Iain Fenlon

The Claims of Choreography – Women Courtiers and Danced Spectacle in Late Sixteenth-Century Paris and Ferrara

When, in February 1579, Alfonso II d'Este, a forty-five year old widower, married Margherita Gonzaga, the fifteen-year old daughter of the Duke of Mantua , a new sense of purpose and a certain degree of innovation was introduced into the already vibrant musical and theatrical traditions of the Ferrarese court.[1] Since inheriting the title twenty years earlier, Alfonso had promoted music at court with enthusiasm, placing particular emphasis upon the cultivation of the madrigal and dramatic music. It was shortly after Margherita's arrival in Ferrara that the *balletto*, or *balletto della duchessa* as it is sometimes called by contemporary observers, with elaborate costumes and complex choreography, was evolved as a regular feature of court entertainment.[2] It should be emphasised at the outset that the kind of dance performed by the *balletto* was specially designed, with the particular skills of a particular group of performers in mind, newly invented for each occasion. Based on choreographical elements familiar from social dances of the period, such as those codified in the manuals of Fabritio Caroso and Cesare Negri,[3] this type of danced spectacle involved the construction of lengthy and more varied episodes assembled into visually impressive displays that could also be invested with symbolic meaning. In terms of construction, the procedure was quite different from the special choreographies that occasionally find a place in the manuals, such as the four torch dances devised by Negri for theatrical per-formance in Milan and described in his treatise *Le gratie d'amore*.[4] That is one characteristic feature. Another is that Margherita's *balletto* was made up of an entirely female cast of performers, a feature that it shared with the better-known *concerto delle dame*, the ensemble of virtuoso singers established at the

1 For general accounts of musical and theatrical life at Ferrara during the second half of the sixteenth century see, 1891); Anthony Newcomb, *The Madrigal at Ferrara 1579–1597*. Princeton Studies Angelo Solerti, *Ferrara e la corte estense nella seconda metà del secolo decimosesto. I discorsi di Annibale Romei* (Città di Castello in Music 7, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1980).

2 Newcomb, The Madrigal, ibid., vol. 1, pp. 35–42.

3 Fabritio Caroso, *Il ballarino* (Venice, 1581) and id., *Nobiltà di dame* (Venice, 1600); Cesare Negri, *Le gratie d'amore* (Milan, 1602).

4 Pamela Jones, »Spectacle in Milan: Cesare Negri's Torch Dances«, *Early Music* 14 (1986), pp. 182–96.

Este court at about the same time.[5] It seems that both these groups were a consequence of Margherita's arrival in Ferrara, and a direct reflection of her interests. In practice the two groups which Margherita fostered were close; three of the sopranos in this second *concerto* – Laura Peverara, Anna Guarini, and Livia d'Arco – are all recorded in descriptions of the *balletto* in 1582 and 1583. The following discussion comments on the Ferrarese *balletto*, offering some ideas about precedents and origins as well as upon the social and political functions of performances that were quite strictly gendered.

Margherita Gonzaga's new *balletto* was fairly well established by 1581, and the following years saw a rapid growth in its repertory. The Florentine Ambassador, Orazio Urbani, describing entertainments which he had witnessed at one of the Este summer palaces during the visit of Prince Vincenzo Gonzaga (Margherita's brother) and Cardinals Farnese and Gonzaga, wrote in May of that year:

> The Duke [Alfonso II d'Este] wanted His Eminence [Cardinal Farnese, the most recently arrived of the guests], to see a very highly worked-out dance [›ballo molto artificioso‹] performed by the Duchess, Donna Marfisa, and ten or twelve other ladies, to the accompaniment, sung by the musicians, of some madrigals that go with the dance.[6]

It seems that this was a complete, and elaborately choreographed set piece, danced by a select group of court ladies, to the accompaniment of appropriate madrigals; the critical phrase »ballo molto artificioso« clearly suggests that this was in the category of theatrical rather than social dance. The practice, always under the guidance of Margherita Gonzaga d'Este, was continued in the following years. Early in 1582 it is reported that »a tournament is being prepared for tomorrow, with a party in the evening with a new *balletto* with music and very beautiful costumes [›con bellissima mascherata‹] by the Duchess«;[7] another eyewitness, Leonardo Conosciuti, wrote that »This evening the *balletti solenni* will

5 Newcomb, The Madrigal (cf. fn. 1), vol. 1, pp. 7–8; Elio Durante and Anna Martellotti, *Cronistoria del concerto delle dame principalissime di Margherita Gonzaga d'Este* (Florence, 1979); Anthony Newcomb, »Courtesans, Muses, or Musicians? Professional Women Musicians in Sixteenth-Century Italy«, *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana, 1986), pp. 90–115.

6 Florence, Archivio di Stato (hereafter ASF), Arch Mediceo f.2900 (29 May 1581), Urbani to the Grand Duke of Tuscany . See Newcomb, The Madrigal (cf. fn. 1) vol. 1, Appendix V, document 34; Durante and Martellotti, Cronistoria (cf. fn. 5), p. 142 (document A30).

