‘Country Dance’ as Reification of the Pastoral Idyll

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In his novel *The Vicar of Wakefield,* 1766, Oliver Goldsmith describes how the newly arrived vicar, needing some extra bodies for a country dance, expresses surprise that although two local lasses, “the Miss Flamboroughs were reckoned the very best dancers in the parish, and understood the jig and the round-about to perfection; yet they were totally unacquainted with country dances.” [1]

The vicar and his upper-class visitors were all familiar with the English country dance, but the local working- class lasses, although excellent dancers, knew nothing of them. Their dances were jigs and roundabouts, that is, solo step dances and circle dances. This would seem to run counter to the views of many that the country dances were done by country folk, and in particular the rural labouring class, presumably on their local village green at celebrations and Holy Days.[2]

On the other hand, the Vicar’s experience does accord with the fact that at the close of the 16th century, Queen Elizabeth’s ladies danced country dances in the Queen’s privy chambers, and that not long afterwards they became the dances of choice, not only of the upper classes, but also at court.[3]

It is perhaps the name – ‘country’ dance – that, unsurprisingly, persuades most people to believe that these dances were originally danced on the village green, and that they somehow evolved into the more complex forms that we know today, perhaps with the occasional help from a dancing master.

Some interesting hypotheses on the origins and name of ‘country dance’ have been proposed by researchers recently. At least three of these[4] suggest that the name has nothing to do with

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[1] Oliver Goldsmith, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, 1766, chapter 9.

[2] In the first edition of Grove’s *Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1904), the article on country dance, written by Frank Kidson, asserts: “There can now be but little doubt that the name country dance correctly expresses what the dance really was when introduced into more refined society from the village green, the barn, or the country alehouse…” Similarly, Hugh Thurston claimed that “country dancing…seems to have come from rural England … it spread to the towns, to the aristocracy, and finally to the court” (“The Development of the Country Dance as Revealed in Printed Sources”, Hugh Thurston, *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, Vol. 7(1) (1952), pp. 29-35).

[3] In 1626, at an evening’s entertainment at the court of King Charles I, they “set to and danced country-dances till four in the morning…”. Quoted in: Keith Whitlock, ‘John Playford’s The English Dancing Master 1650/51 as Cultural Politics’, *Folk Music Journal*, Vol 7 (5) (1999), p. 575. Somewhat later, in 1663, there was a comment about dancing at the Inns of Court: “With us we have only *French* dancing and Country dancing used by the best rank of people.” He continues with his opinion of what the country folk danced: “*Morris-dancing* is an exercise that the loose and vile sort only use, and that only in faires and meetings of lewdnesse…” Quoted in Whitlock, op. cit. 1999, p. 575.

[4] See Anne Daye, ‘What is a ‘Country Dance’?*’,* in *HDS Conference on Zoom: Playford Then and Now*, November 2020, Cécile Laye, ‘A research project analysing the contents of The English Dancing Master, first edition, published by John Playford in 1651’, submitted to Le Centre National de la Danse, Paris, 2018, p.5; also Pendlebury, see note 6.

the countryside, but rather refers to these dances as having originated in this *country*, meaning this nation, England; however, although we do know that country dances were considered to be one of England's national dances, this provides no support for the hypothesis that this is how the country dance acquired its name. The Measures were also considered to be national dances of England,[5] but they were not called 'country' dances. Yet another recent researcher[6] claims in her thesis that the dances were called country dances because, as above, they were the dances of this country, England; furthermore, she proposes that the country dances derived from the *basse danse*, performed at the English court from the late 15th century. Perhaps her translation of Toulouze's description of this dance (c.1496), that: "when you dance [the basse danse], you go to the countryside and jig as graciously as possible," contributed to her hypothesis, a translation now almost universally agreed to have exactly the opposite meaning of the original French text.[7]

Many researchers[8] claim that country dances were performed by all ranks of society, either dancing with others of similar rank, or mixing with those of another class. The same two seemingly impeccable quotations are usually cited in support of this idea, the most convincing being: "…all the Company Dance, Lord and Groom, Lady and Kitchen-Maid, no distinction."[9] This was purported to be a comment about the culture at the court of Queen Elizabeth; however, it was not published until 1689, almost 100 years after the period described, and was supposedly uttered by a jurist who was only 19 when Elizabeth died, and who was known to have little or no knowledge of life at court at that time.[10]

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[5] See for instance F. de Lauze, in his *Apologie de la Danse*, 1623, translated by Joan Wildblood, (Noverre Press, 1952), p. 55.

[6] Pendlebury, Celia, 'Jigs, Reels and Hornpipes: A History of "Traditional" Dance Tunes of Britain and Ireland, , unpublished MPhil thesis University of Sheffield (2015), p. 125.

[7] The generally accepted translation nowadays is: "It is called a *basse dance* because … it is danced serenely without gesticulation and as gracefully as possible." *L'art et Instruction de Bien Dancer*, Richard Rastall (ed.), translated by Andre Lequet, The Royal College of Physicians, 1936. This is hardly the description of a dance likely to evolve into the country dance. The ambiguity stemmed from the fact that "pays" can mean either country or peace. The confusion led for many years to the basse dance being interpreted as a 'rustic' dance, such as country folk might perform. The word used in the Brussels MS is "paix," supporting the translation as 'peace' rather than 'country'.

[8] For the most recent of the many researchers supporting this idea, see for example Anne Daye, op. cit. 2020; also Ann Hinchliffe, 'John Playford's English Dancing Master 1651: What do the dance titles mean? And why 'English'?', *Historical Dance Society Lockdown Lectures* (Feb 2021), https://youtu.be/R-lC_FmHJAo?si=3KFsQqarCfXjkevj [accessed 24 July 2023].

