

Worth and Repute:
Valuing Gender in Late Medieval
and Early Modern Europe
Essays in Honour of Barbara Todd

Edited by

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“PERFORMING” GENDER AND STATUS ON THE DANCE FLOOR IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

EMILY F. WINEROCK

Q. What most delighteth a Ladies eye in a Courtier?

A. Neat apparell, wise speech, to manage a Horse well, to dance well.¹

Dancing was a common, if controversial, component of social activities in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. People of all stations danced to celebrate life cycle events, such as baptism and marriage, and religious and secular holidays, such as Whitsuntide and May Day.² For elites, dance figured prominently in court masques, balls, and other entertainments. In medieval Europe, religious authorities had been the primary commentators on dance, but in the early modern period, an explosion of instructional manuals and how-to guides created a new forum for discussion. Dancing manuals and conduct guides addressed underlying anxieties about sexuality and order by defining and describing how to dance properly in accordance with one's gender and station.

At the same time, these sources created new problems. While both status and gender were, theoretically, static and predetermined in the early

¹ Breton, “Necessary Notes for a Courtier,” sigs. C2^v–C3^r. This list of questions and answers about courtly etiquette appended to Breton's dialogue *The Court and Country* (1618) is written in the same format as a modern-day FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) sheet.

² Dancing remained a component of life cycle festivals throughout this period, but dancing on Sundays and during religious festivals was strongly condemned by Puritans and other Protestant reformers who prosecuted dancers in the church courts for profanation of holy days. Royal sanction for festive dancing in the Book of Sports offered a brief reprieve under James I and Charles I, but attacks resumed as Charles I's power waned, and by the end of the seventeenth century, the tradition of marking Sundays and religious festivals with dancing had been almost entirely suppressed. See Hutton, *Rise and Fall of Merry England*; Forrest, *History of Morris Dancing*; Parker, *English Sabbath*.

modern world, didactic literature reveals that in practice, these aspects of identity were flexible and unstable. In theory, men innately danced in a vigorously masculine manner and women in a demurely feminine manner. In practice, men and women had to be taught, or at least be reminded of, what appropriately masculine and feminine movement entailed. Similarly, in theory, dancing was considered a natural, effortless form of movement that revealed aristocratic dancers' innate nobility and grace. In practice, elite dancers had to learn how to dance "naturally," executing steps skilfully but without obvious effort. To further complicate matters, some of the gender-based and status-based movement recommendations contradicted each other, and the instruction manuals designed to help nobles dance in the manner appropriate to their station could also be used by lower status individuals to approximate elite movement styles.

This study examines the recommendations for elite, gendered dancing found in early modern dancing manuals and conduct literature, sources that are simultaneously didactic and informed by common practices. These sources demonstrate that dance was an integral component of how elites asserted or "performed" gender, and indicate how and why dancers might alter their dance styling. The essay concludes with an analysis of these themes in an oft-cited poem, and suggests that the conceptions and negotiations of gender and status found in dance-related didactic literature may be representative of attitudes towards and concerns about gender and status in early modern society in general.



Dancing manuals are a critical source for understanding the dances of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Formats vary, but all the extant dancing manuals provide one or more of the following: step descriptions, set choreographies for different dance types, accompanying music, recommendations for performance, rules of ballroom etiquette, and defences or rationales for dancing based on Greco-Roman writings, biblical passages, and historical precedents. All the surviving manuals are directed towards aristocratic readers, with the exception of Thoinot Arbeau's *Orchésographie* (1589). *Orchésographie* includes members of professions such as the law among those who may benefit from its explanations, and the steps and choreographies it provides are simpler than those in other works. Although they are didactic

sources primarily delineating how people *ought* to dance, dancing manuals also provide glimpses of actual practices. Complaints and caveats indicate the ways in which dancers failed to live up to their instructors’ expectations. Such evidence of “improper” dancing is at least as interesting and useful as knowing what “proper” dancing entailed. In addition, the manuals’ detailed instructions enable modern-day, source-based reconstructions of early modern dances.³

