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Dancing virtue

Educational aspects of Queen Christina's court ballets

Stefano Fogelberg Rota

Abstract

Stefano Fogelberg Rota investigates the court ballet's pedagogic character during the reign of Queen Christina. French *ballet de cour* was introduced to Sweden in 1638 as part of a larger effort to raise the cultural standing of the state. Ballet became a privileged medium for conveying the Queen's political decisions and ambitions. These political messages were constantly communicated through the use of examples, portrayed as ideals of virtue. Virtue was used by Christina to shape an ideal image of her rule. Fogelberg Rota unveils both the underlying purposes of the representations and the rhetorical strategies employed. Finally, he examines the career of some of the noblemen dancing in order to show the importance of these performances for the advancement at court of Christina's young aristocratic favourites.

Keywords: Christina of Sweden (1626-1689), court ballet, political propaganda, *galanterie*

The introduction of French *ballet de cour* to Sweden in the 1630s marked an important step in the development of Swedish court theatre. Court ballet reached its height soon thereafter, during Queen Christina's brief, but eventful reign (1644-54). This theatre form in Sweden has received increasing attention, but its educational character has until now been overlooked.¹ In this chapter I shall investigate this particular aspect of court ballet in Sweden.

¹ On court ballet in Sweden see Fogelberg Rota, *The Queen Danced Alone*. I have published parts of this monograph in some articles devoted to different aspects of court ballet's development: 'Representations of Power'; together with Maria Schildt, '*L'Amour constant et Le Ballet de Stockholm*'; and 'L'Introduzione del balletto di corte francese in Svezia'. On Queen Christina's ballets see also Dahlberg, 'Theatre around Queen Christina', and Lars Gustafsson's two essays: 'Amor et Mars vaincus', and 'Venus förvisning och återkomst'.

In order to study the educational character of Christina's court ballet I shall proceed on two different levels. After a short overview of the introduction and development of this theatre form in Sweden, I shall study the main themes of the ballets by analysing three of the fourteen extant libretti from Christina's time. The analysis of these libretti will show to what extent the representations of certain virtues were employed to promote specific behaviours in the audience. I shall show how the ideal image of Christina as a sovereign devoted only to virtue and rationality is interrelated with the construction of an ideal image of the subjects as obedient and loyal to the Crown.² Simultaneously, I shall also study the career of the noblemen dancing in two of these three performances. The study of the careers of this representative sample of aristocratic dancers will give us insight into the importance of these spectacles for advancement at court.

French court ballet was established in Sweden primarily for educational reasons. In 1636, Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna (1583-1654) summoned to Stockholm, on behalf of the Council of the Realm (Riksrådet), French *maître à danser* Antoine de Beaulieu (d. 1663), with the explicit purpose of training the young court aristocrats in the art of dancing.³ The Queen dowager Maria Eleonora of Brandenburg (1599-1655), Christina's mother, promoted Beaulieu's employment. She was in her turn counselled by French diplomat Charles de Bretagno-Dubois d'Avagour (d. 1657).⁴ Beaulieu stayed in Sweden until his death in 1663 and was responsible for the choreographies of the great majority of the ballets performed during Christina's time.⁵ His employment at court was part of several initiatives taken to improve Sweden's cultural status, in accordance with the country's newly acquired position as a military power in the Baltic, both during the reign of Gustavus Adolphus (1611-32) and the long period of regency that followed it. The motives behind the introduction of court ballet were similar. Dancing was considered – as described, among others, in Baldassare Castiglione's influential *Il libro del cortegiano* (1528) – an essential part of the skills required of an accomplished courtier. The young nobles of the Swedish aristocracy were expected to

2 The same relation between the monarchical power and its subjects is explored by Marie-Claude Canova-Green in several of her works on court ballet, for instance, *La politique-spectacle au grand siècle*.

3 Dahlberg, 'Theatre around Queen Christina'. Beaulieu probably came to Sweden from England thanks to d'Avagour. For this information see Silfverstolpe, 'Antoine de Beaulieu', p. 6. Although Silfverstolpe's article is generally accurate he does not mention any source for this detail of Beaulieu's recruitment.

4 Dahlberg, 'Theatre around Queen Christina', p. 168; Grönstedt, *Svenska hoffester*, I, p. 8.

5 Kjellberg, 'Baletten', p. 544.

benefit from Beaulieu's training in their future careers, which often entailed diplomatic missions to European courts. Beaulieu's boastful statement 'to have refined the whole court' ('d'avoir poli toute la cour') only a year after his arrival in Stockholm reveals both the progression of his work and its essentially pedagogic nature.⁶ I shall come back to the purpose of refining the manners of the courtiers, which this declaration alludes to.

The first substantial result of Beaulieu's teachings was the performance of *Le Ballet des plaisirs de la vie des enfans sans soucy* (Ballet of the joys of the carefree children), staged at the Castle of the Three Crowns in Stockholm on 28 January 1638. This is the first of the three ballets I shall analyse in this chapter. Its performance is described in a libretto written in verses. These publications are the best-preserved documents from Queen Christina's court ballets. They were written in French and often translated into Swedish and German, so that we sometimes have up to three different publications for one single ballet. They had an important function in helping the members of the court to understand the allegories and personifications represented on stage. The libretti were also meant to circulate among the European courts. Ballet performances were part of the ceremonial of the court and had an almost official character.⁷ Although considered as the conventional expressions of a literary genre of secondary importance, they had the specific function of conveying poetically a message of political character.⁸ The libretto of *Le Ballet des plaisirs* is a good testimony of the double function of entertainment and political propaganda that characterized this theatre form since its invention in late sixteenth-century France.⁹ This genre reached Sweden in its most extemporary form, the so-called *ballet à entrées*, in which various scenes were held together by a vaguely expressed common theme with allegorical meaning. *Ballet à entrées* were often characterized by a frail narrative and a grotesque-burlesque style.¹⁰ This is the case of *Le*

6 Grönstedt, *Svenska hoffester*, I, p. 9.

7 This aspect has been thoroughly investigated in Canova-Green, *La politique-spectacle au grand siècle*. Canova-Green focuses here on the relations between the French and the English courts. Essential reading on this aspect is also McGowan, *L'Art du ballet de cour en France 1581-1643*. I have a similar approach in my own *The Queen Danced Alone*.