[9] John Selden, *Table Talk, 1689 Carefully edited by Edward Arber*, (London, 1895), p.62.

[10] The comment supposedly comes from discourses of John Selden. Unfortunately, Selden did not record any of his discourses. Selden's secretary, Richard Milward, wrote down Selden's ideas between the 1630s and 1650s, and Milward's jottings were published by yet another person in 1689, nine years after Milward's death, 35 years after Selden's death, and almost 100 years after the events being described. Milward claimed that "the sense and notion" and "most of the words" were those of Seldon – a claim that was sometimes questioned. Furthermore, John Selden himself was a country lad who at 18 arrived at the London Inns of Court in 1602, shortly before Elizabeth's death, and even in 1618 it was said that he was a stranger at court. Moreover, the comment seems particularly strange when applied to the English courts of the period, for whereas in France the aristocracy performed with the bourgeoisie, in England the strict rules of protocol forbad this (see Anne Daye, '*Theatre dance*

There may well have been mixing of classes to make up sets for country dances in private households; I suspect that representatives from the lower classes who joined in were mostly in the domestic service of the higher classes, and by participating, they were doing the dances of a class that was not their own; they were not performing the country dances with their peers on the village green – in this capacity they were what might be called 'honorary' gentry for this activity.

The second piece of evidence is a report of the entertainments at Cowdrey in 1591. Cowdrey was the home of the Montagues, and Queen Elizabeth stopped there on one of her progresses around the countryside. One evening "the country people presented themselves to her Majesty in a pleasant dance with tabor and pipe, and the Lord Montague and his lady among them, to the great pleasure of all the beholders - and the gentle applause of Her Majesty."[11]

This reference has often been used to support the idea that country dances were performed by all classes of society dancing together – but how much support does it really give? At the entertainments at Cowdrey, Queen Elizabeth had dined in the privy walks in the gardens there, and later that day the dance with the "country people" was performed for her as part of the entertainment. These "country people" may well have been either the local aristocracy and gentry who had dined with the Queen earlier, or possibly actors. Moreover, they may well have been dancing a stately Pavan or an English Measure, for there is no description of the kind of dance they were performing.[12] It is not surprising that the lord and lady entertaining the Queen would have joined these dancers in their own gardens, particularly since, being Catholic, they would have wanted the Queen to think they were accepted by the local English aristocracy and gentry.[13]

Present day accounts of Queen Elizabeth seeing and liking country people dancing indicate images in the minds of some, that the Queen would look out of her carriage window on her progresses and see the peasants dancing happily on their village green, provoking a smile from the Royal Mouth.[14]

The reality was rather different. The entertainments devised for Queen Elizabeth were tightly organised down to the very last detail. Towns were transformed for her progresses, elaborately

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in the private and public domains of Stuart and Commonwealth London, 1625-1685', in David Wilson (ed.), *Restoration of Charles II*, *EDC Conference 2002*, p. 11.)

[11] Leah Scragg, *Five Elizabethan progress entertainments*, (Manchester University Press, 2019), lines 270-4, p. 42.

[12] The mention of "tabor and pipe" to accompany the dance may have led some researchers to believe that it must have been a rustic folk dance. However, well into the reign of Henry VIII, pipe and tabor players were highly paid members of the court establishment, probably as a result of their knowledge of dance tunes. It is likely that these skills were passed on to the musicians of Elizabeth's court; we know that she had at least one pipe and tabor player. Furthermore, it is known that Lord Montague used "her Highness' musicians" for this entertainment at Cowdrey. See: Katherine Butler, *Music in Elizabethan Court Politics*, 2015, The Boydell Press, p. 146.

[13] It was not unusual for the hosts of the entertainments to participate; for instance, in the pastoral entertainment presented to Queen Elizabeth at Bisham, it was the hostess's daughters who performed. See Scragg, op. cit. 2019, p 8.

[14] Gene Murrow expresses this view: "In her periodic 'progresses' by which she travelled throughout her realm, Elizabeth had opportunity to observe these indigenous folk dances, and manuscripts of the time document her pleasure at seeing them." Gene Murrow, online at *English Country Dancing – Origins and Evolution* (Stanford.edu).

decorated temporary buildings were erected, even landscapes might be transformed, if say a lake were needed for a pastoral entertainment. The Queen would not have seen local peasants dancing on the village green, everything she witnessed was so tightly controlled. On the other hand, everyone was allowed to see her,[15] and even some of the shows devised for her. Being seen by her subjects was one of the purposes of her progresses.

In 1600, there was talk of both 'old' and 'new' country dances. "Her Majestie [Queen Elizabeth] is in very good health, and comes much abroad these holidays: for almost every night she is in the presence, to see the ladies daunce the old and new Country dances, with the tabor and pipe."[16] What did the concepts of 'old' and 'new' country dances signify in 1600?

It is generally agreed that the "old" country dances would have been similar to what had been danced on the village green for centuries. Sir John Davies' poem[17] of 1596 tells us that the first dances ever performed were "rounds and winding Heyes." Arena, writing in France in 1529, commented on the dancing of country folk: "they throw themselves about and do not even observe the beat," everything is spontaneous invention, everything comes "out of their heads."[18]

The "new" country dances were presumably more like the dances that we know today, the **set** dances first published by John Playford in 1651. They had set choreographies, only the steps could show invention. It is proposed here that these country dances were deliberately invented by dancing masters to represent dancing on an **idealized** village green. They did not gradually evolve from the dances of the countryside; rather they were composed to be 'in the spirit of' countryside dances, for instance by the incorporation of "winding heyes" into set dances, together with a more relaxed style of 'footing' than would normally have been used in the formal dances, and all set to music expressing "the spirit of Countrey jolitie" that characterised the music in the set formation May dance in Beaumont's 1613 entertainment. [19] These 'new' dances were created to be performed in the disguisings, mummeries, pageants, plays, masques and other entertainments of the upper classes, either performing themselves, or being the audience. They subsequently adopted these 'country' dances for performance in their homes, their ballrooms and their informal dramatic shows.[20]

One of the first references to what may have been a country dance performed at an after-dinner dancing party in the home of an upper-class family was in a play by Breton in 1577:

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[15] At the entertainment for Queen Elizabeth at Elvetham, "near ten thousand people from sundry places" saw her ceremonial entrance into the park. Scragg, op. cit. 2019, p. 63.