7 Modena, Archivio di Stato (hereafter ASM), Particolari Trotti (20 January 1582). See Newcomb, The Madrigal (cf. fn. 1), vol. 1, Appendix V, document 35.

be given by eight ladies dressed very gracefully – four as shepherds, four as nymphs.«[8] Two days later, Urbani also described the *balletto*:

> Yesterday, during the usual small party, the Duchess, Donna Marfisa, Signora Bradamante, and some other ladies (there were eight of them altogether), did a large new *ballo* ... the dance was done twice, with costumes and without, to the accompaniment of a substantial piece of music for voices and instruments.[9]

Urbani's description also emphasizes that four of the women were dressed as men. Four days later Consociuti mentioned the occasion yet again, this time dividing the performers into two groups, one 'male' and the other female:

> On Sunday ... there were festivities at court, including the *balletti* with the *gran concerto*. The crush was so great that many who had brought along their ladies lost track of them ... The *balletti* succeeded extraordinarily well. Although the Princess [of Mantua] did not come, [Camilla] Scandiano Mosti did. The males [in the *balletto*] were Donna Marfisa [d'Este], Signora Bradamante, La Pipperara [Laura Peverara], and La Marcia [Ginevra Marcia, lady-in-waiting to Donna Marfisa]. The women were the Duchess [Margherita Gonzaga], La Scandiana, La Vittoria [Bentivoglio], and another of the Duchess's ladies-in-waiting.[10]

One year later, Margherita's *balletto* put on another performance. As becomes clear from the evidence, this had been prepared to celebrate the marriage of Count Annibale Turco and Laura Peverara, an occasion generally thought to have given rise to the preparation of the madrigal anthology *Il lauro verde*, commissioned by a Ferrarese academy and printed by the court printer Vittorio Baldini.[11] Urbani, who had prior knowledge of the arrangements, wrote back to his contacts in Florence:

> Tomorrow, to conclude the festivities, Laura Peverara's wedding will be celebrated with a tournament, for which the programme [›cartello‹] was published

8 ASM, Particolari Conosciuti (20 January 1582). See Newcomb, The Madrigal (cf. fn. 1), vol. 1, Appendix V, document 36; Durante and Martellotti, Cronistoria (cf. fn. 5), p. 146 (document A43).

9 ASF, Arch Mediceo f.2900 (22 January 1582), Urbani to the Grand Duke of Tuscany. See Newcomb, The Madrigal (cf. fn. 1), vol. 1, Appendix V, document 38. At greater length in Solerti, Ferrara e la corte estense (cf. fn. 1), p. lxxviii. See also Durante and Martellotti, Cronistoria (cf. fn. 5), pp. 146–7 (document A44).

10 ASM, Particolari Conosciuti (24 January 1582). Newcomb, The Madrigal (cf. fn. 1), vol. 1, Appendix V, document 37. Durante and Martellotti, Cronistoria (cf. fn. 5), p. 147 (document A45).

11 The tradition stems from Angelo Solerti, *Vita di Torquato Tasso*, 3 vols. (Turin, 1895), vol. 1, p. 364. See Anthony Newcomb, »The Three Anthologies for Laura Peverara«, *Rivista italiana di musicologia* (*Studi in onore di Nino Pirrotta*) 10 (1975), pp. 329–45, where it is proposed that the earlier anthology *Il lauro secco* (1582), also printed by Baldini, was assembled in honour of the couple. See also Flora Dennis, *Music and Print: Book Production and Consumption in Ferrara, 1538–1598* (Ph. D. diss., Cambridge University, 2002), pp. 121–5 and appendix I, nos. 9 and 12.

> yesterday ... To compose this, and the words to a *gran balletto* that will be performed in the evening by the Duchess and eleven other ladies, Cavalier [Giovanni Battista] Guarini was recalled from Venice, where he had gone on private business.[12]

Another despatch, written two days later, mentions that the

> dance, which as I wrote was being rehearsed by the Duchess and eleven other ladies, partly dressed in black as gentlemen and partly in white as ladies, made a rather beautiful sight.[13]

Taken together, these remarks point to three aspects of these two performances that gave Margherita's *balletto* its particular quality. First, each choreography was new, specially constructed for the occasion, and as such was the latest in a growing repertory of such works that was constantly being renewed. Secondly, both Conosciuti and Urbani explicitly refer to the participation of the *gran concerto*, the large ensemble of court musicians directed by Luzzasco Luzzaschi, in one of these performances. The music that accompanied the *balletto* on this occasion was both sung and played, Guarini having been summoned back from Venice specifically to provide the words. Finally, in both performances half of the dancers, all of whom were female, were cross-dressed as men.