8 Goulet, *Poésie, musique et sociabilité au XVIIe siècle*, p. 282.

9 The first of these performances is generally considered Balthasar de Beaujoyeulx's renowned *Balet comique de la Royne* (1581), in which he adapted the Florentine intermezzi to the context of the French court.

10 On the *ballet à entrées* see Leconte, 'Introduction'; Franko, *Dance as Text*; and Henri Prunières' classic *Le Ballet de cour en France avant Benserade et Lully*. Louis E. Auld observes how these performances nevertheless corresponded to a certain 'inner logic' determined by the genre's inherent claim to variety. According to Auld the regulating principle of court ballet is to be

Ballet des plaizirs. The scenes follow one another with no apparent narrative connection and incorporate a great variety of roles such as Turks, card players, prostitutes, soldiers, drunkards, shepherds, hunters, ancient divinities, satyrs, and nymphs. Although essentially entertaining, *Le Ballet des plaizirs* refers to the ongoing Thirty Years War in its central scenes (*entrées* 4 to 6), where the love of a prostitute, 'La Courtizana double', is disputed by a Spaniard and a Swedish captain. Gustav Oxenstierna (1626-1693), a kinsman of Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna, interpreted the Swede who threatens to take to arms as soon as he hears of love ('Le seul subiect d'amour me fais prendre les armes').¹¹ The martial element thus introduced in the performance is reversed in the following scenes in which his adversary, a Spanish soldier, and then a drunkard, appear. The Swedish captain waits for his rival with a sword in his hands. The entry of the Spaniard – interpreted by Axel Åkesson Natt och Dag (1617-1642) – contrasts in tone and content with that of the Swede:

6. *The Spaniard.*

Per dios! Who are you? Don't you know my nobility? Don't you know Don victor the Phoenix of the warriors? Don't you know who I am? Do you have so little adroitness so that you fail to recognize my palms and laurels?¹²

Introduced by a typical Spanish expression, the Spaniard acts arrogantly and challenges the Swedish captain to a duel. The Spaniard is presented in a comical way in his boastfulness, a characteristic of recurrent use in the French ballets of the time.¹³ This scene introduces another important element typical of court ballet, namely the fascination for foreign characters, which is a consequence of the role played by diplomacy in these spectacles.¹⁴ Spaniards are often ridiculed in court ballets for their requests of precedence

considered 'metonymic rather than metaphoric or narrative'. Auld, 'The Non-dramatic Art of *Ballet de Cour*', pp. 367 and 392.

11 *Le Ballet des plaizirs*. Gustav Oxenstierna travelled to Holland and France during his youth. In 1648 he travelled to Germany with Carl Gustav of Pfalz-Zweibrücken, the future King Carl X Gustav (1622-1660), and at his return in 1653 he was employed at Christina's court as chamberlain. He later chose to pursue a military career and was appointed first colonel and later general. He became member of the Council of the Realm in 1673. *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, XXVIII, p. 477.

12 '6. *L'Espanjol*. / Per dios qui es tu cognois tu ma noblesse/ Cognois tu Don victor le Phenix des guerriers/ Scais tu pas qui ie suis as tu si peu d'adresse/ De vouloir mescognoistre mes palmes & mes lauriers', *Le Ballet des plaizirs*, f. 4. All translations are by the author.

13 Durosoir, *Les ballets de la cour de France*, p. 62.

14 Canova-Green, *La politique-spectacle au grand siècle*.

and their exaggerated ceremonial concerns. The comic dispute between the Swedish captain and the Spaniard for the love of the prostitute, which echoes the more serious military conflict of the Thirty Years War, is resolved in a grotesque tone by the invitation of the 'yvrogne', the drunkard, interpreted by Beaulieu. He invites the rivals to reconcile with an obscene proposal: 'This beauty can accommodate you both, one will have the front and the Spaniard will have the rear' ('Cette beauté vous peut tous deux accommoder/ L'un aura le devant l'espagnol le derriere').¹⁵ If we consider the presence of the eleven-year-old Christina in the audience, the educational character of this performance appears, at least, ambiguous. The final grand ballet in which all dancers gather on stage shows, on the other hand, a more solemn tone proving the complexity of these spectacles:

14. *Le grand Ballet.*

The Swedish Cavaliers to the Queen

Happy to live under your laws, worthy heiress of our Kings, we come to pay homage to you. Accept these untamed hearts which, fleeing all other servitude, will line up under your will, and prostrate at your knees, they confess freely that they are subject to you.¹⁶

The declaration of faith offered by the Swedish nobles to Christina is total and without reservations. The image of the Swedish reign conveyed in these lines is one of prosperity and stability. The ideal representation of the relation between the monarchy and the aristocracy of the country expressed here gains in importance if we consider who the dancers were that interpreted the different roles. As in the French performances of the time, noblemen interpreted most of the dances, while dancing master Beaulieu took care of the more difficult roles. Among the nobles dancing, the presence of some of the most distinguished aristocratic families of Sweden such as Oxenstierna, Natt och Dag, De la Gardie, and Pfalz-Zweibrücken stands out. The majority of the dancers were born around 1610-15 and were at the time between 23 and 28 years old. This simple fact confutes the idea that the 'enfants' referred

¹⁵ *Le Ballet des plaisirs.*

¹⁶ '14. *Le grand Ballet./ Les Cavaliers Suedois à la Royne/ Heureux de vivre sous vos loix/ Digne heritiere de nos Roys/ Nous venons pour vous rendre homage/ Acceptez ces coeurs indomptez/ Qui fuyans tout autre servage/ Se rangent sous vos volentez/ Et prosternees à vos genoux/ Avoue librement qu'ils sont soubmis à vous', *Le Ballet des plaisirs*, f. 7-8.*

to in the title are the dancers of the ballet.¹⁷ An example of the maturity of the dancers is the first scene in which four ‘volontaires’ appeared on stage and promised to serve the beautiful ladies of the audience. These volunteers were as follows: Bengt Skytte (1614-1683), the above-mentioned Axel Åkesson Natt och Dag, Claës Stiernesköld (1617-1676), and Johan Rosenhane (1611-1661). The four were later to be elected to the Council of the Realm or appointed as diplomats in embassies to foreign countries.¹⁸

