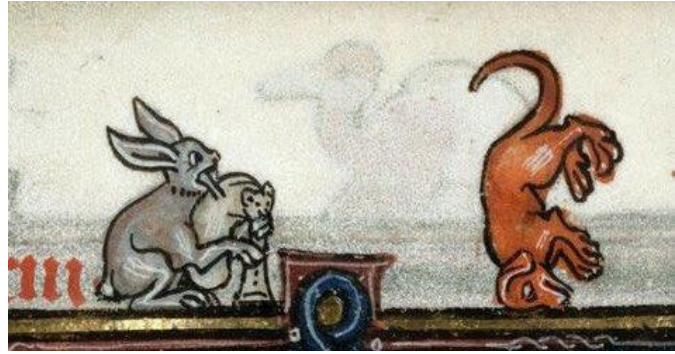


Figure 4. *Rutland Psalter*, Cambrai MS 102

Medieval sources displaying this pose include a number of gargoyles, testifying to its grotesque nature:



Figure 5. Notre Dame de Fougeray on the walls of L'Abbaye Saint Paul, Cormery, Indre et Loire



Figure 6. Eglise de Surgeres, Charente Maritime

Schmidt goes on to cite Montaigne to confirm the existence of a social attack on high and dangerous jumps, such as Tuccaro's "cubistic jump" or death defying leap: "Just as in our dances, these men of low condition, because they cannot reproduce the carriage and decorum of our nobility, try to excel by means of dangerous jumps and other strange and juggleresque movements."¹¹ This description of leaping as lower class does sound convincing, but given what we know about Renaissance dance with its myriad of vigorous and high galliards, it may need qualification. A recently published essay by Barbara Sparti suggests that dancing masters and indeed dancers of all classes were fond of jumps, turns and exciting tricks. She writes, "indeed, better-class men did leap, not only the burgher in the dancing-school and the *scudiero* (or knight) in the *Moresca*, but, depending on age, inclination, social standing, talent, and the occasion, so did the courtier, the gentleman, and the prince."¹² Perhaps if something has to be forbidden, it's highly likely people are doing it. However, bending very far down and so lowering the head, is not obviously part of courtly leaping in dance. Oddly enough this pose is depicted in some marginal illustrations of dancers with musicians, where the context is unclear and no clear indication of censure is present, as in Figs. 7 & 8.



Figure 7. BL Stowe MS 17, The Maastricht Hours, f128r

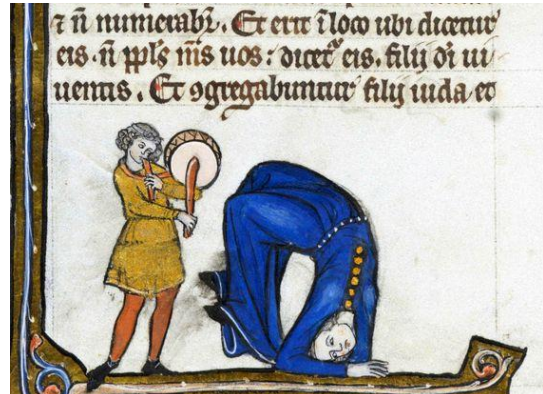


Figure 8. Lausanne, Bibliotheque cantonale et universitaire de Lausanne, U964, fol. 343v

However, in the case of Salome in Fig. 9, her pose may indeed be demonstrating her evil nature:

Figure 9. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 835, f. 137

Clearly one reason Tuccaro includes material on dance is to allow his gymnastic exercises to bask in the reflected social glory of dance, as an accepted and dignified courtly pastime and as an opportunity for convincing cultural display. Hence too, his insistence on the humanist frame of his dialogue and the frequent hints of his familiarity with the highest of nobles, despite his own early life.



Alessandro Arcangeli's article, "Renaissance Dance and Writing: the Case of Arcangelo Tuccaro", first outlines a brief historiography of work on Tuccaro and then shows how Tuccaro uses all the armoury of Renaissance Humanism to raise the status of his "art", just as Domenico and others had done for dance. He provides a useful resumé of previous pieces on Tuccaro and goes on to open discussion of his textual strategies, including the prestigious dialogue form itself and the extensive display of learning in its many citations of pagan and Christian authorities.¹³ Tuccaro wants a place for the "art" of jumping, its practice and its theory, among those arts pursued in the *trivium*, consisting of grammar, logic, and rhetoric (the Dialogues themselves) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy). Hence, his recurrent disquisitions on etymology and grammar and some of the "scientific" discussion and images of his jumps. With their circles and squares, these may recall the more familiar Vitruvian man by Leonardo. The Platonic pure circles and geometric squares add dignity and provenance to Tuccaro's poses.