[16] Thus said Sir Philip Sidney in 1600. See George S. Emmerson, *A Social History of Scottish Dance* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1972), p. 266.

[17] Sir John Davies, *Orchestra, or A Poem of Dancing*, Dance Horizons republication of the 1945 publication of Chatto & Windus.

[18] McGowan, Margaret M., *Dance in the Renaissance* (Yale University Press, 2008)**,** p. 193. Peasants in England may have danced similarly. An Englishman in 1530 remarked: "I lyke nat his daunsing, he hoppeth and tryppeth lyke one of the countraye…comme vng paysant".

[19] Beaumont, Francis, 'Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn'. In Fredson Bowers (ed.) *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, Cambridge (1966), I:111-44.

[20] It is these deliberately devised dances that would have been collected by Playford for his publications. Many dancing masters may have been struggling financially, given the constraints imposed on dancing during the Commonwealth, so they may well have composed and sold dances for extra income. Other dances may have come from actors and dramatists dealing with similar issues, with all the theatres closed. Some might have been sourced from plays, masques and other entertainments printed by Playford, or by his master, John Benson.

… the youth must needs go dance,
First, galliards; then larousse; and heidegy;
"Old lusty gallant"; "all flow'rs of the bloom"
And then a hall: For dancers must have room.
And to it then, with set, and turn about,
Change sides, and cross, and mince it like a hawk,
Backwards and forwards, take hands then, in and out,
And, now and then, a little wholesome talk,
That none could hear, close rowned in the ear.[21]

The description of the dancers' movements[22] may be an early indication of the freedom of dance steps and style used for country dancing in England – bearing in mind it is satirical.

Misogonus, a play written in either 1560 or 1577, may be the first known reference to "countrye dauncis." Athough ostensibly taking place in the Roman empire, *Misogonus* is entirely English in tone and atmosphere, and mention of Robin Hood and Maid Marian suggests a country context. It may be that playwrights would commission a dancing master to compose a dance in the spirit of the countryside for their pastoral plays, and gradually these dances became a new genre under the name of 'country dance.'

This new genre of 'country dance' would have become firmly established by the mid-seventeenth century when Playford started to publish them, so similar dances could be devised by dancing masters for Playford to publish, even if they had nothing to do with pastoral entertainments.

The Pastoral Aesthetic & the Country Dance

The question arises, why would dances devised mostly for upper class entertainments and even danced in the Queen's privy chamber, want to be associated with rusticity? This seems curious in a court that was extremely class conscious, even to the extent that at the beginning of the 17th century, the courtiers in England, unlike their French counterparts, would not even share a stage with professional dancers,[23] let alone with rural labourers?

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[21] Nicholas Breton, *The Workes of a young Wyt*, *II,* (London, 1577), in A.B. Groshart (ed.), *A Mother's Blessing*, in *Works of Nicholas Breton, vol 1* (New York: AMS Press, 1966), pp. 15-23.

[22] But to behold the graces of each dame!
How some would dance as though they did but walk;
And some would trip, as though one leg were lame,
And some would mince it like a sparrow hawk;
And some would dance upright as any bolt;
And some would leap and skip like a young colt
And some would fidge, as though she had the itch;
And some would bow half crooked in the joints;
And some would have a trick; and some a twitch;
Some shook their arms, as they had hung up points,
With thousands more that were too long to tell,
But made me laugh my heart sore, I wot well.'

[23] Anne Daye, op. cit, 2002, page 11.

It is argued here that it was the strong influence of the pastoral aesthetic in Tudor England that encouraged the upper classes to indulge in supposedly 'rustic' behaviour. The Pastoral was one of the most popular literary forms of early modern England – as also of Italy[24] and France[25] - probably as a result of the renewed interest in the classics: the pastoral poetry of Theocritus in the third century BC is the earliest known; the Roman poet Virgil also composed pastorals. The pastoral was revealed in Drama, Poetry, Plays, Masques, Art, Music and many other activities. A well-known poem is Edmund Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender* of 1579; even more familiar is Christopher Marlowe's poem *The Passionate Shepherd to His Love,* published in 1599.

> Come live with me and be my love,
> And we will all the pleasures prove
> That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
> Woods, or steepy mountain yields.
>
> And we will sit upon the rocks,
> Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks,
> By shallow Rivers to whose falls
> Melodious birds sing Madrigals.

The earliest English play with the title of 'pastoral' was George Peele's *Arraignment of Paris*; it was written for and played before Queen Elizabeth in 1584. *The Faithful Shepherdess*, a Jacobean pastoral tragicomedy, was the work that inaugurated the playwriting career of John Fletcher in 1608 in London.

Moreover, pastoral literature and art were full of dancing images and allusions. The pastoral idyll is portrayed in many paintings, for example those of Nicolas Poussin in the early 17th century, and in the 18th century, Watteau, Lancret and the many artists portraying an idealised Arcadian landscape, often as a background for dancing.