Unfortunately, there are no surviving English dancing manuals for the period between the compilation of the Gresley manuscript (c. 1500) and the publication of John Playford’s *The English Dancing Master* (1651).⁴ However, there are several Continental European dancing manuals that provide choreographies and conduct rules for dances known in England. While it is certainly possible that the *canario* danced in Italy varied somewhat from the canary danced in England, there is substantial evidence that traveling dancing masters, ambassadors, and the households of royal brides spread courtly dance fashions across Europe. Indeed, several Continental dancing manuals have known English ties.⁵ For example, according to a 1605 inventory, Sir Thomas Bodley’s library contained a copy of an Italian dancing manual by Fabritio Caroso, *Il Ballarino* (1581), while French dancing master Barthélemy de Montagut wrote his dance treatise, “Louange de la Danse” (c. 1619), in England and dedicated the manuscript to his patron, George Villiers, the Marquis and future Duke of Buckingham and one of the most powerful men in the English court.⁶ If read cautiously, Continental dancing

³ Dance reconstructions serve a similar purpose too and suffer from many of the same difficulties as early music performances and “original practices” theatre projects. See, for example, Steigerwalt, “Performing Race.” *Il Ballarino: The Art of Renaissance Dance*, directed by dance historian Julia Sutton (VHS 1990, DVD 2009) is the best commercially available video recording of reconstructed Renaissance dances. There are also several excellent videos in the video archive of the Jerome Robbins Dance Division of The New York Public Library.

⁴ The Gresley Manuscript is a small book containing twenty-six choreographies and tunes, collated with Latin prayers and other unassociated materials by John Banys (c. 1500) in Derbyshire. *The English Dancing Master* (1651) was the first dancing manual of English dances to be published in England or Europe and includes step descriptions and music for each dance. John Playford, incidentally, was not a dancing master but a music publisher, and it is not clear whether he or an associate collected the dances.

⁵ For an excellent discussion of the relevance of Continental dancing manuals to English dance, see Ravelhofer, *Early Stuart Masque*, 16–20.

⁶ Ravelhofer, *Early Stuart Masque*, 50–51; Smith, “What Did Prince Henry Do,” 201; Montagut, *Louange de la danse*, 1, 63.

manuals can provide a reasonable approximation of the dance types, steps, and styles used in England.



Women, especially noblewomen, are noticeably present in dancing manuals; authors note differences in male and female dance styles, discuss gender-specific etiquette, and dedicate choreographies to particular noblewomen. This female presence is notable because in addition to being “at considerable remove from formal centers of learning and institutions for cultural definition,” and from centres of “royal, civic, and senatorial” political power, early modern women are often absent from, underrepresented in, or otherwise marginalized in the historical record.⁷ On the early modern dance floor, however, women are literally and figuratively as central and visible as men. As Jean-Paul Desaiève observes, “Along with riding [...] dance was the only form of body language that allowed a woman to express herself as an equal of, and in perfect symmetry with, a man.”⁸ Moreover, because dance manuals describe ideal feminine and masculine movement and because they comment on the interactions between female and male dancers, these sources can illuminate gender assumptions, expectations, and relations.

The dancing manual *Nobilità di dame* (1600) by the Italian dancing master Fabrizio Caroso is typical of the genre.⁹ In *Nobilità di dame*, Caroso includes sixteen notes on conduct for ladies and eight conduct notes for gentlemen. These notes give instructions on how to properly dance, bow, sit, and invite partners to dance, and supplement the descriptions of dance steps and complex choreographies that comprise the rest of the book (134–150). Caroso dedicates each of the forty-eight choreographies to an Italian noblewoman and, as in the case of “Alta Colonna” (“The Great Lady Colonna”) dedicated to Lady Arsilia Sforza Colonna, even names some of the dances in honour of dedicatees (222).¹⁰ Not only does Caroso’s manual demonstrate

⁷ Davis, *Women on the Margins*, 209–210.

⁸ Desaiève, “Ambiguities of Literature,” 291.

⁹ Caroso was closely associated with the Caetani of Sermoneta and the Orsini in Rome, and his dancing manuals were successful publications. *Nobilità di dame* was a revision of his first manual, *Il Ballarino* (1581), and there was a second printing of *Nobilità di dame* in 1605, plus a reissue as *Raccolta di varij balli* in 1630. See Caroso, *Nobilità di dame*, 14–15, 19.