Arcangeli describes Tuccaro as engaged in a typically Renaissance attempt to convince his contemporary society to accept his own definition of the status of his particular discipline. His lengthy discussion and defence of courtly dance, allows Tuccaro to leave behind the shaming "street theatre" heritage of acrobatic gymnastics.

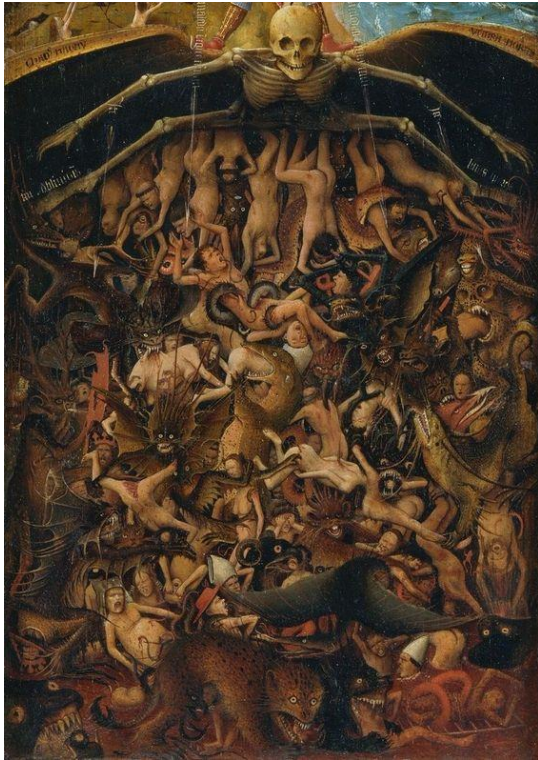
Illustrations from *Trois dialogues du Sr Archange Tuccaro* (1616), a book of gymnastic exercises.



Figure 10. Early European book images: Collection 6, Bibliotheque Nationale 8 638

Sandra Schmidt raises another danger for Tuccaro's ambitious project, one even more serious given his contemporary audience, but one that might not occur to a modern reader. She points out that the very practice of his great leaps entailed a reversal of the upright posture that distinguished man from the animals and bespoke his orientation to the heavens. The deliberate turning down of the head and body could she says, "be interpreted as a reprehensible and blasphemous movement" and cites many condemnations of the cubistic jump as heretical and even the work of the devil.¹⁴ Such ideas may indeed lie behind the depiction of Salome in

Figure 9. The headlong tumble of sinners into Hell depicted in so many Doom paintings may also have something to do with the diabolic connotations of this movement, as in Fig. 11.



Of course, Tuccaro takes great care to assert that his jumps describe a mathematically perfect circle, bringing the head back precisely to its true position in the best Platonic manner. I noted early on in this article that the foldout illustration of his consummate skill omits the head down position. Tuccaro does, however, reference the diabolic aura that might surround such skill in his text. But he displaces it into the discussion of dance. Here is another strong reason for the inclusion of all that dance material. Dance is very useful to him indeed.

Figure 11.
The Last Judgment
Jan van Eyck (1426)

As we have seen, Tuccaro's Cosme expends a great many words on how dancing provides a clear path to Hell and paints its burning pains rather vividly, over and over again. However, all this is absolutely reserved for the discussion of "*la dance et le bal*" and Ferrand has no trouble fending off this attack with no reference at all to "*le saut*" in any gymnastic sense. In fact, I suspect that Cosme's hell fire sermons about dance are deliberately exaggerated to make him appear almost a figure of fun. He is the butt of many a quietly ironic riposte from Ferrand, such as, "Do you think it's only at dances that women paint themselves to appear beautiful?" [35v], "*Pensez you que ce soit seulement au bal & à la dance que les femmes se fardent pour paroistre belles?*".