Bengt Skytte deserves a particular mention. He was the son of Johan Skytte (1577-1645), chancellor of Uppsala University and former tutor of Christina's father, Gustavus Adolphus. He became chamberlain at Christina's court in 1633. Skytte played an important part in the Riksdag (Parliament) of 1647 in his capacity as Lantmarskalk (Lord Marshal), that is, speaker of the estate of the nobles. During this session of Parliament he introduced the delicate question of Christina's succession to the Crown. Any decision on this matter was delayed to a later time, and the grounds were laid for the election of Christina's cousin, Prince Carl Gustav, as her heir. This solution was strongly advocated by Christina, who now began to show her aversion to marriage and to plan for her abdication. The positive outcome of this discussion for Christina is likely to be attributed to Skytte's adroitness.¹⁹

Markedly younger were the two dancers of the ninth scene who interpreted two hunters, namely Prince Carl Gustav of Pfalz-Zweibrücken

17 Grönstedt, *Svenska hoffester*, I, pp. 11-12.

18 Bengt Skytte travelled extensively in Europe both for his studies and for diplomatic missions. He visited England (1629); Germany, France, Italy, and England again (1634-35); Amsterdam, Paris, Strasburg, and Montpellier (1641-42); and Turkey (1651-52). He became chamberlain at Christina's court on 4 December 1633, and later Lantmarskalk (Lord Marshal, i.e. speaker of the nobles) at the Parliament of 1647. He was also governor of the county of Uppsala (1646-49) and of Stockholm (1647-49), and member of the Council of the Realm from June 1648. *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, XXXII, pp. 515-19. Axel Åkesson Natt och Dag was the first son of Åke Axelsson Natt och Dag (1594-1655), Riksmarsk (Lord High Constable) between 1643 and 1651. He studied in Uppsala and Leiden and was appointed chamberlain at Christina's court. He travelled to Paris and Europe with his cousin Ture Turesson Natt och Dag, thanks to his uncle Axel Oxenstierna. I thank Ola Winberg for this information regarding Axel Åkesson Natt och Dag's travels abroad. Elgenstierna, *Den introducerade svenska adelns ättartavlor*, p. 407. Clas Stiernesköld was first governor of the county of Västmanland (1643-51) and then of Värmland (1651). He was also assessor in the Bergskollegium (Board of Mines, 1648-51). He was elevated to *friherre* (baron) in 1651 and became member of the Council of the Realm in 1660. *Nordisk familjebok*, XXVI, p. 1352. Johan Rosenhane undertook study trips to Holland, France, England, and Germany (1631-36). He was Carl Gustav's *hovmästare* (master of the house) during the prince's foreign travels (1638-40), and later governor of the county of Viborg (1645) and Östergötland (1655). He was elected member of the Council of the Realm in 1658. *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, XXX, pp. 533-34.

19 Asker, *Karl X Gustav*, p. 84. On these events see also Rodén, *Drottning Christina*, p. 95.

(1622-1660), later on King Carl X Gustav, and Count Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie (1622-1689). They were only twelve and fourteen years old. De la Gardie was among the closest favourites of the Queen, and it is therefore not surprising that their roles are of a more noble character. The verses describing their characters allude to their privileged condition at court: 'Hunting is a pleasant pastime, very worthy of great men and Princes' ('La Chasse est un playsant deduy/ Tres digne des grandes & des Princes').²⁰ It is plausible to think that their higher status was the motive of their participation in the ballet with elder nobles.

Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie's career is particularly interesting to follow. He was the son of the Riksmarsk (Lord High Constable) Jacob De la Gardie (1583-1652) and climbed rapidly up the hierarchies of the court thanks to Queen Christina's favour. De la Gardie is described in the sources of the time as a young and promising aristocrat of brilliant allure. He represented a new, French, aristocratic model thanks also to his French ancestry.²¹ Christina, who had turned her interests towards France, favoured him in different ways. She promoted, for instance, his marriage with Carl Gustav's sister, Maria Eufrosyne (1625-1687), by means of which he attained a princely condition.²² Another means by which the Queen enhanced De la Gardie's prestige was his election as Extraordinary Ambassador to France in 1646.²³ De la Gardie is thus a good example of the fact that the dancers of the ballets were often employed for diplomatic missions – although he was truly extraordinary in many respects. Several written accounts are preserved from De la Gardie's embassy in which the magnificent character of the French reception is emphasized. An impressive number of theatrical and musical performances were arranged to entertain the Swedish ambassador. De la Gardie attended no less than four French and three Italian comedies.²⁴ The good deportment and qualities of De la Gardie are praised in Theophraste

20 *Le Ballet des plaizirs*.

21 It was Magnus Gabriel's grandfather Pontus De la Gardie (1520-1585) who established the family in Sweden in the mid-sixteenth century.

22 On Magnus Gabriel De la Gardie's life see *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, X, p. 660. A recent biography on De la Gardie is Ullgren, *En makalös historia*. On his importance as patron of the arts see Ljungström, *Magnus Gabriel De la Gardies Venngarn*.

23 Grönstedt, *Svenska hoffester*, II, pp. 5-6.

24 See Carl Liliecrona's travel diary from De la Gardie's embassy, 'Carl Liliecronas resedagbok', pp. 12 and 39. On 14 September De la Gardie also attended the performance of a court ballet in the residence of the influential Louis Hesselin (1602-1662), 'surintendant des plaisirs du Roi' and one of the foremost patrons of ballets at the court of Louis XIV. On Hesselin see Fogelberg Rota, *The Queen Danced Alone*. See also Weil-Curiel, 'Recherches sur Louis Hesselin (1602-1662)'.