Pastoral writers extolled the virtues of an idealised English countryside, a world where shepherds and shepherdesses frolicked on the village green, where beauty, innocence and a contentment free of worldly strife reigned supreme. Fortuitously shepherds, like the English aristocracy and gentry, were not tainted by the need to toil, only rural labourers, the tillers of the soil, needed to work and get their hands dirty. This happy state of affairs, together with the great virtue possessed by Arcadians, rendered it acceptable for nobles and even royalty to be portrayed as shepherds; Shepherd-Kings and Shepherdess-Queens abound in pastoral literature. In 1579, Edmund Spencer's *The Shepheardes Calendar* portrayed Queen Elizabeth as "Elisa,

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[24] Tasso's sylvan fable, *Aminta*, in 1573 in Ferrara was an early Italian example of a pastoral comedy; another was Giovanni Battista Guarini's *Il Pastor Fido* (The Faithful Shepherd), set in Arcadia in 1590. In the late 17th century, an Arcadian Academy was established in Rome; at its meetings, the academicians masqueraded as shepherds. See Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance*, (New York: OUP, 1969), pp. 44 and 51.

[25] In Pierre de Ronsard's *La Bergerie*, a pastoral masque of 1564, a chorus of shepherdesses hails their presiding shepherdess, Catherine de Medici, as the benefactor who has recreated the golden age, epitomized by tranquillity and contentment. Ronsard's *La Bergerie* was sent as a gift to Queen Elizabeth in 1565. Copies of new dances in France were sent to Queen Elizabeth by her ambassadors (1559), and they regaled her with drawings of pageants and masks (1581), see McGowan, op. cit, 2008, p, 30.

Queene of shepheardes all;"[26] in his *The Faerie Queen* of 1596, the fairy queen of course represents Elizabeth; George Peele's *Descensus Astraeae*, performed in a Lord Mayor's pageant in 1591, had Queen Elizabeth personified as a shepherdess, surrounded by shepherds and virtues;[27] at a pastoral entertainment presented to Elizabeth at Kenilworth, the Goddess Diana recognises Eliza as her lost nymph Zabata, while at Bisham, Ceres presents her with a crown of wheat ears (albeit one ornamented with an expensive jewel).[28] In Michael Drayton's poem of 1593 written to celebrate her Accession Day, Queen Elizabeth is portrayed as the nymph Beta, surrounded by her nymphs and shepherds.[29] On her entry into Harefield in 1602, Elizabeth was greeted by a dairymaid who invited her to spend the night in her dairy house, claiming that she would be better accommodated there than at the great house. The dairymaid would of course be in need of rake and fork; Elizabeth was presented with both, of course as "2 Juells."[30]

Pastoral poetry and literature inevitably have a hint of nostalgia, harking back to a golden age of contentment unsullied by the evils of any particular modern society, a golden age travelling via the pastoral glades of Arcady in Greece, but originating in the Garden of Eden. The literary pastoral is of course a mirage; it is a dream about an imaginary past. However some, including many Queens, sought to move the pastoral idyll from the abstract literary domain into the domain of real life, a process of reification.[31] Catherine de Médicis in 16th century France, portrayed by Pierre de Ronsard in his pastoral masque of 1564 as "la Bergere Catherine" (the shepherdess Catherine),[32] built a real-life dairy, *La Vacherie*, where courtiers played at being shepherds and shepherdesses.[33] Queen Mary II had a dairy built at Hampton Court in the late 17th century, fully equipped with the finest Delph milking pans, and a century later Marie Antoinette indulged in the same rural fantasy, with golden milking pans. These pastoral activities allowed the upper classes to enjoy greater freedoms than usual; however, they would never replace the strict court protocol observed on most occasions; such pastimes afforded only a light relief from the usual formalities.

What kind of dancing would be appropriate for such an idealised Arcadian setting in the 16th century? Surely not the formal court dances of the period, such as the Basse Dance, the Measures and the Galliard, and definitely not the uncoordinated jigging and cavortings of rural labourers. As mentioned earlier, it is being proposed here that a new(ish) style of dance was

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[26] See Sharon Butler, 'Choreographies of Order and Chaos: Pastoral and Courtly in Chaucer and Spenser', in Barbara Segal & Bill Tuck (eds.), *Dance &Society, Early Dance Circle Conference Proceedings* (2012), pp.101-105.

[27] Harry Levin, *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance* (OUP, 1969), p. 99.

[28] Scragg, op. cit. 2019, p. 6.

[29] See Butler, op. cit. 2015, p. 1.

[30] Louis Adrian Montrose, '"Eliza, Queene of shepheardes," and the Pastoral of Power', *English Literary Renaissance*, Vol. 10(2) (1980), p. 160.

[31] Reification is the process of making an abstract idea concrete, changing something abstract into something real.

[32] see Levin, op. cit, 1969, p. 70. Ronsard's *mascarade/pastorale* blended pastoral and courtly traditions, creating a fantasy world of make-believe similar to that created by Queen Catherine at *La Vacherie*. This pastoral masque, *La Bergerie*, was dedicated to Mary Queen of Scots, and a copy was later found in the library of James I. As mentioned, Queen Elizabeth also had a copy.

[33] McGowan, op. cit. 2008, p.160.

created for these pastoral entertainments in England, and that as a result they developed into a new genre known as 'country dances.'

The description of an entertainment for Charles II at Lincoln's Inn in 1662 nicely presents this situation. It "gives you a Country Dance, perform'd by Sheapheards and Sheaperdesse, in the habits of Arcadian pastorals; who set forth the Innocency of their minds, by the simplicity of their manners."[34]

"The poetry of shepherds was written by and for sophisticates."[35] So too was it sophisticates who devised and performed 'country dances'.[36] Just as the shepherdesses frolicking in the farmyards of Royalty are not real shepherdesses, so too were the country dances in pastorals not what real country folk danced on their village greens.[37] In the field of music, especially in the 18th century, a similar idealization of country life occurred, both in the composition of the music and the choice of instruments. The upper classes played jewel-encrusted hurdy-gurdys and musettes with elaborately embroidered bellows, and serious composers were obliged to produce pastoral music for these instruments.