In the years after 1583, the *balletto della duchessa* continued to be an established feature of court life; its participants performed with some regularity, particularly during the carnival season and in honour of distinguished visitors. One such was the Duc de Joyeuse, for whose marriage in 1581 the Valois court had presented the *Balet comique de la Royne*. For the Duke's visit to Ferrara, in the summer of the same year, Margherita Gonzaga had devised yet another danced spectacle, again with complex choreography. Urbani reported it in his dispatch to Florence in the following terms:

> The Duchess remained here [in Ferrara] to study and rehearse that grand ballet, which she did yesterday, during the hottest hours of the day, with Donna Marfisa and other ladies together numbering nine.[14]

12 ASF, Arch Mediceo f.2901 (21 Feb 1583), Urbani to the Grand Duke of Tuscany. See Newcomb, The Madrigal (cf. fn. 1), vol. 1, Appendix V, document 45; Durante and Martellotti, Cronistoria (cf. fn. 5), p. 156 (document A76)«.

13 ASF, Arch Mediceo f.2901 (23 Feb 1583), Trotti to Luigi d'Este. See Newcomb, The Madrigal (cf. fn. 1), vol. 1, Appendix V, document 46; Durante and Martellotti, Cronistoria (cf. fn. 5), pp. 156–7 (document A77).

14 ASF, Arch Mediceo f.2901 (25 July 1583), Urbani to the Grand Duke of Tuscany. See Newcomb, The Madrigal (cf. fn. 1), vol. 1, document 47; Durante and Martellotti, Cronistoria (cf. fn. 5), pp. 160–1 (document A91).

Another important visitor to the court in the mid-1580s was Anna Caterina Gonzaga, the daughter of Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga, who arrived in Ferrara during the carnival season of 1585. Just three years earlier, in May 1582, Anna Caterina had been married in Mantua to Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, the brother of the Emperor, Rudolph II.[15] Following the usual festivities, she left for her new home in Innsbruck, taking with her an impressive dowry of jewels, clothes and silver. This marriage not only strengthened the all-important Gonzaga alliance with the Hapsburgs, (the Duchy of Mantua was an Imperial fiefdom), it also provided the Este with a dynastic connection to the Empire itself. It is not surprising that Anna Caterina's return visit to Ferrara should have been marked with celebrations of some elaboration, including yet a further performance of the court *balletto*:

> That evening there was a gathering in the *gran sala*. Twelve dancers, with astonishing plumes ordered by the duke himself, performed the *balletti*. It was said to be a beautiful thing to see, but the violins, harpsichords, and organs could be heard only with difficulty. The words, written by Signor [Giovanni Battista] Guarini, were extremely pleasing, and the music, by [Ippolito] Fiorino, served them well. The dancing was so well matched to both that it was heavenly. I have tried to get hold of the words to send to you, but have been told that they cannot be distributed ...[16]

The notion that such carefully-structured dances, performed to mark dynastic occasions of political significance, were intended to resonate with neo-Platonic notions of cosmic harmony and an ordered universe, was not in itself new. The idea of a lengthy and elaborately choreographed danced spectacle to be performed as a discrete entertainment is at the core of the French *ballet de cour* tradition which, as has been convincingly argued, also transmitted messages with strong political overtones.[17] The origins of that tradition can be first detected in 1572, when the *Académie de poésie et de musique*, which had been founded just two years earlier, in November 1570, was involved in the production of entertainments to mark the wedding of Henri de Navarre and Mar-

15 For the brief contemporary description of the occasion in Giovanni Battista Vigilio's *La insalata* see Giovanni Battista Vigilio, *La insalata. Cronaca mantovana dal 1561 al 1602,* ed. Daniela Ferrari and Cesare Mozzarelli (Mantua, 1992), p. 58. See also the account by the Mantuan court composer Giaches de Wert in a letter to Count Camillo Gonzaga of Novellara in *Giaches de Wert: Letters and Documents*. Épitome musical 4, ed. Iain Fenlon (Paris, 1999), pp. 134–5.

16 ASM, Particolari Conosciuti (26 February 1585). See Newcomb, The Madrigal (cf. fn. 1), vol. 1, document 49; Durante and Martellotti, Cronistoria (cf. fn. 5), p. 169 (document A124).

17 For the argument see, *inter alia*, Frances A. Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1947), pp. 236–74; Margaret M. McGowan, *L'art du ballet de cour en France 1581–1643* (Paris, 1963), particularly pp. 11–47; Roy Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals 1450–1650* (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 98–125, particularly pp. 119–22.