Renaudot's *Gazette de France* dated 28 September, which reports from a ball held by the dowager Queen Anna of Austria:

The 23rd of this month His Eminence [Cardinal Mazarin] splendidly treated the Extraordinary Ambassador of Sweden to dinner. On this occasion were also present the Dukes of Guise and of Joyeuse, the Knight of Guise, the Dukes of Chaunes and of Rochefoucault, the Field Marshal de Bassompierre, and some other Gentlemen of this Court and of the suite of this Ambassador. The table with 30 place settings was set in the galerie des Cerfs, and on it in the middle against a rail there was a superb buffet in golden gilt and in front of it another one even richer. Behind this rail there was a musical surprise by the King's 24 violins, whose harmony aroused no less enthusiasm than all the rest did. All this magnificence was, however, surpassed by the friendly expression and the gracious welcome of His Eminence, for whom nothing is dearer than to second all the wishes of the Majesties. Among all the entertainments with which their Majesties continue to treat this Ambassador they held on the 26th, after having returned from hunting and the French comedy, a ball in the Queen's great cabinet [reception room], where he [De la Gardie] danced with her with such a flair as to reveal that accomplishment is not only to be found in France.²⁵

De la Gardie's public appearance proved that refinement could be found even outside France. These lines remind one of the widely spread idea of the essentially moral character of an upright physical deportment in court society. Castiglione's above-mentioned *Il libro del cortegiano* is the foremost example of this view. Georges Vigarello traces, in his article 'The Upward Training of the Body from the Age of Chivalry to Courtly Civility', the ethical principles that underlay a good deportment in seventeenth century courtly

25 'Le 23 de ce mois, Son Eminence traita splendidement à disner l'Ambassadeur Extraordinaire de Suède: ou se trouvèrent aussi les Ducs de Guise & de la Joyeuse, le Chevalier de Guise, les Ducs de Chaunes & de la Rochefoucault, le Mareschal de Bassompierre & quelques autres Seigneurs de cette Cour & de la suite de cet Ambassadeur. La table de 30 couverts, estoit dans la galerie des Cerfs: au milieu de laquelle, contre un retranchement, il y avoit un superbe buffet de vermeil doré vis-a-vis d'un autre encor plus riche, & derrière ce retranchement une surprise de musique des 24 violons du Roy, dont l'harmonie ne ravissoit pas moins que tout le reste: toutes ces magnificences neantmoins estans surpassées par le bon visage & le gracieux accueil de Son Eminence: qui n'a rien plus au cœur que de seconder toutes les intentions de Leurs Majestez: Lesquelles, entre les autres divertissemens qu'elles continuent de faire prendre à cet Ambassadeur, le 26, au retour de la chasse & de la comédie Française, lui donnèrent le bal dans le grand cabinet de la Reine, où il mena dancier Mademoiselle, avec une disposition qui fit voir à la Cour que toute l'adresse n'est pas en France', *Recueil des Gazettes nouvelles ordinaires et extraordinaires*, p. 854.

entertainments. In his investigation of the concept of rectitude in early modern time, Vigarello explains how a certain moral stance could be expressed in typical aristocratic activities such as fencing, riding, and dancing:

Fencing and riding are 'fields' in which the body's uprightness is a sign of good manners. In these 'technical' activities the straight body is filled with a self-controlled politeness. The measure is less and less one of strength, and increasingly one of elegance. In the end, it is dance that sets up models aimed at excellence and distinction. It was to be the foundation for an art of controlled, developed and privileged performance. Dance allows people 'to be taught how to walk well, to curtsy, to carry their body properly and to loosen their arms and legs'. It is an exercise for maintaining and perfecting one's bearing.²⁶

The fact that Vigarello quotes, at the end of these lines, the French theologian Nicolas Fontaine (1625-1709) and his *Mémoire pour servir à l'histoire de Port-Royal* (published posthumously in 1756) reinforces the moral quality attributed to such activities during French *grand siècle*. The praise of De la Gardie's distinction in the above-mentioned quotation from the *Gazette de France* serves the double purpose of paying tribute to the Swedish ally and, at the same time, reaffirming French superiority in courtly manners. The primacy asserted in this notice also relates to the seventeenth-century French concept of *galanterie*, which exemplifies the refinement Christina wanted to introduce in Sweden. According to Alain Viala, this specific Gallic phenomenon should be interpreted both as an 'esthétique' and a 'mode de comportement'.²⁷ The social character of this ideal 'manner of behaviour' stands out as particularly important. Galanterie presupposed an honest and virtuous behaviour – the often referred to concept of *honnêteté* – joined with the requirements of elegance and ease of manners. Its courteous nature is only apparently in contradiction with these requirements, which were perceived at the time as mutually interdependent. These distinguished but yet free and easy manners are, finally, related to Castiglione's ideas of the courtier's *sprezzatura* as an art 'which conceals art'.²⁸ All these elements are hinted at in the above-mentioned praise of De la Gardie. The Swedish ambassador's

26 Vigarello, 'The Upward Training of the Body', p. 179.

27 Viala, *La France galante*, p. 12. On French influence at Christina's court see Fogelberg Rota, 'Naudé, Bourdelot and Queen Christina's French Court in Stockholm'. On the concept of *galanterie* and its influence on the aesthetic field see also Goulet, 'Louis XIV et l'esthétique galante'.

