

Melinda J. Gough. *Dancing Queen: Marie de Médicis' Ballets at the Court of Henri IV*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo, London, 2019. ISBN 978-1-4875-0366-6, xvi + 378pp. 7 figures

The seventeenth century was a formative era for dance, as evidenced by the changes from the 'Renaissance' technique and choreographies found in Italian sources c.1600 to the 'Baroque' ones of French sources c.1700. Records for dancing and the progress of change are slim for the central years of the seventeenth century. The account by de Lauze 1623 offers limited elucidation while analysis of *The English Dancing Master* London 1651 can produce some insights into dancing at the mid-point. For the highly influential school of French dance, there are, in truth, no sources for court practice as Arbeau 1589 and the anonymous manuscript *Instruction pour dancer* of c.1612 both present a modest repertoire suitable for bourgeois contexts. For French ballet, the model for dance theatre in other countries, there is a similar paucity of information, until the last decades when the performances of Louis XIV are both better documented and well-researched by scholars. Margaret McGowan has led the field with the 1963 *L'Art du Ballet de Cour en France: 1581– 1643* while her most recent publication of 2008 *Dance in the Renaissance: European Fashion, French Obsession* examines both social dance and dance theatre but only up to 1600. Other than the text of *Le Ballet Comique de la Royne* 1581, a singular publication, there was no practice of publishing *livrets* of ballets and mascarades until 1610. A *livret* can provide posterity with a basis for understanding the theme and action of a ballet, in line with the texts published by masque poets in England from 1604, but music scores, casting, scenic and costume designs are not collated with them, so require gathering together to get a more complete picture. The ballets of the reign of Henri IV and Louis XIII have been virtually ignored by modern scholarship.

Melinda Gough's *Dancing Queen* is a very welcome addition to an under-represented field. Her academic background is in English and cultural studies, with a feminist perspective. The study focusses on the three ballets led by Marie de Médicis from her marriage to her widowhood in 1610: *Ballet of the Sixteen Virtues* 1602; *Ballet de la reine* 1605; *Ballet of Diana and her Nymphs* 1609. Gough argues that the queen was able to participate in political issues, expressing her views and even contesting the king through the imagery, action and casting of her ballets. Marie's status as second wife to Henri was consolidated by the birth of the dauphin, but she still had to contend with the rival claims of legitimacy for the sons of the king's mistresses. Her own origins in the Medici merchant family was also below that of the French nobility. By choosing women of the highest rank, Marie validated her status as queen. By 1605, Henri had made her the official guardian of the dauphin and brought her into the Royal Council. Two critical issues for France negotiated by Marie through her ballets were the struggle between the Protestant Huguenots and Catholics, and France's status in the light of England's peace with Spain.

Gough draws on little-known eye-witness accounts and the few surviving song texts to confirm the date and present the likely scenario for each ballet, including the *Ballet de Madame* (her daughter Elizabeth) of April 1609. The verse texts are included in French and English as appendices. She refers to a detailed anonymous eye-witness account of the 1605 ballet, but her full transcription and translation is only

to be found in the journal *Early Theatre* 2012. Gough's expertise in exploring the web of French politics and court life while interpreting the allegory and implications of the spoken evidence is much appreciated. The patronage by Marie of Tuscan performers is also aired, including the singer Francesca Caccini. Gough points out that Marie's ballets allowed France to show off its wealth, not least through the quantity of diamonds on her costumes. A piquant snippet of information is that Marie wore the famous Petit or Beau Sancy diamond in her 1605 headdress, but James I had acquired the more valuable Grand Sancy for his coronation, and had two portraits painted in the same year to show it off as his hat ornament.

The dance historian who wishes to get close to the action and dancing of the ballets needs to extract relevant information from the dense discourse. The music sources are not included and only briefly considered. Referencing is thorough, which also allows the dance historian (and others) to follow up related evidence and discussions. The strongly academic thrust includes the use of theories and methodologies drawn from related fields, including dance studies. However, theorising on other people's theories does tend to lead one away from reality. Distortion in interpreting the dance information can perpetuate errors of understanding for non-specialist readers.

Drawing primarily on Marko Franko's discussion of the *basse danse*, Gough discusses the queen's entry of 1605 as merely graceful walking, as a significant contrast to the lively and grotesque dancing of additional characters. The original text states '*marchant d'une façon grave faisant des petits passages...*' a *passage* being a section of steps or figuring in the flow of forward progress. The fact that terre à terre steps or *pas mesurées* require intricate and virtuosic footwork is not made apparent. Gough is also guided by Franko on cross-dressing as a means of feminising and disempowering courtiers before the king, in discussion of the appearance of César de Vendôme (Henri's bastard son) as a girl in the ballet of 1605. She argues, therefore, that Marie indicated his inferior status in public in defence of the legitimacy of dauphin Louis. However, the French must have had different connotations of cross-dressing than we can understand as the dauphin himself made his dance debut at St Germain in a female role, while several ballets before 1602 were danced by leading noblemen in cross-dressed roles, such as washerwomen and nymphs. Perhaps, they simply found it amusing and a suitable performance for carnival. Again, Franko is cited in support of a chain figure being a hay: is it pernicky to propose that a chain involves the use of hands, whereas a hay does not?

Dance studies benefit from the careful work of other scholars in finding and editing sources that illuminate dance culture. Feminist approaches also support the notion of ballets and masques as politically engaged and significant productions, in proposing the agency of queens in political life. Gough's final chapter explores the function of Marie's ballets in diplomacy, with very interesting consideration of the links between her ballet of 1609 and *The Masque of Queens* led by Anne of Denmark. *Dancing Queen* is an admirable and informative addition to dance studies.

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