guérite de Valois. The *Académie*, which merged seamlessly with the Pléiade, the poetic movement led by Pierre de Ronsard, and with Jean Dorat as its *éminence grise*, was instituted by Charles IX and sustained financially by members of the French court. As a young man Dorat had known Guillaume de Budé, and had attended the Greek lectures of Germain de Brie, a pupil of Jean Lascaris and a friend of Erasmus; Dorat's fierce commitment to Greek letters found an effective outlet in his strong encouragement of the general development of printed editions of classical Greek texts in France.[18] Principally concerned with the composition and performance of *vers measurés*, designed to revive the effects of ancient music and poetry through imitation, the *Académie* gathered at the Paris mansion of Jean-Antoine de Baïf, located between the Porte Saint-Victor and the Porte Saint-Marceau.[19] This constituted a distinct link with the past, since it was in this same house, then the property of Baïf's father, Lazare de Baïf, that Jean-Antoine and Ronsard had studied a variety of subjects, including Greek, under Dorat's guidance.[20] This sense of common intellectual purpose continued at the Collège de Coqueret beginning in the 1550s; some sense of the intense atmosphere there is conveyed by Ronsard's early biographer, Claude Binet. »Ronsard«, he writes, »who was accustomed to late hours from having lived at court, used to study until two hours after midnight. On retiring to rest he would awaken Baïf, who rose and took the candle with him ... In this honourable contention he remained five years with Dorat, always continuing in the study of Greek letters and of other good sciences«.[21] Binet's specific mention of Greek literature is a reminder of the strong Hellenistic element that united both the *Académie* and the Pléiade, and which Jean-Antoine de Baïf inherited from his father, who studied Greek in Rome with Lascaris and Marc Musurus.[22] He returned to France as one of the few properly trained Hellenists in the country. The façade of the Hôtel Baïf, now destroyed, proclaimed his strong belief in the superiority of ancient, and above all Greek culture in a series of Greek inscriptions taken, according to a contemporary description, from a number of authors including Anacreon, Pindar, and Homer;[23] this was probably the earliest example in northern Europe of a practice that had grown up in late fifteenth century

18 Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from 1300 to 1850* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 102–9.

19 Yates, The French Academies (cf. fn. 17), particularly pp. 14–27.

20 For Jean-Antoine de Baïf see Mathieu Augé-Chiquet, *La vie, les idées et l'œuvre de Jean-Antoine de Baïf* (Toulouse, 1909).

21 Claude Binet, *Discours de la vie de Pierre de Ronsard, gentil-homme vandomois, prince des poëtes françois, avec vne eclogue réprésentée en ses obsèques* (Paris, 1586), p. 10.

22 On Lazare de Baïf see Lucien Pinvert, *Lazare de Baïf (1496?–1547)* (Paris, 1900).

23 Yates, The French Academies (cf. fn. 17), p. 16.

Italy, and Baïf may well have seen the remarkable large-scale inscriptions in Latin and Greek that adorn the Casa Manlio in Rome.[24]

The five years that Lazare de Baïf spent in Venice, a city with a sizeable Greek community and a considerable tradition of Greek scholarship, can only have consolidated his interest in the ancient world, an interest which he passed on to his son who in turn became »probably the best Greek student of the Pléiade«.[25] As one contemporary put it, »je m'asseure qu'il n'y a bon auteur Grec ou Latin, que Baïf n'ait veu diligemment«.[26] In this sense Jean-Antoine was the inheritor not only of his father's experience of early-sixteenth century Italian study of classical antiquity, but more particularly of the markedly Hellenistic emphasis of Venetian humanism, a legacy which he passed on to Claude Le Jeune and other musicians in his circle.[27] In terms of musical theory and practice, the musicians of Baïf's academy attempted to realize the fabled ›effects‹ of ancient Greek music through the revival of the ancient modes, and the recuperation of the Greek genera. Baïf's musicians, and above all Le Jeune, were also attracted to the possibilities of *musique mesurée* on two grounds: first that music and poetry must be closely united as in antiquity, and secondly that this union, if properly executed, would result in a revival of the ethical effects of ancient music.[28] Little of the music that came out of the experiment was published during the sixteenth century, and it must be doubted whether *musique mesurée* had very much influence outside Baïf's immediate circle. Its most public exposure was in the composition of the *ballet de cour*, beginning with the arrangements made to celebrate the Navarre-Valois wedding.

At the centre of these festivities was a fête, with the theme of the »Paradis d'amour«, given in the Salle de Bourbon in the Petit Palais of the Louvre, a space which no longer exists. The marriage of Caterina de' Medici's daughter to the leader of the French Protestants might have initially appeared to contemporaries as the culmination of the policy of conciliation which the Valois had been adopting towards the religious question for some years. Horrifically, the wed-

24 For the practice see Georgia Clarke, *Roman House – Renaissance Palaces. Inventing Antiquity in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 22–5, 227–32.

25 Linton C. Stevens, »A Re-Evaluation of Hellenism in the French Renaissance«, *French Humanism, 1470–1600*, ed. Werner L. Gundersheimer (London, 1969), p. 187.

26 Guy de Brues, *Les dialogues contre les nouveaux académiciens que tout ne consiste point en opinion* (Paris, 1557), p. 46.

27 Iain Fenlon, »Claude Le Jeune and the Greeks«, *Claude Le Jeune et son temps en France et dans les états de Savoie, 1530–1600: Musique, littérature et historie. Actes du colloque de Chambéry (4–7 novembre 1991)*, ed. Marie-Thérèse Bouquet-Boyer and Pierre Bonniffet (Bern, 1996), pp. 5–15.

28 David P. Walker, »The Aims of Baïf's Académie de poésie et de musique«, *Journal of Renaissance and Baroque Music* 1 (1946), pp. 91–100.

ding celebrations themselves became the setting for the infamous St. Bartholomew's Night massacre, when many of the Huguenots gathered in Paris for the occasion were brutally murdered. This confluence of events has darkly coloured the reception history of Caterina's image in general, and of the court festivities which she arranged in particular.