28 I quote Castiglione's renowned words from Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier*, p. 31.

success at the French court could also, at least partly, be referred back to Beaulieu's lessons at court and his dancing in the ballets. De la Gardie's highly praised elegant behaviour and posture, with its virtuous implications, were necessary requisites for a successful diplomatic mission. The importance of De la Gardie's embassy for the further diffusion of these ideals in Sweden can be measured by its impact on the development of court ballet in Sweden. As a result of his diplomatic mission, six French musicians, an Italian *macchinista* (set designer) and a French artist arrived in Sweden in order to work with the music, set design, and costumes of the ballets, respectively.²⁹

French influence on Swedish court ballet is also evident in the more marked use of political themes in the libretti, which accompanied the performances. *Le Monde Reioivi [Réjouï]* (The world delighted), staged on 1 January 1645 precisely to celebrate Christina's coming of age and the beginning of her rule, is an important step in this development. An important exemplar for this performance was the *Ballet de la Prospérité des Armes de la France*, commissioned by Cardinal Richelieu to celebrate the victories over the Spaniards in the sieges of Casale Monferrato and Arras and danced at the Palais Cardinal in Paris on 7 February 1641. This ballet marked a renewed way of understanding court ballet as a means of political propaganda aimed for the legitimation and affirmation of kingly power. The *Ballet de la Prospérité des Armes de la France* is characterized by the absence of comic scenes in favour of more serious and heroic ones. The libretto of *Le Monde Reioivi [Réjouï]* shows a similarly tangible reduction of comic scenes to the advantage of serious and solemn *entrées*. This is evident, for instance, in the third scene. Jupiter, the king of the Gods, who is here as in several other ballets identified with Gustavus Adolphus, descends to the stage on a coach together with 'la Prudence, & la Justice' (Wisdom and Justice). These two essential virtues of a righteous monarch are followed by Heroic virtue, which is described first in prose and then in verses:

Heroic virtue follows on from Wisdom who guides her. She [Heroic virtue] undertakes nothing without her advice. As Temerity sometimes carries

29 The French musicians were as follows: Pierre Verdier, Pierre Guilleroy, Pierre Garset, Nicolas Bigot, Nicolas Picart, and the singer Alexandre Voullon. These joined the French violinist Cuny Aubry and the lutenist Bechon, who were already in Stockholm before 1646. Bigot and Picart returned to France only a few years after their arrival in Stockholm and were replaced by Jacques Feugré, François De La Croix, and his son Adrien. Kjellberg, *Kungliga musiker i Sverige under stormaktstiden*, pp. 508-9; 421; 416-17; 382; 469; 515; 374-75; 378-79. Antonio Brunati was the set designer and worked with the new *Balettsalen* that was inaugurated in 1649. Nicolas Vallari was the French artist who took care of the costumes of the performances. Fogelberg Rota, 'Representations of Power', pp. 65-85.

out some actions as spectacular as hers [Heroic virtue's], in order to prove that she does not engage in dangers blindly as vice does, she foresees these situations and overcomes them with courage receiving the true reward that she deserves. So *honour* follows her step by step in order to crown her, because it is never him [honour], but rather fortune, who rewards Temerity when she succeeds. This heroic virtue and honour come together to follow Christina and render her Reign as glorious as that of Gustavus. He who never decided anything without prudence, never executed anything without Justice, never engaged in any deed that was not counselled by heroic virtue.³⁰

Heroic virtue acts always according to Wisdom's advice. Virtue's high reward does not come from Fortune, which randomly rewards the reckless without considering true merit, but from Honour, which always crowns virtue. Heroic virtue's role is to act jointly with Wisdom and Justice to underline the continuity between Gustavus Adolphus's and Christina's reign. As her father was, she will be led by reason and act stoically above her passions.³¹ Christina guarantees with her virtue the continuity of his reign. Virtue, and in particular heroic virtue, is thus the unifying element holding together the ballet and giving it a coherent character. The theme of the ballet is hence connected to its aim: the praise of Christina and her kingly virtues. The idea of a heroic virtue presented in *Le Monde Reioivi* [*Réjouï*] stems from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book 7, 1145 a18-21). The heroic is a habit that befits only the most excellent individuals and that by conferring a higher status to all other virtues brings man closer to divinity. Because of its elitist character heroic virtue was particularly appropriate for the representation of an ideal and exclusive image of man particularly meant for monarchs.³² Christina's appraisal through virtue stands out as particularly suited for

30 'La vertue heroique descend apres la Prudence, c'est sa guide, Elle n'entreprend rien sans ses conseils, Et par ce que la Temerité faict quelques fois des actions aussi Eclatantes que les siennes, afin de faire veoir qu'elle ne se porte point aveuglément dans les dangers comme faict le vice, elle veut les conneestre auparavant & les surmontant apres avec hardiesse elle reçoit les iustes recompenses qui lui sont deuës. Aussi l'honneur la suite elle pas à pas a fin de la couronner, car ce n'est jamais luy mais la fortune qui recompense la Temerité qu'elle a faict reussir. Cette vertu héroïque, & l'honneur viennent ensemble pour accompagner Christine & rendre son Regne aussi glorieux que le fût celui de Gustave, qui ne resolut iamais rien sans la prudence, n'executa rien sans la Justice, ne fit aucune action qui ne fût avouëe par la vertu héroïque', *Le Monde Reioivi* [*Réjouï*], f. 3-4.

31 For a study of Neostoic influence on Swedish seventeenth-century debate see Lindberg, *Stoicism och stat*.

32 Heroic virtue's importance in political philosophy, ever since its conception and until early modern time, is dealt with in *Shaping Heroic Virtue*, ed. by Fogelberg Rota and Hellerstedt.

her role as a young and unmarried queen for whom dynastic claims, after the long rule of the Regency Council, were the core of the legitimacy to the throne. This is also expressed clearly in the verses presenting Heroic virtue's character. Christina is described, now in verses, as the true heir of her glorious and invincible father:

Heroic Virtue.