Pastoral themes were a favourite in England among the upper classes, even in the early disguisings of Henry VIII at the start of the 16th century. At a banquet of Cardinal Wolsey's, Henry arrived with a party of mummers dressed as Shepherds – of course in "fynne Clothe of gold and fyn Crymosyn Satten,"[38] just like real shepherds! Wearing a mask would have meant he no longer had to act the role of a King[39]; being a shepherd not only granted him greater

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[34] Cunningham, James P., *Dancing in the Inns of Court* (Jordan &Sons, 1965), p. 5.

The French upper classes danced their *branles*, some of which were mimetic. It has often been said of elite society dancing say the Washerwomen's Branle, pretending to do the washing, that they were mischievously parodying the working classes. It may be, however, that they were instead pretending to indulge in activities that represented the innocence of the countryside, that is, revelling in a pastoral idyll.

Similarly, in late 15th century Italy, there were many *moresche*, by and for the nobility, featuring the rustic activities of mowing and sowing the ground, scattering seeds and harvesting grain, all of course with (possibly imitation) gold and silver implements, all in time with the music. See: Jennifer Nevile, *The Eloquent Body* (Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 34-39. See also: Barbara Sparti, *Guglielmo Ebreo of Pesaro* (1993), p. 55.

[35] Eleanor Terry Lincoln (ed.), *Pastoral and Romance* (Prentice-Hall, 1969), p. 2

[36] In her seminal work examining the folk revival of the early 20th century, Georgina Boyes describes the potency of the image of rural innocence and joy evoked by dancing on the village green of *The Imagined Village* (1993). Interestingly, even in the early 20th century, it was the intelligentsia and upper classes who enjoyed this country (folk) dancing, the 'folk' could rarely be persuaded to join in.

[37] In his scholarly work, *The History of the Morris*, (James Clarke & Co., 1999, p. 297), John Forrest describes a scene in a play by Phillips from 1658, where Bess, a servant girl representing the lower classes, tells the dancing master that her style of dance is far more interesting than that of her superiors dancing upstairs. Forrest notes that "in this period, the dances of the lower classes appealed to the nobility," implying a great similarity between the two. We are told, however, that Bess's friend dances a "North countrye Jigg," a solo stepping dance that would be an unlikely source for the 'country dances' of the upper classes (recall the jig danced by the local working-class lasses in *The Vicar of Wakefield* mentioned on page one). See: Edward Phillips, *The Mysteries of Love and Eloquence*, London, 1658.

[38] M. Twycross, & Sarah Carpenter, *Masks and Masking in Medieval and Early Tudor England* (Routledge, 2002), p. 167/132.

[39] Castiglione's *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (1528) was translated into English in 1561 by Thomas Hoby. Castiglione advises that it is unseemly for a gentleman to perform the virtuosic dance steps of a dancing master, unless he is in his private chambers; he must not dance so in public "unlesse hee were in a maske." Holby, p. 97.

freedom from the strict rules of court decorum, it also bestowed on him the innocence of Arcady.

Elizabethan Progresses

An important context for pastorals may have been the many entertainments devised for Queen Elizabeth on her annual summer progresses. Every town where the Queen stopped presented her with lavish entertainments of all kinds, including mock battles, pastoral plays, masques, songs and dances.[40] The shows in the street were organised by the local guilds; however, the entertainments at the stately homes usually had the backing of court composers, well-known musicians, London playwrights and prominent academics.[41] Entertainments were usually of a pastoral nature; for example, the entertainment for the Queen at Bisham in 1592 was called *The Lady of the Farm*,[42] and performed by the hostess's daughters. A rained-off entertainment at Sudeley in 1592 was called *The Shepherds' Entertainment*, in which John Dowland was to perform.[43] Entertainments at country estates usually featured "classical deities, shepherds and shepherdesses, anglers, dairymaids and wild men of the woods,"[44] an Arcadian world that would surely have been in need of pastoral dances - but not of course what was to be seen on a real village green.

One such pastoral event was the entertainment for Queen Elizabeth mounted at Elvetham in 1591. The Fairy Queen came into the garden, "dauncing with her maides about her," [45] to the sound of three cornetts, playing "fantastic dances." The Fairy Queen danced a second time, singing a fairies' song of six parts, accompanied by an exquisite consort. Queen Elizabeth was so entranced, she asked for the dance to be repeated three times,[46] and asked other lords and ladies to come and see it. A long fairies' dance in a garden would need a pastoral style – fairies inhabit magical pastoral glades, emerging in the moonlight, dancing in Fairy rounds.[47]

Round dances and heydeguises were the dances of rural labourers. Would such a dance be suitable for a Fairy Queen [she would of course have represented Queen Elizabeth]? It is

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[40] See: Scragg, Leah, (ed.), *Five Elizabethan progress entertainments* (Manchester University Press, 2019), p. 8.

[41] Detailed accounts of these pastoral entertainments, including those at Elvetham and Cowdray, were sometimes published in London, gaining a wider audience. These events in the countryside were not trivial affairs; it has been suggested that the pastoral entertainment at Elvetham may have influenced Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (see Scragg, op. cit, p. 5.)

[42] J E Archer, E Goldring & Sarah Knight (eds), *The Progresses, Pageants, & Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, 2007, p. 207.

[43] See: Butler, op. cit. 2015, p. 173.

[44] Scragg, op. cit. 2019, p 5.

[45] David M Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry 1558-1642* (2003), p. 61.

[46] Scragg, op. cit. 2019, p. 85/6.