Nearly everything that is known about the »Paradis d'amour« comes from two authors, both Protestant. The more substantial record is to be found in the *Memoires de l'estat de France*, written by Simon Goulart and first published anonymously in Middelburg in 1577,[29] to which should be added the scattered remarks of a second source, Théodore-Agrippa d'Aubigné's *Histoire universelle*.[30] According to these the entertainment took place behind closed doors. To the right of the scene was Paradise, represented by a triumphal arch through which could be seen the Elysian Fields, inhabited by twelve nymphs. On the left was Hell, populated by devils. Running between the two was the River Styx, identifiable by the presence of Charon's boat. Beyond could be seen the heavens, shown as an enormous wheel decorated with the twelve signs of the zodiac and the seven planets, against a background of twinkling stars. Since the »Paradis« took place in a hall and against a background of fixed scenery, it marks in these respects a departure from the medieval tradition of processional forms, in which decorated cars containing the performers moved through a space occupied by the audience. The spectators on this occasion were placed in galleries above the action, which was viewed from above.

The action consisted of a simple political allegory based on a familiar medieval *topos*. In conformity with this convention Paradise was besieged by knights, who attempted to carry off the nymphs, but they were repelled by three guardians of the celestial regions who drove them down to Hades. This was the setting for the second act, which opened with the defeated knights imprisoned behind locked gates. From the heavens Mercury and Cupid now descended, both singing words that had been specially composed for the occasion by Ronsard. Still singing, they then returned to the heavens. Following this, the three victorious knights led the nymphs out into the body of the hall where they performed a complicated dance at the end of which the defeated attackers were released from Hell. In this way the piece gradually arrived at the happy conclu-

29 [Simon Goulart], *Memoires de l'Estat de France, sous Charles Neufiesme* (Meidelbourg, 1577); see Alexandre Cioranescu, *Bibliographie de la littératurefrançaise du seizième siècle* (Paris, 1959), no. 10879. The work was reprinted in both 1578 and 1579. The description is summarized in Henry Prunières, *Le ballet de cour en France avant Benserade et Lully, suivi du Ballet de la délivrance de Renaud* (Paris, 1914), pp. 70–75.

30 Summarized in Yates, The French Academies (cf. fn. 17), pp. 254–5.

sion demanded by convention. The dance itself is said to have lasted more than an hour, and is the major novelty of the »Paradis« from a stylistic point of view. Since the music has not survived, it is an open question as to whether or not it would have adopted the principles of *musique mesurée*; as has been pointed out, if it had been composed in this way it would be the »Paradis d'amour«, rather than the *Balet comique de la Royne*, that would have been placed at the head of the *ballet de cour* tradition by historians. Prunières, who was aware of its importance, conjectured that it was a collaboration between Baïf, Joachim Thibault de Courville, and Claude Le Jeune, and suggested that choreography may have been drawn up by Balthasar de Beaujoyeux.[31] That seems likely given the organizational similarities, in as much as they can be deduced, between the two spectacles, together with the fact that Beaujoyeux is known to have been responsible for the choreography of the *ballet* given before the Polish ambassadors during their visit to Paris in the following year. Beaujoyeux had arrived in France as a violin player in 1555, but he soon made his way rapidly at court, and by the early 1570s had skilfully accumulated a large number of waged positions in the *maison du roi* and associated households; by 1566 he had become a *valet de chambre* in the household of Caterina de' Medici, (a post that he was to retain until at least 1585), as well as being a court musician.[32]

As is sometimes the case with court entertainments of the early modern period, (the seventeenth-century Stuart masque would be another example), this apparently simple fable was lent a political dimension by the participation of the patrons of the spectacle, in this case the Valois themselves. Charles IX and his two brothers were cast in the roles of the three defenders of Paradise, a metaphor for the court itself and beyond it Catholic France, while the defeated attackers were played by Henri de Navarre and his Huguenot companions. The concluding dance conveyed a traditional set of metaphorical meanings based through a sequence of choreographic episodes which visually described a set of geometric figures. The result, perceived as ordered and harmonious, was understood to be a reflection of cosmic harmony; as such the danced itself embodied restorative and edifying moral properties that could bring positive benefits to the body politic. This dimension became explicit in the final scene of the »Paradis« when, through music and dance, the defeated Huguenots were released from Hell and harmony secured. Such workings-out, in theatrical form, of the

31 Prunières, Le ballet de cour (cf. fn. 29), pp. 70–5.

32 Jeanice Brooks, *Courtly Song in Late Sixteenth-Century France* (Chicago, 2000), pp. 106–7 and appendix 2. See also Jeanice Brooks, »From Minstrel to Courtier – The Royal Musique de Chambre and Courtly Ideals in Sixteenth-Century France«, *Trossinger Jahrbuch für Renaissancemusik* 1 (2001), p. 49.

political tensions between the two religious factions had occurred before, notably at Fontainebleau in 1564. Following the performance of the »Paradis d'amour«, the sequence of entertainments that had been prepared to celebrate the Valois-Navarre marriage continued on its course until 24 August, when the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre began, and fantasy turned into grim reality.