¹⁰ See also Feves, “Fabritio Caroso’s Patronesses,” 49–70.

the centrality of women on the dance floor, but his step instructions and conduct notes also provide concrete details of what types of movement were considered masculine or feminine and under what circumstances. Caroso indicates that what constituted appropriately masculine movement depended on a male dancer's social status, while feminine movement expectations were less status dependent.¹¹

Caroso's conduct notes for women stress the dual concerns of gracefulness and modesty. For example, when dancing backwards, a woman must take care not to trip on her train or gown. Instead of lifting up her train, a woman should step back while “strutting a little and moving in a snakelike way with a slight swaying of her dress and the farthingale underneath it,” which accomplishes the same effect “much more gracefully” (144). In this note, Caroso emphasizes female gracefulness and defines smooth, serpentine movement as graceful. He also warns against immodesty, as it is possible when raising her dress that a woman may accidentally raise her petticoats as well as her outer skirts, “thus revealing such things as modesty will not permit me to mention!” (143) Likewise, a woman “should also remember not to raise her eyes too high while dancing, as some do, nor to turn her head hither and thither in order to look at this or that gentleman” (144). It is not enough that a woman be graceful in dancing; she must also preserve her reputation.

Yet modesty had its limitations. Caroso points out a logistical problem when, due to excessive modesty, “some new brides and other ladies cast their eyes so low that the gentlemen cannot tell which one of them has been invited [to dance], so that one rises to his feet rather than the other” (146). Most dances called for the man to invite the woman to dance, but there was a whole category of dances that required women to ask men to dance. This category included object or prop dances such as “Ballo del Fiore” (“Dance of the Flower”) in *Nobilità di dame* and “Candlestick Branle” in Arbeau's *Orchésographie* (281–283 and 161–163 respectively). In these dances, the leader of the dance chose a partner of the opposite sex, danced with that person, handed over the object, and then retired. The new possessor of the object would choose another partner, and the dance would continue in this pattern. Thus, every other repetition of the pattern required a woman to ask a man to be her partner. Although Caroso warns against a woman having

¹¹ Women's dancing was judged appropriately feminine if it was modest and chaste, regardless of the woman's social rank. In Arbeau's *Orchésographie*, which was aimed at a lower status audience, the main concern with women's dancing is also modesty.

a roving eye, he also acknowledges that certain aspects of a dance, such as asking a partner to dance, required eye contact between men and women to avoid confusion and embarrassment.

For men, Caroso also stresses grace, but he defines masculine grace in terms of agility, strength, and having control over the body and accoutrements. His instructions for the galliard include, “land agilely in this *cadence* [...] making it more graceful by separating your knees a little” and “do not hold [your right arm] down stiffly, for then you would appear to have fractured or burned your arm” (117). The *salto tondo*, or turning jump, requires jumping off both feet and then “raising your entire body as high as your strength will allow” in order to make “two complete turns before landing on the ground” in the same spot, and facing in the same direction (119). Jumping high enough to perform a double turn in the air requires a great deal of strength, while being able to land in a specific spot demands skilful control of the body’s momentum. Caroso also reminds men that they must manage their garments and accoutrements gracefully. He chastises those who wrap themselves in their capes “as if swaddled,” covering their swords and sword hilts so that “the swords are so obstructed that if they should be needed, they could not be [got at], thereby endangering their lives,” and he recommends securing one’s sword with the left hand when dancing the galliard and other athletic dances “so that it will not wave around wildly” (135–136). Wearing a sword might show one’s elite status (as only men of certain ranks were entitled to bear them), but a sword only highlighted gentility and masculinity if handled properly.

In addition to managing their swords, to preserve their reputations gentlemen also had to control their strength skilfully. This was particularly true when dancing the galliard. The galliard was the dance showpiece for men at court, offering plentiful opportunities to display strength and agility.¹² The basic galliard step consists of four kicks and a cadence, or closing step. The kicks and cadence could be augmented by caprioles or capers, which were jumps with multiple beats or quick switching of the feet in the air, or one could add turning jumps, spins, and other impressive embellishments.¹³ To come up with new galliard step variations and execute them smoothly and gracefully required a great deal of study and practice. There were even dancing manuals dedicated entirely to the galliard such as Lutio Compasso’s

¹² Sutton, “Galliard,” 106–111.

¹³ Caroso, *Nobilità di dame*, 116–127.