[47] "…the Elizabethans, even when they ceased to believe in fairies, had a homelier and sturdier impression of them than we have been able to retain. They had belonged to Merry England and the green world and the festive customs that were put down with the old religion.." Levin, op. cit. 2019, p. 102.

Robin Goodfellow, a puck-like fairy, tells us in 1580: "By wells and rills in meadows green, We nightly dance our heydeguise, And to our fairy king and queen, We chant our moonlight harmonies." *The Cambridge Book of Lesser Poets*, by Sir John Collings Squire – from web search for heydeguise.

fortunate that circle dances also represented the divine world - dances of the angels and muses - allegorical dances – the circle having a symbolic value in conveying social harmony[48] (so long as it was moving clockwise). What could be more fitting for a Fairy Queen and her maidens than to be dancing in a circle, representing both social harmony and also the pastoral fantasy of shepherdesses frolicking on the village green. But a "fantastic" dance that was so entrancing, and presumably novel, for Queen Elizabeth, could surely not have been just a simple circle dance. This dance was performed by actors, and they would have been very well-rehearsed. A basic circle dance would have needed many embellishments to turn it into a novel and "fantastic" dance for the Queen. Elizabeth was both an accomplished dancer, and also a critical judge of dancing; it is thought she even composed dances herself,[49] so to be novel and fantastic for her, it must have had many new inventions. Did this become one of the 'new' country dances that Queen Elizabeth enjoyed watching her ladies perform in her privy chambers?[50] There are many circle dances in the first edition of Playford. I think it more likely that Playford's elaborated circle dances came from the creations of dance masters for Fairy Rounds in pastoral entertainments for the upper classes, than somehow evolving from the circle dances of the real village green.

The Influence of Italian Geometric Dances on English Dances

There are basically two forms of geometric patterns for the English Country Dances described in Playford, namely circles and rectangles. According to the authoritative Roy Strong, the geometric patterns of the Renaissance gardens 'were a profound expression of the Renaissance mind.'[51] These geometric figures represented the cosmos in the Renaissance, the square representing the earth, and the circle the divine world.[52] The same significance may have applied to the geometric figures traced by dancers in court entertainments. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that the country dances with circular patterns were devised to represent the divine world – including the domain of Fairies.

In contrast, those with rectangular patterns would represent the earthly domain. Elements of such patterns in English dance can be seen in the so-called Gresley Dance Collection. This is an invaluable collection of 26 dances found just a few decades ago, in the notebook of a very well-educated gentleman, Johnes Banys, from Derbyshire in England and dated around 1500.[53] One interesting fact about the Gresley dances is that the majority are described as being

[48] Whitlock, op. cit. 1999.

[49] Barbara Ravelhofer, *The Early Stuart Masque* (Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 29.

[50] An early reference to 'english country dance' was by Thomas Morley in his book: *A Plain & Easy Introduction to Practical Music* (1597). It is interesting that Morley is known to have composed music for dances in the entertainments seen by Queen Elizabeth on her progresses, so if my hypothesis on the origins of the country dance is correct, he may have been an early witness of the newly devised 'country dances.' Morley wrote a pastoral Canzonet in 1593, *Blow, Shepherds, Blow*, describing Elizabeth as part of a pastoral idyll: "All hail Eliza fair, the country's pride and goddess,/ long mayest thou live the shepherd's queen and lovely mistress." See Butler, 2015, p. 211.

[51] Roy Strong, *The Renaissance Garden in England* (Thames & Hudson, 1979), p. 223.

[52] See Jennifer Nevile, 'Choreography and Meaning in Renaissance Danced Spectacles: A Catalyst for Discussion', *Historical Dance*, Vol. 4(2) (2012), p. 30.

[53] David Fallows, 'The Gresley Dance Collection, c. 1500' in *Research Chronicle*, Vol. 29 (1996), pp.1-19.

performed by men only; the remainder do not indicate a gender. Were these dances performed by masked nobles and gentry in court entertainments? Dances in these events were usually for single sex groups.

Women also took part in these entertainments. In 1527 Henry VIII produced an entertainment in his specially constructed 'disgysing house.'[54] Gasparo Spinelli, the Venetian ambassador, described the dancing of four women, including princess Mary, Henry VIII's eldest daughter: "dancing thus they presented themselves to the King, their dance being very delightful by reason of its variety, as they formed certain groups and figures most pleasing to the sight."[55] This suggests that as early as 1527 in England, even for the women, figure dances were being devised for the upper-class entertainments that were different from the usual court dances.

In early Tudor times, at the start of the 16th century, there were many entertainments at court, including tournaments, plays, mummeries, and a number of these included intricate dancing.[56] Henry VIII performed in many such entertainments. In 1512, he and his courtiers celebrated epiphany "disguised, after the manner of Italie, called a mask."[57] These entertainments consisted mainly of dancing and spectacle, with just a small part for scripted drama. Both performers and audience in these entertainments were courtiers and honoured guests, often foreign ambassadors. In these entertainments, masked men entered, performing dances typically with many leapings and high jumps. 'Lepes' are specified for some of the Gresley dances.[58] Perhaps the dances in Johnes Banys' notebook had been devised by a dancing master for the masked entertainments in which he himself had participated, or at least witnessed.

Most of the names of the Gresley dances are English, but they do not have much in common with the dances typically referred to as being danced at the English court at that time, like the basse dance. The Gresley dances do however show many similarities to the Italian dances of the 15th century. "Like the Italian *balli*, the floor patterns … are more often linear than circular," and they have obvious affinities "in terms of their manipulation of the choreographic material, the variety of their floor patterns, the number of performers and, not least, their music."[59] There are however many steps mentioned in the Gresley dances that were not in any Italian dances (for example the wonderfully pastoral-sounding Flowrdelice step). Furthermore, the Gresley dances also show similarity to the English Country Dances. Did these new figured patterns, together with their novel English steps, represent a new style of English dance?[60] And did they evolve into the English Country Dance in the 16th century?