A new ballet was produced in the following year, 1573, when ambassadors from Poland, who had come to offer the crown of their country to Caterina de' Medici's son, Henri, were received in Paris. The visitors were treated to a series of entertainments, which culminated in a danced spectacle, devised by Caterina herself, and performed on 19 August in a temporary hall erected in the Tuilerie Gardens. This event is commemorated in Jean Dorat's *Magnificentissimi spectaculi* which, in addition to the main text in Latin, also includes French verse by Ronsard and Amadis Jamyn, and a number of illustrations.[33] As Dorat describes it, the action centred on sixteenth nymphs representing the provinces of France, who entered on a moving rock made of lath and plaster from which they descended to perform a long and intricate dance designed by Beaujoyeux. Although Dorat provides only the most general clues about the choreography, there is enough detail given to locate it as an elaborate geometric dance. Pierre de Brantôme, who witnessed it, described the action in the following terms:

> After making a circuit of the hall, the nymphs, again seated on their rock as in a military encampment, stepped down, forming small battalions of bizarre invention. Accompanied by a band of thirty viols, the dancers, without one false step, to a lovely cadence, drew up before the king for ingenious figures, turns, turnabouts, counter-turns, interlacings, stops and starts, in which not one lady failed to memorize their order, all participants having solid judgement and excellent memories.[34]

The visual effect evidently impressed some of the spectators. Brantôme described it as »le plus beau ballet qui fust jamais au monde«,[35] and the Polish guests are also on record as being amazed at the novelty of the conception; according to d'Aubigné, they collectively exclaimed that »le bal de France estoit chose impossible à contrefaire à tous les rois de la terre«.[36] Although, as with the »Paradis d'amour«, the music has not survived, some impression of the appear-

33 Jean Dorat, *Magnificentissimj spectaculi, a regina regum matre in hortis suburbanis editi, in Henrici Regis Poloniæ inuictissimi nuper renunciati gratulationem, descriptio* (Paris, 1573).

34 Translated from the French original in Lincoln Kirstein, *Movement & Metaphor: Four Centuries of Ballet* (New York, 1970), p. 51.

35 Brantôme, Pierre de Bourdeille, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Prosper Mérimée and Louis de La Cour, vol. 10 (Paris, 1890), p. 74.

36 Théodore-Agrippa d'Aubigné, *Histoire universelle*, ed. Alphonse de Ruble, vol. 4 (Paris, 1886), p. 179.

ance of the moving rock and of the disposition of the nymphs is provided by one of the six Valois Tapestries now in the Uffizi, having been brought to Florence by Christine of Lorraine on her marriage to the Ferdinando de' Medici in 1589, by Antoine Caron's drawing for it (which probably served as a sketch for a cartoon), as well as by one of the illustrations in Dorat's account. The latter would seem to be the more accurate record, since they show the action of the dance being performed within a temporary structure (in the tapestry it takes place in the gardens themselves), and shows a geometric pattern involving fourteen dancers instead of the three couples in court dress who are performing an ordinary social dance in the tapestry. The dancers, then, were all female. As for the musical detail, the rock as shown in the tapestry is crowned by the figure of Apollo playing an *all' antica* lyre, perhaps in reference to the »Gallic Apollo« who appears on the title-page of Dorat's booklet, and whose music has the power to unite the troubled provinces of France.[37]

While the origins of the *ballet de cour* tradition can be traced back to the »Paradis d'amour« of 1572 and the Polish entertainments of the following year, the first examples of the genre for which words, music, and details of costumes and décor have survived is the *Balet comique de la Royne*.[38] On 24 September 1581, Anne, Duc de Joyeuse was married to Marguérite de Vaudemont, sister of the reigning queen, and in the days which followed some seventeen separate entertainments were staged, including a water fête, a number of tournaments in allegorical settings, a horse ballet, and a firework display. It seems that Baïf's *Académie*, which was financially supported by the Duc de Joyeuse among others, was responsible for the overall organization and co-ordination of these events. The *Balet comique* which, like the danced spectacle for the Polish ambassadors of the previous year, is known to have been devised by Beaujoyeaux, was most probably performed in the Salle de Bourbon in the Petit Palais, by now becoming established as the venue for such entertainments. Three sides of the hall were occupied by galleries to accommodate the socially less elevated members of the court, while at one end of the room a raised dias had been constructed for the royal party. Behind was the area where the ladies of the court were to sit.

37 Frances A. Yates, *The Valois Tapestries*. Studies of the Warburg Institute 23 (London, 1959), pp. 67–72.

38 The principal source, Baltazar de Beaujoyeulx, *Balet comique de la Royne, faict aux nopces de Monsieur le Duc de Ioyeuse & madamoyselle de Vaudemont sa soeur* (Paris, 1582), contains text, music, and a number of illustrations of groups of costumed participants. See the main discussions of the event in Prunières, Le ballet de cour (cf. fn. 29), pp. 82–94, Yates, The French Academies (cf. fn. 17), pp. 236–50, and McGowan, L'art du ballet de cour (cf. fn. 17), pp. 42–7.