[...] A girl comes now to take his place, she will maintain the sceptre of his race, treading the path of his glorious deeds, her invincible State places its faith in her youth, and great bravery is to be observed in her, worthy of her Swedish blood, and of her Ancestors, her exceptional qualities make her adorable. I want, on my honour, to be inseparable from her, I want to be the support of her Intentions and that she be loved by other nations, that she punishes the insolence of her Enemies and that she demonstrate with her great heart that she is a daughter, but Gustavus's, and that she bears in her breast a male strength.³³

The young Queen is the rightful heir of Gustavus Adolphus because of her 'male strength' ('masle vigueur') that makes her virtuous. It is thanks to her extraordinary virtue that Christina overcomes the weaknesses of her sex and raises herself as the worthy heir of her victorious father. A seventeenth-century misogynistic attitude shines through in these lines, but of even greater importance is the dynastic bond by which Christina is attached to Gustavus Adolphus – an aspect that is deeply connected to virtue – and by which she is legitimized in her new status as ruling queen. Heroic virtue appears as inseparable from Christina and as the ground on which her reign is based. It is in particular the counselling function of this virtue that is underlined, as in the above cited passage where it is mentioned as 'the support of her Intentions' ('l'appui de ses Intentions'). Virtue is the pillar on which Christina's reign leans, and it thus has a function similar to that of the Regency Council,

The praise of Christina's heroic virtue would also become one of the privileged themes of her Accademia Reale founded in 1674 in Rome. Fogelberg Rota, *Poesins drottning*, pp. 95-124.

33 'La Vertu Heroique./ [...] Une fille à présent vient de remplir sa place/ Elle va soutenir le sceptre de sa race,/ Marchant sur le sentier de ses faits glorieux/ Son invincible Estat espere en sa jeunesse,/ Et l'on remarque en elle une haute hardiesse,/ Digne du sang suédois, digne de ses Ayeux,/ Ses rares qualités la rendent adorable./ Je veux, honneur, je veux en estre inséparable,/ Je veux estre l'appui de ses Intentions/ Et qu'elle soit l'amour des autres nations/ Que de ses Ennemis l'insolence elle brave/ Et qu'elle fasse voir enfin par son grand coeur,/ Qu'elle est fille, mais de Gustave,/ Et qu'elle porte au sein une masle vigueur', *Le Monde Reioivi [Réjouï]*, f. 8.

which manifestly inspired the messages conveyed by the ballet. The libretto of *Le Monde Reioivi* [*Réjouï*] ends with a clear invitation to marry in order to guarantee the succession to the throne: 'And finally to give some Kings to Sweden, together with our Amazon, it is necessary to have an Alexander.'³⁴ This exhortation was directly derived from the Regency Council and its leading personality, Chancellor Axel Oxenstierna, who had ruled for thirteen years and was finally returning the reign of the country to Christina.³⁵ The explicit political message of *Le Monde Reioivi* [*Réjouï*] is concentrated in these lines in which Christina's marriage is presented as a compelling necessity and the Queen's absolute duty towards Sweden and her subjects.

An important change occurred in the messages conveyed in the ballets that were performed immediately after the beginning of Christina's sovereign rule. Lars Gustafsson shows how what he defines as Christina's 'personal politics' determines these performances, that is, her strong will to free herself from the necessity of marrying in order to guarantee the succession to the throne.³⁶ Three ballets performed in 1649, the most prolific year in the history of court ballet in Sweden, had a major importance for the affirmation of Christina's personal politics: *Les Passions Victorieuses et Vaincues* (Passions victorious and vanquished; April 1649), *Le Vaincu de Diane* (The victory of Diana; November 1649), and *La Naissance de la Paix* (The birth of peace; December 1649). Finally, I shall, focus on the first of these three performances in order to show how the image of the virtuous Queen was used by Christina to legitimize her decision not to marry.

Les Passions Victorieuses et Vaincues was performed on 4 April 1649 in the Castle of the Three Crowns. Christina had, shortly before its performance on 23 February, finally announced in the Council of the Realm that she

34 'Et qu'enfin pour donner à la Suede des Rois,/ Avec nostre Amazone, Il faut avoir un Alexandre', *Le Monde Reioivi* [*Réjouï*], f. 27.

35 Gustafsson, 'Amor et Mars vaincus', p. 88.

36 'To the extent in which the ballets danced at Christina's court had a political leaning, this was of course "inspired", and that inspiration came, in one way or another, "from above". The ballets from the later period unambiguously pleaded the cause of the personal politics of the Queen. Those that preceded them, especially the ballets performed before Christina had reached her majority, also reflect other opinions circulated at court, and show in particular the desire to persuade the young Queen to marry.' ('Dans la mesure où les ballets dansés à la cour de Christine avaient une tendance politique, celle-ci était bien entendu "inspirée", et l'inspiration venait, d'une façon ou d'une autre, "d'en haut". Les ballets de la dernière période plaident sans ambiguïté la cause de la politique personnelle de la Reine. Ceux qui les précéderent, surtout les ballets exécutés avant que Christine ne fût déclarée majeure, reflètent aussi d'autres opinions répandues à la cour, et laissent transparaître en particulier le désir d'inciter la jeune Reine à se marier.') Gustafsson, 'Amor et Mars vaincus', p. 88.

would not marry under any circumstances. The 23-year-old Queen stated on that occasion that:

if it was possible for me to marry I would do so readily [...] I state it clearly that for me it is impossible to marry. So it is with this matter. The reasons for this I cannot say. But I am disinclined toward it. I have earnestly prayed to God that I would become inclined toward it, but this has not happened.³⁷

Christina's decision was allegorically rendered on stage through a praise of duty towards the country, a theme that runs as a thread throughout *Les Passions Victorieuses et Vaincues*. This libretto is the first one to give printed information on the interpreters of the dances, whose Swedish names are misspelled by the anonymous French author. The theme of *Les Passions Victorieuses et Vaincues* is outlined in the opening song, *récit*, which introduces the story of the Horatii and the Curiatii, inspired by Pierre Corneille's tragedy *Horace* (1640):³⁸

Complaint by the Sister of the Horatii.

For music.

Sacred destiny moderate your endeavour, I shall die either because of love or because of friendship. If my misfortune moves pity to cure the evil which constrains me, Alba will die together with my love, or Rome will be eclipsed along with my happy days.

The blood of the Curiatii must be shed to elevate Rome to the heights of Honour; Alba can attain happiness only through the death of the Illustrious Horatii. Love or Piety, which one among you will win? And whose victory will be sweeter to me?