There is a curious dance described in The Lincoln's Inn Moot Book, 1485-1547,[61] *The Howe of the howse*. The short description of this dance not only tells one to "flower" several times, but may indicate a progression similar to that in most country dances: "roll into other places."

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[54] Sarah Carpenter, *Early Performance: Courts and Audiences* (Routledge, 2021), p. 166.

[55] Carpenter, op. cit. 2021, p.170. See also Streitberger, op. cit. 2012, p. 129.

[56] W.R Streitberger, *Court Revels, 1485-1559* (University of Toronto Pres, 2012), p. 83.

[57] Streitberger, op. cit, 2012, p. 82.

[58] For instance in *Prenes a gard, Temperans, Northumberland* and *Damesyn.*

[59] Jennifer Nevile, 'Dance in Early Tudor England: An Italian Connection?', *Early Music*, Vol. 26 (2) (1998), p. 237.

[60] see Jennifer Nevile, op.cit.1998, p. 231.

[61] See: John Gardiner-Garden, *Historic Dance,* 2013, Vol. 1, I.72.

Queen Elizabeth enjoyed pastoral entertainments as much as her father, Henry VIII. In 1573, a pastoral entertainment was presented to Queen Elizabeth at Wynsor, which required “shepherd hookes,” “lamskynnes for Shepperds,” “arrows for nymphes,” “shepperds staves”, not to mention garlands, baye leaves and flowers. This entertainment was presented by a group of “Italyan Players;” making it likely that the dances in this pastoral had an Italian influence, although they may have been set to English music.[62] Elizabeth was very fond of dancing; she was reported to “like the manners and customs of the Italians better than those of all the rest of the world,” [63] she spoke fluent Italian, and she had had at least one Italian dancing master, Jasper Gaffoyne.[64] She was said to have loved dancing ‘high’ in the Italian style, resulting in some calling her ‘the Florentine’.[65] Many of her musicians were Italian, inherited from her father, Henry VIII, and some of these may have taught dance.

Italian dancing masters of the 15th century were the first to document dances with geometric patterns. Some of these Italian dances[66] have figures surprisingly similar to those of the English country dances. It is plausible that these Italian dances would have influenced the early Tudor entertainments. Furthermore, some of the Italian *balli* current in Italy in the late 16th century, a period when the new country dances were becoming popular outside the masque setting in England - dances choreographed by masters such as Caroso and Negri – are even more similar to the patterns of English country dances than those of the earlier 15th century dances.[67] Even the concept of longways progression in country dances could have been adopted from the Italian dances.[68] It seems reasonable to assume that entertainments in the Elizabethan period would have been influenced as much by the Italian geometric dances as they were in earlier Tudor times.

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[62] J.M.Jeffery, ‘Italian and English Pastoral Drama of the Renaissance: Source of the “Complaint of the Satyres against the Nymphes”’, *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 19 (1) (1924), p. 60.

[63] Judy Smith & Ian Gatiss, ‘What did Prince Henry do with his feet on Sunday 19 August 1604’, *Early Music*, Vol. 14(2) (1986) p. 200.

[64] Barbara Ravelhofer, *The Early Stuart Masque* (Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 29.

[65] Ravelhofer. op. cit, p. 29.

[66] For instance: *Pizochara*, *Anello* and *Gelosia*. An interesting article by David Wilson draws attention to the similarity of the “rise” in the early country dance *Parson’s Farewell* and the *movimento* action in Domenico’s *Anello*. (see: David Wilson, ‘The Missing Link’, in *On Common Ground 2: Continuity and Change*. *DHDS, March 1998.*

Since the Italian *balli* of the 15th century are the first known recorded dance choreographies, it is tempting to assume that later dances with similarities to them were influenced by these early Italian dances. However, our understanding is totally dependent, not only on what dances were recorded, but also on what has survived. English music thought to be for dancing certainly exists from an earlier period, but without choreographies, so it may well be the case that English set dances from this period influenced the early Italian choreographers; however, such sources have not as yet appeared.

[67] Some of these were even for as many as will, eg. Negri’s *La Catena d’Amore* and *La Caccia d’Amore,* while Caroso’s *Chiaranzana* in particular could almost be mistaken for an English country dance.

[68] It is thought that editions of both Caroso and Negri were to be found in England at the beginning of the 17th century; certainly, the Bodleian had copies of their books. One of the British Library’s copies of Caroso’s *Nobilta di Dame* (1600) has on its binding a coat of arms which may indicate that it was originally in the Prince of Wales’ library during the reign of James I. See Peter Walls, *Music in the English Courtly Masque, 1604-1640* (Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 111.

Pastoral Influences from Italy

The strong resemblance of the patterns of many of the 15th and 16th century Italian dances to the English country dances has been mentioned. In addition, some of these Italian dances had pastoral associations. Two Italian dances of the 15th century, Belriguardo and Belfiore,[69] were named after noble rural residences in whose magnificent gardens, known as *Delizie*, the upper classes could partake of courtly recreations in an ambience providing a relaxed escape from the strictures of court life - in a pastoral idyll. Furthermore, in the late 15th century, "Lorenzo the Magnificent and Politian metaphorically identified the Medici villa at Fiesole with Arcady and their own circle with the Arcadian shepherds."[70]

In the 16th century, many of the court spectaculars in Italy for which the dancing masters made choreographies were pastorals. Cesare Negri composed dances for many of these; in his book he describes a long dance he made for the conclusion of a pastorale, danced by four shepherds holding crooks and four nymphs holding arrows; this dance is very similar to an English country dance, a longways dance for four couples - albeit danced with Italian steps.[71]

Conclusions

The English Country Dance emerged as an important constituent of the pastoral during the Tudor period. It built upon various dance forms then becoming known within court culture, such as the imported Italian *balli*, with their geometric patterns, and home-grown dances such as those of the Gresley collection, with their novel 'English' steps. Using elements from these various sources, a new form of dance developed well-suited to representing the pastoral ethos then emerging in the literary domain. Furthermore, the setting of these dances to English tunes would have greatly increased their popularity, and would also have contributed to the universal acknowledgement that they were English dances.