Ballo della gagliarda (1560), which is essentially a long list of *mutanze* or step variations “for gentlemen to devise their own improvisations.”¹⁴ The galliard could be danced as a male solo, as when the Duke of Buckingham, during the presentation of Ben Jonson’s masque *Pleasure Reconiled to Virtue* (1618), famously “saved a tedious performance by cutting a series of athletic capers.”¹⁵ Alternatively, the galliard could be danced by a male-female couple, either for the whole dance or as a section in a suite of dances.¹⁶

It was only when dancing solo that a gentleman was invited to display his pyrotechnics. However, even solo dancing carried restrictions. Excessively vigorous and skilful dancing made a gentleman look like a lower-status professional dancer or dance instructor instead of a naturally graceful dilettante, and some dancing instructors discouraged gentlemen from dancing the most ornate steps, although they would be the ones most likely to benefit from a dancer’s desire to learn complicated choreographies.¹⁷ Other dancing masters echoed Caroso’s recommendations. In “Louange de la Danse,” Barthélemy de Montagut recommends that noble dancers should dance “very simply and without affectation,” avoiding difficult, showy steps such as *fleurets* and *caprioles* or capers.¹⁸

Indeed, focusing on the differences in how men and women were supposed to dance can be misleading. In practice, even the most talented dancers would have downplayed or modified many of Caroso’s recommendations at times. This was because dancers had to adjust their performance style to accommodate different contexts. Whether dancing with a partner of the opposite gender in a duet, or with many dancers of the same gender in a court masque choreography, conformity among dancers trumped displays of individual skill. It was more important for a couple or group to dance in harmonious synchrony with each other and the music than for a man to show off his high, turning jumps or a woman her small, smooth steps. Rather, dancers had to find a “happy medium” when dancing

¹⁴ Daye, “Review of *Ballo della gagliarda*,” 89.

¹⁵ Ravelhofer, *Early Stuart Masque*, 69.

¹⁶ Sutton, “Galliard,” 107–108.

¹⁷ Montagut, *Louange de la danse*, 36.

¹⁸ Montagut, *Louange de la danse*, 10–12, 133. It is interesting that Montagut discourages ornate steps, as does George Villiers, to whom the manual is dedicated, and who was arguably the best dancer in England, and one of the few who could perform capers and multiple turns with ease.

together, even if that meant dancing in a way that was less than the epitome of ideal masculine or feminine movement. As the majority of choreographies in the early modern canon were for one or more male-female couples, this “medium” style would have been the general rule rather than the exception.

A breakdown of the choreographies in the most detailed and influential Italian and French dancing manuals confirms the predominance of male-female couple dances (see Table 15.1). While these dancing manuals vary somewhat in their choreographic configurations, dances for male-female couples dominate all the manuals: Fabritio Caroso’s *Nobilità di Dame* (1600) favours dances for one couple, Cesare Negri’s *Le Gratie d’amore* (1602) features dances for one or two couples, and Thoinot Arbeau’s *Orchésographie* (1589) mostly contains branles for any number of couples.¹⁹ The only dances in these manuals that are not for couples are solo galliard variations (as opposed to the duet galliards), several all-male sword dances, and two court masque choreographies for single-sex groups of men or women. All the other dances — almains, branles, corantos, galliards, pavans, voltas, and dance suites — are for men and women to dance together. In addition, in almost all of these choreographies, men and women performed the same steps; thus it was dance styling and performance that was gendered, not the dances themselves.



Conduct manuals can provide critical insight into historical dance practices and attitudes towards dancing, helping contextualize the recommendations and complaints of dancing masters. Many English works and English translations of Continental publications include dancing among the required skills for courtiers and the sanctioned recreations for students, while a few discourage it strongly.²⁰ Works that describe dancing as a requisite courtly art tend to follow in the footsteps of Baldassarre Castiglione’s *Il Libro del*

¹⁹ Although there are some references that refer to branles danced by single-sex groups, all of Arbeau’s choreographies are for groups of male-female couples; see Sutton, “Branle,” 522.