Alba, for you I offer sacrifices; Rome, for you I present my wishes, you can only die in my fires. Who can thus alleviate my suffering? Only death can cure me, let us die then love, since you must die.³⁹

37 '[...] om det stodo i min förmågo at giffa migh, vill jagh thet gerna göra. [...] Jagh säger det uthryckeligen, at det är migh ömöjeliget att giffa migh. Således är migh denne saken beskaffat. Rationes härtill förtijger jagh. Men mitt sinne är dertill inthett. Jag hafver bedet flitigt till Gudh derom, at jagh mått få det sinnet, man jag hafver det aldrigh kunnat få', *Svenska riksrådets protokoll*, p. 349.

38 Corneille, *Horace, Tragedie*.

39 'Plainte De la Soeur des Horaces:/ *Par la Musique*./ Sacré destin modere ta poursuite/ Le vay mourir d'amour, ou d'amitié:/ Si mon malheur pour toucher la pitié/ Gueris le mal ou je me vois

Camille, the sister of the Horatii, is torn between love and honour, or better, between love towards her beloved and love towards her homeland. Camille finally assumes the necessity of her death, as the only solution to the destroying power of her passion. *Les Passions Victorieuses et Vaincues* is, essentially, a critique of the power of excessive passions. Three more passion-driven characters – Nimrod, Paris, and Mahomet – appear on stage in the next three scenes. Their actions are considered as devastating because they have, in order, confounded language by the construction of the Tower of Babel, endangered the Spartan empire because of the beautiful Helen, and challenged the Christian faith. The disorder represented by these three personages is counterbalanced by the appearance of three women from Antiquity known for their virtue: Zenobia, Pulcheria, and Lucretia.⁴⁰ These are interpreted by three of Christina's pages: Erik Appelgren (d. 1701), Wolter Stackelberg, and Abraham Göransson Pistolekors (d. 1699). It was a common practice in the ballets from Christina's time to let young pages play female characters. The virtue and sense of duty, which characterize the three women, are another example of that 'severe moral' of Corneille, which according to Gustafsson gives a 'certain coherence' to *Les Passions Victorieuses et Vaincues*.⁴¹ Women's pre-eminence in virtue over men is

reduite;/ Albe perit avecque mes amours./ Ou Rome Ecclypse avecque mes beaux jours.// Il faut verser le sang des Curiaces/ Pour eslever Rome au comble d'Honneur;/ Albe ne peut acquerir le bon'heur/ Que par la mort des Illustres Horaces;/ Amour, Pieté, lequel vaincra de vous,/ Et quel vainquer me sera le plus doux.// Albe, pour toy l'offre des sacrifices,/ Rome, pour toy je presente des voeux,/ Vous ne pouvez perir qu'avec mes feus,/ Qui pourra donc aleiger mes suplices?/ La seule mort à droit de me guerir,/ Mourons amour puisque tu doibts perir', *Les Passions Victorieuses et Vaincues*, f. 2.

40 Zenobia (241-after 274) was queen of Palmyra in the third century AD. She conquered Egypt and much of Asia Minor. After she had proclaimed her son emperor, she was defeated by the Roman emperor Aurelian. She was a patron of literature and created a court of intellectuals. Stoneman, 'Zenobia', pp. 274-75. Pulcheria (c.399-453) was the second child of Eastern Roman Emperor Arcadius and Empress Aelia Eudoxia. On the death of her father her brother Theodosius II became Emperor at the age of seven years. In 414 when she was aged fifteen she proclaimed herself regent over him. She took a vow of virginity and became Augusta. However, she married Marcian in 450. She died in 453 and was later beatified by the Catholic Church. *Enciclopedia dell'arte antica classica e orientale*, IV, p. 540. Lucretia (d. 510 BC) was a legendary Roman woman who took her life after being raped by the son of Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the proud). This led to the expulsion of the Tarquins from Rome during Lucius Junius Brutus's rebellion. Connors, 'Lucretia', p. 291.

41 '[...] severe moral of the tragedy of Corneille: love must surrender when confronted with duty towards country. It is necessary to win over passions, ruin of hearts, and especially of the well-born hearts; this is the common theme that gives a certain coherence to the scenes of the ballet in which appear thereafter some female roles renowned for their virtue and sense of duty: Zenobia, Pulcheria, and Lucretia' ('sévère morale de la tragédie de Corneille: l'amour doit céder devant le devoir envers la patrie. Il faut vaincre les passions, perdition des cœurs et surtout des

stated in these lines in which the formers' right to rule is also affirmed. The three women are praised for the exemplarity of their virtue. The third-century Syrian Queen Zenobia is described as: 'Miracle of virtue, mirror of chastity: Marvel of wisdom, excellent beauty, infinitely lovable, equally loved'.⁴² Virtue, chastity, and wisdom are qualities used to represent an ideal image of Christina in her court ballets. Two exempla stand out for their importance for the representation of the Queen: the goddess of chastity and hunting Diana and the goddess of wisdom Pallas Athena. The first goddess was particularly significant for the image of the Queen. In fact, the connection between Christina and Diana was unequivocally rendered in the performance of the above-mentioned *Le Vaincu de Diane* when she herself danced in the role of Diana.⁴³ The theme of sacrifice for the benefit of the state also recurs in the sixth scene in which Cicero appears on stage. The Roman statesman and orator appears on stage in the sixth *entrée* where he is praised for his sacrifice for the state, an act of generosity that survives his death and reaffirms the ideal of freedom:

Cicero.

[...] I preserved the freedom of the people whose hearts would win the world. My days were but a tissue of virtue, honour, and glory, and knowing that I was engendered by a King of pious memory I thought that I owed to Rome everything I had, and stopping a storm that threatened it with misfortune I died happily sacrificing my heart and my head.⁴⁴

'Virtue, honour, and glory' are the leading ideals of Cicero, whose defence of the Roman Republic against Caesar survives its fall and inspires Roman citizens long after his lifetime. The capacity of literature to preserve the memory of great men and their deeds is aimed at here. Death is sweet to Cicero who dies happily for his country. It is noteworthy that Svante Sparre

coeurs bien nés; tel est le thème commun qui donne une certaine cohérence aux scènes du ballet dans lesquelles apparaissent ensuite, notamment, des personnages féminins célèbres pour leur vertu et leur sens du devoir: Zénobie, Pulchérie et Lucrèce'), Gustafsson, 'Amor et Mars vaincus', p. 92.