First appearing in court entertainments, the country dance then moved into the social domain, becoming very popular at court: As early as 1626, at an evening's entertainment at the court of King Charles I, they "set to and danced country-dances till four in the morning…"[72] No particular steps had to be learned, and the lively duple-time coranto step claimed by Thomas Morley in 1597 to be the rhythm of the country dance would have allowed the dancers to trip around the dance floor in the easy-going fashion of shepherds and shepherdesses in an arcadian idyll.[73]

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[69] See Hazel Dennison, 'Delizie e Danze: A tangible context for an intangible heritage' in Barbara Segal & Bill Tuck (eds), *Ballroom, Stage & Village Green: Contexts for Early Dance*. *Early Dance Circle Conference Proceedings* (2014), pp.13-17.

[70] Erwin Panofsky, '"Et in Arcadia Ego": Poussin and the elegiac tradition', in E.T.Lincoln (eds), *Pastoral and Romance* (1969), p. 32n.

[71] Cesare Negri, *Nuove Inventioni di Balli* (Milan: G. Bordone, 1604).

A typical ending position for an Italian stage dance was a semi-circle, facing the audience; see for example the *Ballo Fatto da Sei Dame* by Negri, a dance composed for the festa celebrating the wedding of Isabella of Austria in 1599. A version of a country dance, *Step Stately*, published in Playford 1651, has also been found in an earlier manuscript, the *Patricke* Ms (see Ravelhofer, op. cit., p.43). This earlier dance ends in a semi-circle at various places, as if it were a stage dance, but in the Playford version, the pattern has been regularised into a column. Perhaps the earlier manuscript version indicates a stage provenance.

[72] Whitlock, 'John Playford's The English Dancing Master', p. 575.

[73] I should like to suggest that dances performed at court in Italy in the 15th and 16th centuries required a certain style of body movement that was far removed from the natural movement of walking, where the arms swing in

This reification of the pastoral aesthetic even survived the Civil War and Commonwealth period, as witness the description of an entertainment for Charles II at Lincoln's Inn in 1662: It "gives you a Country Dance, perform'd by Sheapheards and Sheaperdesse, in the habits of Arcadian pastorals; who set forth the Innocency of their minds, by the simplicity of their manners."

Since the country dances had become so popular and enjoyable, one might well wonder why they danced anything else. The English court was highly class-conscious, and dance acted as a class identifier. Perfection in the formal court dances, the "Grave Measures,"[74] "full of State and Ancientry,"[75] was necessary to show that you belonged to elite society, by demonstrating complete mastery over all your body movements.[76] The country dances could provide only a light relief from the oppressive constraints of court protocol. One had to first demonstrate total bodily control in the formal dances before any such relief could be contemplated – at least in public. Later in the 17th century, the courante, and later still the minuet had to be performed, one couple at a time, under the full scrutiny of the court - only then were you permitted to indulge in the more relaxed and jollier country dances.[77] The relief these dances provided at the Elizabethan court is amply demonstrated by the Earl of Worcester's remark in 1602: "we are Frolyke heare in cowrte: much dauncing of contrey dawnces before the QM [Queen's Majesty] Whoe is exceedingly pleased therwith."[78] Thus, even the Queen appreciated relief from court protocol - on occasion!

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opposition to the foot moving forwards; it was a highly controlled and sophisticated sideways movement of the body which owed more to 'art' than to nature. This dance style may also have been required of the English upper classes when dancing their formal dances, such as the *basse danse*. I am proposing that the country dance would not have required this artful style – the more natural oppositional style would be more in keeping with the idea of 'rusticity' implicit in the pastoral aesthetic. This would of course have rendered them easier and jollier to perform.

[74]The Galliard, the Volta, and the Coranto were also part of the social dance repertoire; these dances were livelier than the Measures, although still requiring the appropriate degree of deportment and courtliness. However, they were not open to all on account of the degree of skill required for their performance. The galliard was becoming a virtuoso male solo, "so full of trickes and tournes, that he which hath no more than the plain Sinquepace, is no better accoumpted of them than a verie bongler," said Barnaby Riche in 1581. Quoted in *Dancing Through Time*, compiled by Allison Thompson, (McFarland,1998), p. 10.

[75] William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing* (c. 1599).

[76] Still prevailing was the Renaissance humanist belief that the virtue of the dance was that it was nothing less than an external action reflecting interior movements of the soul; in other words, if you are a virtuous person, then all your body movements will be graceful and harmonious, while those lacking grace were of questionable moral virtue (see Nevile, *The Eloquent Body*, p. 91) When dancing country dances, you were not performing as your real character, you were in a sense performing in a pastoral masquerade.

[77] It is thought that at the court balls of Charles II, after the courantes had been danced, one couple at a time, interminably - as Pepys tells us - only those who had danced the courantes could then take part in the country dances after supper. It was not only in court balls that a graceful deportment had to be shown to gain acceptance into society. Even at local Assembly Room Balls in the early 18th century, countless minuets were performed. This was surely not because the minuet was a dance beloved by all – it was a required formality possibly to discourage those who had not mastered such control from attending.

[78] Cited in George Emmerson, *A Social History of Scottish Dance,* p.61. Quoted from J Nichols, (1823) *The Progresses and Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, London. 3 vols.