In Tuccaro's text, dance provides a kind of stalking horse for himself as adept and for his beloved gymnastics. This is one of the prime purposes for its inclusion at such length. A stalking horse tests an argument, mounts a challenge to an idea, often to prepare for the appearance of some absent, third party. Once that challenge has been defeated, that absent party can put forward his case without much risk of failure. Throughout this first dialogue, Tuccaro is absent, though often referred to in honorific terms. Cosme, the enemy of dance, attacks it without reference to gymnastics. Dance, not gymnastics, is under fire for its ignoble status, its waste of time and energy, its effeminacy and, most importantly of all, for its satanic temptations. The conflation of leaping and dancing, which gains by repetition as the dialogue progresses, relieves any further pressure to confront and dispose of such arguments about gymnastic postions by the great Tuccaro himself. However noisy and adamant Cosme may be, in the end he gives up with hardly a whimper and looks to earn Tuccaro's favour. At this point, "*la dance et le bal*" fade away in the text. Here, in a dialogue of 1599, sport (that is, gymnastics) seems to be riding into the world of high respectability on the coat tails of dance.

What a contrast to today! Tuccaro's book found a place in a library dedicated to the education of princes. In the education system of today's UK, dance has lost its status as one of the "arts", a status once so treasured and jealously defended. Rather than legitimising sport, dance has become its hanger-on, at least in schools. One Dance UK, the subject specialist for dance in UK education, must constantly remind head teachers that they are "allowed" to spend some of their dedicated funding, the PE & Sport Premium, on dance. In contrast, the budget for UK Gymnastics for the Olympics of 2016 was £14,615,428 and for Tokyo in 2020 it was approximately £16.5 million. In the UK today, sport confers cultural legitimacy on dance.

End Notes

¹ Arcangelo Tuccaro, *Trois Dialogues*, a reproduction of the copy in the British Library owned by Henry Prince of Wales (Archival Facsimiles Ltd, 1987); *Trois Dialogues de l'exercice de sauter, et voltiger en l'air* (Paris, Claude de Monstr'oeil, 1599).

² Girolamo Mercuriale, *De arte gymnastica*, cited in Alessandro Arcangeli, *Recreation in the Renaissance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p 24.

³ Sandra Schmidt, "'Sauter et voltiger en l'air'; The Art of Movement in Late Renaissance Italy and France" in *The Body in Early Modern Italy*, ed. J L Hairston & W Stephens (Johns Hopkins, 2010), p 214.

⁴ F L Jahn, *Die deutsche Turnkunst* 1816, p 256.

⁵ A Arcangeli, *Recreation in the Renaissance – Attitudes towards Leisure and Pastimes in European Culture c1435-1675*, ed. R Houston & E Muir (Palgrave Macmillan 2003), pp 101 and 127. There is a full discussion of this topic here.

⁶ M M McGowan, *L'Art du ballet de cour en France 1581-1643* (Paris, CNRS, 1963), pp 20-21.

⁷ Angela Voss, "The Natural Magic of Marsilio Ficino" in *Historical Dance*, V, 1 (1992), p.25-30. Voss examines material from Ficino's influential *Liber de vita*, ed. C Kaske and J Clarke (1989). The occult properties of words and of music are most prominent in Ficino's text, but he also mentions movement and dancing. Voss quotes his advice about imitating planetary movements from *Liber de vita* Book 3, VI, 170: "if you can pass through larger spaces in your motion, you will thereby imitate the heavens all the more and will get in contact with more of the strengths of the celestials."

⁸ Emma Byrne, "Soaring jumps and turns in thrilling wishlist", *Evening Standard* 16/4/2018, p 36.

⁹ A Arcangeli, "Renaissance Dance and Writing: the Case of Arcangelo Tuccaro", pp 34-38 in *Virtute et arte del danzare: contribute di storia della danza in onore de Barbara Sparti*, ed. A Pontremoli (Aracne, 2011).

¹⁰ Schmidt translates from Baldassare Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, ed. W Barberis (Turin, 1998), p 59.. p 217-8 and p 119 (her translations).

¹¹ Schmidt translates from Michel de Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. P Villey (Paris, 1992), p 165.

¹² Barbara Sparti, "Courtiers and 'Court Dance': To Leap or not to Leap" in *Dance, Dancers and Dance-Masters in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. G Giordano and A Pontremoli (Bologna, 2015), p 276.

¹³ Arcangeli, "Renaissance Dance and Writing", especially pp 6 ff.

¹⁴ Schmidt, pp 221-3.