42 'Miracle de vertu, miroir de chasteté:/ Merveille de sçavoir, excellente beauté,/ Amyable infiniment, également aymée', *Les Passions Victorieuses et Vaincues*, f. 6.

43 Grönstedt, *Svenska hoffester*, I, p. 53.

44 'Ciceron./[...] Je conservay la liberté/ Au peuple dont le coeur devoit vaincre le monde./ Mes jours ne furent qu'un tissu/ De vertu, d'honneur, & de gloire/ Et sachant que j'estois issu/ D'un Roy de pieuse memoire/ Je creus aussi que je devois/ A Rome tout ce que j'avois/ Et arrestant une tempeste/ Qui la menaçoit de malheur/ Je peris avec le bon'heur/ De luy sacrifier, & mon coeur & ma teste', *Les Passions Victorieuses et Vaincues*, f. 8.

(1623-1652), the successor of Bengt Skytte in the office of Lantmarskalk (Lord Marshal) in the Riksdag of 1649 and 1651, interpreted the role of Cicero. It was precisely during these two parliaments that the question of Christina's succession was resolved in her favour.⁴⁵ His role as the virtuous Cicero was probably a reward for his contribution in this delicate issue for Christina. The refusal of the passions is finally praised once again in the concluding *récit* through yet another reference to the ancient heroes. Their inability to reject the power of the passions is summarized in this song:

For music.

Stanzas.

The most false Tyrants of life: Venus, vanity, love, ambition, and jealousy sojourn on earth, and the heroes are busy ruining them with their contraries [to contrast them]

Cyrus, Alexander and Pompey, the Caesars and the Scipios, permitted these passions to easily enter their souls and saw them subjugated to these cruel enemies.

In this century two great Queens, [who reign] over minds and over our souls, entirely and always sovereigns, know of no winners. They make us see those dangerous enemies subjugated.⁴⁶

Many ancient heroes have fought against the tyranny of the passions, among which love takes a pre-eminent place, as it is referred to here by three of five words ('Venus', 'l'amour', 'la jalousie'). However, few have managed to overcome

45 Svante (Larsson) Sparre (1623-1652) studied at Uppsala University from 1636 and in Leiden in 1644 together with his brother Gustav. He was chamberlain at Christina's court between 1645 and 1647. He was the brother of Christina's favourite Ebba Sparre. In 1649 he was elected Lantmarskalk (Lord Marshal and speaker of the Riksdag), a position which was confirmed in 1650 and 1651. He was later elected governor of the county of Stockholm and Uppsala (1649-1652). *Svenskt biografiskt lexikon*, XXXII, p. 697, and *Nordisk familjebok*, XXVI, p. 575.

46 '*Pour la Musique./ Stanses./ Les plus faux Tyrans de la vie/ Venus, la vanité, l'amour,/ L'ambition, la jalousie/ Font dans le monde leur séjour,/ Et les Heros ont bien a faire/ A les ruiner par leur contraire// Cyrus, Alexandre, Pompée,/ Les Cesars, & les Scipions/ Permirent aisement l'entrée/ De leur ame, a ces passions,/ Et les virent assugeties/ A ces cruelles Ennemies./ En ce siecle, deux grandes Reynes/ De nos Esprits, & de nos coeurs,/ En tout & tousjours Souveraines,/ Ne connoissent point de vainqueurs:/ Et nous font voir assugeties/ Ces dangereuses Ennemies', *Les Passions Victorieuses et Vaincues*, f. 19-20.*

them. Christina and her mother Maria Eleonora are praised as being above the same passions, which they have managed to defeat. The two queens have succeeded where all other heroes have previously failed. They neglect their personal happiness for the higher good of the Kingdom and stand invincible above passion. The ideal image of Christina expressed in these lines is evident. She is here represented as a superior being completely devoted to reason. The praise of the two queens reminds us of the aim of court ballets in Sweden and elsewhere in early modern Europe, that is to defend monarchical power against the claims of the nobles and its importance in establishing absolutism.

Also, this last example from *Les Passions Victorieuses et Vaincues* reveals the main aims and goals of the introduction of court ballet in Sweden. This theatre form was introduced and developed during Christina's time both to refine the manners of the Swedish court and to represent an ideal image of the Queen as wise, virtuous, and raised above the passions. The complement to this image was that of her subjects as loyal and obedient to the Crown. Moreover, these performances seem to have furthered Christina's interests through the establishment of a network of favourites, which was to become instrumental in carrying out her political plans. For instance, the Queen rewarded the courtiers who stood closest to her with such appointments as that of Lord Marshal (Lantmarskalk), conferred first on Bengt Skytte and then on Svante Sparre. The noblemen who danced in the ballets, whose career paths I have discussed in this chapter, appear to be sufficiently homogeneous to permit us to draw some conclusions. First of all, the participants were often members of the noblest families of Sweden (Oxenstierna, Natt och Dag, De la Gardie, and Pfalz-Zweibrücken, etc.). These aristocrats were later employed in diplomatic missions, after which they were usually elected to the Council of the Realm. The presence of a considerable number of Christina's pages also reinforces this pattern by indicating that the dancers most often had close relations with the Queen. Consequently, court ballet stands out as Queen Christina's privileged medium to convey her political propaganda, both because of the themes treated in the ballets and the network of persons who interpreted these ideas on stage with their bodies. While *Le Monde Reioivi* [*Réjouï*] still conveyed the politics of the Regency Council, Christina seized the stage, literally and metaphorically, at the beginning of her sovereign rule to further her personal politics. The performance of *Les Passions Victorieuses et Vaincues*, with which she aimed at freeing herself from the necessity of providing an heir to the throne, reveals her use of this theatre form for propagandistic objectives. Finally, the praise of virtues such as self-control and chastity were aimed at representing Christina as a superior being completely devoted to reason.

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