As Beaujoyeulx explains in his account, the title of the work is intended to indicate that the *Balet* is a musical drama combined with dance, »comique« only in the sense that it has a happy rather than a tragic ending. The balletic elements in the work are very substantial, greater than in any previous piece in the tradition. In the first act, twelve naiads accompanied by twelve pages entered to perform a figure in the form of a triangle, followed by twelve further geometrical figures, all different one from the other. This dance, a symbol of the familiar political metaphors of order, balance, and proportion,[39] was then interrupted by Circe, whose magic powers immobilized the performers. Freed by Mercury, the dancers resumed their movements, only to be frozen into inactivity once again by the re-appearance of Circe. The drama continues until Minerva appears, accompanied by the four cardinal virtues. Approaching the king's dias, where the group is joined by Jupiter, Minerva declares that only the power of reason allied to the supreme authority of Jupiter and the justice of the king himself can defeat Circe's magic powers. This is indeed what follows. Circe is compelled to relinquish her magic wand to Minerva, and is then led from the enchanted garden and conducted to the dias where Minerva places the wand in the hands of Henry III. With Circe vanquished, the action was then resumed with the *entrée* of the *grand ballet* (consisting of fifteen figures), followed by the *grand ballet* proper (composed of forty figures), which proclaimed the triumph of good over evil in a choreographic sequence of considerable complexity. Beaujoyeux described it as follows:

> It was composed of fifteen figures arranged in such a way that at the end of each figure all the ladies turned to face the king. When they had appeared before the king's majesty, they danced the *grand ballet* with forty passages or geometric figures. These were all exact and well planned in their shapes, sometimes square, sometimes round, in several diverse fashions; then in triangles accompanied by a small square, and other small figures. These figures were no sooner formed by the naiads, dressed (as we have said) in white, than the four dryads, dressed in green, arrived to change the shape, so that as one ended the other began. At the middle of the ballet a chain was formed, composed of four interlacings, each different from the others, so that to watch them one would say that it was in battle array, so well was order kept, and so cleverly did everyone keep his pace and cadence. The spectators thought that Archimedes could not have understood geometric proportions any better than the princesses and the ladies observed in this ballet.[40]

The currents that contributed to the French *ballet de cour* in its fully-fledged form are clear. Essentially it was invented by two Italians, Beaujoyeux and Caterina de' Medici, and although numerous artists, dancers, musicians, and poets

39 Yates, The French Academies (cf. fn. 17), pp. 248–51.

40 Beaujoyeulx, Balet comique (cf. fn. 38), pp. 55–6.

contributed to the final result, it was Caterina who, with a highly developed conception of the new danced spectacle as a political instrument, was responsible for formulating the overall design of the ballet, and for organizing its execution. Brantôme confirms that it was she who retained overall control of the spectacle, always the most admired component in any sequence of entertainments, and it was recognized that the fêtes that she promoted were intended to soften hearts and to reconcile opposing factions.[41] Beaujoyeux, a professional capable of transforming Caterina's ideas into choreography, and to rehearse the result, was essential to this process.

The parallels between the French *ballet de cour* and the Ferrarese *balletto della duchessa* are extremely close and can hardly be coincidental. Both consist of a sequence of long and intricate dances performed to specially composed music and choreography. There are obvious similarities, too, in the all-female casts of dancers in both the *Balet comique* and the *balletto*, and in the central roles of Caterina de' Medici and Margherita Gonzaga, both of whom were responsible for training the ladies of their court to perform elaborate dances of their own devising. These analogies are not surprising in view of the strong cultural connections between the French and Este courts in the period. It may be significant that Ferrarese interest in danced spectacles in the French manner can be dated from one year after the Polish entertainments in Paris. When, in July 1574, Henri III arrived in Ferrara on the return leg of his journey to Kraków, where he had been crowned King of Poland, an elaborate *ballo* for eight women dancers together with what the documents call »intramezzi di musica« (musical interludes) were performed.[42] It would seem that here, some six years before Margherita Gonzaga's arrival at the Este court, the choreographic practices and female personnel of the *balletto della duchessa* are anticipated. If, as the evidence suggests, the model for Ferrarese interest in elaborately choreographed dances was stimulated by French example, that is simply part of a more general phenomenon in which the Valois court proved to be highly susceptible to Italian cultural influences;[43] the exchanges were also reciprocal.

In Italy itself, the emergence of the independent danced spectacle reached something of a watershed not in Ferrara, but in Florence. What seems to have happened is that, towards the end of the sixteenth century, a new type of danced

41 Yates, The French Academies (cf. fn. 17), p. 251.

42 Pierre de Nolhac and Angelo Solerti, *Il viaggio in Italia di Enrico III, Re di Francia, e le feste a Venezia, Ferrara, Mantova e Torino* (Turin, 1890), pp. 176–7, 258–60. An earlier version of the *concerto delle dame* also performed; see Durante and Martellotti, Cronistoria (cf. fn. 5), pp. 131–2 (document A8).

