
ARCANGELI, ALESSANDRO. *Davide o Salomè? Il dibattito europeo sulla danza nella prima età moderna*. Rome: Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche/ Viella, 2000. Pp. 390.

The book by Alessandro Arcangeli, a cultural historian with interests in sociability and leisure, reconstructs, through a careful analysis of different kinds of sources, the theological and moral discourse of dance in Europe from 1450 to 1650. The introduction presents the theoretical background of the analysis, discussing some of the main interpretations of the role of dance in history. The first two chapters describe the practices and the idea of dance to which the moral debate refers.

From the third to the eighth chapters the author presents the lines of the debate. The birth and the activities of mendicant orders and the institution of confession in Latin Christian tradition during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries generate the production of sources in which Arcangeli finds the first signs of the debate: pastoral literature strongly condemns dance and moral theology defines it as an act indifferent *per se*, acquiring moral value following the circumstances. Moral theology discusses the opportunity of dancing during religious festivities and in sacred places, the participation of regular and secular clergy in public balls, the use of *gesticulationes* inspiring sexual desire and the role of individual responsibility in controlling one's behavior while dancing.

Secular literature from Humanism to the Counter Reformation offers positions ranging from condemnation rooted in Christian stoicism to the humanists' praise, connected to the renewed attention to the body in pedagogic practices and to the evaluation of dance as a relevant element of civility. The Italian Counter Reformation culture already strongly condemned dance (e.g., *Opusculum de choreis et spectaculis*, rewritten in several versions by Carlo Bascapè and published only in the seventeenth century under the name of Carlo Borromeo), Catholic moralizing intent gets stronger in the context of seventeenth-century France, with the exception of the pedagogic programs and the staging of allegorical ballets in the Jesuit colleges.

The reformed ethics expressed different intellectual traditions and specific regional characteristics drawing a non-monolithic map of positions about dance. Calvinism produced some of the more intransigent defenses against dance (e.g., the *Traicté des danses* by Thomas Chesnau, translated to English, to be considered the model of a *genre* later disseminated all over Europe) and the *traicté des danses* by Lambert Daneau, who stigmatized the artificiality of dances. The social objects of Daneau's condemnation are the groups sensible to the Reform, the urban bourgeoisie. British texts deal in particular with two themes: the defense of dance on festive days and the defense of theatrical dance. A whole chapter is devoted to what Arcangeli defines as "the Lutheran exception," where he observes a softer position towards dance and how very often the theme of the dance becomes the pretext for the debate against Calvinist rigor.

The systematic organization of the argumentation used by these different voices as proposed by Arcangeli reveals the strong intertextual nature of the debate, relying on a system of shared notions and traditions, rather than on dance practices. From the sources investigated emerge various ideas associated with dance as a bodily manifestation of happiness, as entertainment, as an occasion of social encounter, as consuetude, as cultural variable, as place of conflict between nature and culture, as pagan and evil rituals, as outrage to the cross, as epidemic manifestation, pedagogic instrument, mimetic and representative genre. Finally, the last two chapters analyze medical texts and travel records from the new continent, producing different views of dance.

The conclusion proposes an attempt to interpret theoretically and in a long *durée* perspective the themes that the very precious work of research, organization and description or the sources revealed. Arcangeli suggests that it could be efficacious reading the debate on dance, and particularly its condemnation aspects as discipline in a Foucaultian sense, as an exercise practiced by the European *élite* with the aim of domestication their body first and then imposing those behavioral models on a subaltern class. Moreover, Arcangeli judges as promising McNeill's intuition about a disposable space in the dancing hall that could have provided a modern perception of the space around us.

Arcangeli's book is a relevant contribution not only to dance historiography but also to the cultural history of leisure, showing how much dance practices, theories, and discourses reveal about the notion of the body, their cultural transmission in time and space and the reaffirmation bodily exercise and leisure as crucial functions of change in society and in culture.

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