43 Jacqueline Boucher, *La cour de Henri III* (Rennes, 1986), pp. 97–125.

ballo became popular in court entertainments given there, beginning with the final item of the last *intermedio* for *La Pellegrina*, devised by Emilio de' Cavalieri, to accompany a performance of the play produced to celebrate the celebration of the marriage of Ferdinando de' Medici to Christine of Lorraine in 1589.[44] As with the Ferrarese *balletto*, this elaborate form of danced spectacle is distinguished both by being choral, and by its dependence upon specially devised choreography rather than the stock formulas of court dance, or newly written court dances for amateur performance. In essence, this was a professional enterprise which needed to be worked out by someone talented in the arts of both choreography and musical composition – »a knowledgeable person«, as the theorist Giovanni Battista Doni later put it, »skilled in the one profession and in the other, as was that Signor Emilio del Cavaliere, inventor of that fine *ballo*, and of the same air [›aria‹] called the *Granduca*; he was not only an extremely expert musician but also a most graceful dancer.«[45] This linkage of *ballo* and *aria* is indicative; in practice Cavalieri devised the choreography and its accompanying bass pattern first, leaving the words to be added later in what was essentially a reversal of the emergent *seconda pratica* aesthetic. The *aria* itself, whose origins have been much discussed,[46] developed a considerable afterlife of its own, being used as the basis for some 240 compositions written in the course of the seventeenth century.[47]

The idea of a lengthy and elaborate choreographed ballet as an integral part of court spectacle lies at the heart of the French *ballet de cour* tradition, a tradition which was the invention of an Italian choreographer (Balthasar de Beau-

44 There is a substantial bibliography. The fundamental studies remain Aby Warburg, »I costumi teatrali per gli intermezzi del 1589«, id., *Gesammelte Schriften. Die Erneuerung der Heidnischen Antike. Kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Geschichte der europäischen Renaissance*, ed. Getrud Bing (Leipzig, 1932), vol. 1, pp. 259–300, with important addenda and excerpts from the *Memorie e ricordi* of Girolamo Seriacopi, the engineer in charge of the stage machinery, on pp. 394–422; and for the music, the relevant parts of Nino Pirrotta and Elena Povoledo, *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, trans. Karen Eales (Cambridge, 1982). See also Alois M. Nagler, *Theatre Festivals of the Medici 1539–1637* (New Haven, 1964), the relevant entries in *Il luogo teatrale a Firenze: Brunelleschi, Vasari, Buontalenti, Parigi*. Spettacolo e musica nella Firenze medicea. Documenti e restituzioni 1, ed. Mario Fabbri, Elvira Garbero Zorzi, Anna Maria Petrioli Tofani (Milan, 1975), Strong, Art and Power (cf. fn. 17), pp. 126–52, and, most recently, James M. Saslow, *The Medici Wedding of 1589: Florentine Festival as ›Theatrum Mundi‹* (New Haven, 1996).

45 Giovanni Batista Doni, *Lyra barberina*, ed. Antonio Francesco Gori, vol. 2 (Florence, 1763), p. 95.

46 John Walter Hill, »O che nuovo miracolo! A New Hypothesis about the Aria di Fiorenza«, *In cantu et in sermone. For Nino Pirrotta on his 80th Birthday*. Italian Medieval and Renaissance Studies 2, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta and Franco Piperno (Florence, 1989), pp. 283–322.

47 Warren Kirkendale, *L'Aria di Fiorenza id est il Ballo del Granduca* (Florence, 1972).

joyeux) and a Medici queen from Florence (Caterina de' Medici). Although numerous artists, dancers, musicians, and poets contributed to the final result, it was Caterina who, with a highly developed notion of the ballet as a political instrument, was responsible for constructing these entertainments, as Brantôme confirms. It is clear that these developments must have been known in Ferrara where, as it evolved, Margherita Gonzaga's *balletto della duchessa* exhibited some analogous features. Prominent among them was a sense of exclusivity, the presence of a large instrumental accompanying ensemble, and specially devised choreography. Both at the Valois court, as well as in Ferrara, a particular feature of these elaborate spectacles was that they were performed only by women courtiers. In France this public deployment of notions of the feminine, adroitly arranged by Caterina, had served an explicitly political purpose. In Ferrara, those same notions were channelled into a novel form of elite entertainment, heightened and spiced by cross-dressing. With the arrival of Cavalieri in Florence, and his construction of the *ballo* which concludes the sixth *intermedio* of the 1589 set, a new phase in this history is reached, for it is on the structural foundations established by this piece that the impressive tradition of seventeenth-century independent danced spectacle was founded.[48]

48 Iain Fenlon, »The Origins of the Seventeenth-Century Staged *Ballo*«, ›*Con che soavità*‹: *Studies in Italian Opera, Song, and Dance, 1580–1740*, ed. Iain Fenlon and Tim Carter (Oxford, 1995), pp. 13–40.