²⁰ Examples promoting dance include Roger Ascham’s *The Scholemaster* (1570), Richard Mulcaster’s *The Training Up of Children* (1581), and Nicholas Faret’s *Honneste homme* (1630), translated by Edward Grimstone as *The Honest Man: or, The Art to Please in Court* (1632). Examples condemning dance include Juan Luis Vives’s *De institutione feminae christianae* (1524), translated by Richard Hyrde as *A Very Fruteful and Pleasant Boke Callyd The*

cortegiano (1528), while those recommending dancing as a complement to scholastic pursuits often cite Sir Thomas Elyot’s *The Boke Named The Governour* (1531), and many English conduct manuals incorporate elements of both works in their discussion of dancing. Although *Il Libro del cortegiano* was a literary work that employed dialogue to present divergent views without a definite conclusion, sixteenth-century and later readers and publishers saw it as a guide to courtly conduct. Publishers added indices, marginal headings, and summaries of the qualities of the perfect courtier and lady, enabling readers to learn Castiglione’s “rules” without reading the whole text.²¹

Baldassarre Castiglione’s *Il Libro del cortegiano* (1528) was widely read in England in its original Italian as well as in Latin and English translations.²² Castiglione (1478–1529) was a noted courtier in his own day, as well as a writer, and his discourse on courtly interactions was “celebrated throughout Europe as a delightfully sophisticated analysis of elite manners and morals, which offered an excitingly expansive vision of what a Renaissance courtier could, and should, be.”²³ Sir Thomas Hoby (1530–66) published the first English translation of Castiglione’s work as *The Courtyer of Count Baldassarre Castilio* (1561). Hoby was himself a courtier and ambassador, and his high rank and family connections (William Cecil was his wife’s brother-in-law) ensured that his translation would be well-received.²⁴ Hoby retains the term “courtier” in the book’s title, but in the subtitle and throughout the work Hoby refers to “Gentlemen and Gentilwomen” at least as frequently as “courtiers.”²⁵ This translation choice indicates a subtle revising of Castiglione’s work, presumably to extend its relevance to the English gentry as well as the nobility. Hoby also anglicizes the names of the participants in the dialogues, which might have heightened its appeal to English readers by making the text seem less “foreign.” The popularity of Hoby’s translation both increased

Instruction of a Christen Women (1541), and Barnaby Rich’s *The Excellency of Good Women* (1614) and *My Ladies Looking Glasse* (1616).

²¹ Burke, *Fortunes of the Courtier*, 43–44.

²² See Burke, “The Courtier Translated,” in *Fortunes of the Courtier*, 56.

²³ Partridge, “Thomas Hoby’s English Translation of Castiglione’s *Book of the Courtier*,” 782.

²⁴ Priestland, “Russel [*née* Cooke], Elizabeth,” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition (henceforth *ODNB*).

²⁵ Castiglione, *The Courtyer*, title page.

the influence of Castiglione's work in England and enables us to consider *The Courtyer* as an early English work in its own right.²⁶

Castiglione contends that a gentleman should be able to dance well, and that this was best done by dancing with *sprezzatura*, or "contrived spontaneity," and *grazia*, or "grace."²⁷ As Sir Fridericke (Federico Fregoso) asserts in book two, a gentleman's dancing should be moderate and aesthetically pleasing, especially when dancing in public, "if he daunceth in the presence of many, and in a place full of people, he must (in my minde) keepe a certaine dignitie, tempered notwithstanding with a handsome and sightly sweetnesse of gestures" (sig. M3^r). Castiglione warns that even if a gentleman is particularly skilled in dancing, he should avoid spectacular moves, unless he is in private company, "for all he feeleth him selfe very nimble and to have time and measure at will, yet let him not enter into that swiftnesse of feet and doubled footinges" (sig. M3^r). These caveats mirror those of dancing masters Fabritio Caroso and Barthélemy de Montagut discussed previously. The exception to this rule is if a gentleman were disguised or masked, as "to be in a maske bringeth with it a certaine libertie and lycence," and exempts the wearer from needing to display the "certain Reckelesness" or nonchalance otherwise essential to graceful, gentlemanly conduct (sig. M3^r). In general, a gentleman should strive "to daunce well without over nimble footinges or to busie trickes," allowing his carriage and motions to "reveal" his nobility or gentility and strengthening his reputation as one who was effortlessly graceful, dignified, and accomplished (sig. Zz1^r).

English conduct manuals adopted and expanded on Castiglione's concern with gentlemen dancing in a status-appropriate manner. In *ΠΡΩΤΑΙΔΕΙΑ* or *the Institution of a Young Noble Man* (1607), James Cleland advises remembering one's rank, wearing nice clothes, and dancing well to make a good impression: "When you go to Daunce in anie Honourable companie, take heede that your qualitie, your Raiment, and your skil go al three together: if you faile in anie of those three, you wilbe derided."²⁸ There is little known about James Cleland other than that he was the tutor of Sir John Harington and that *Institution of a Young Noble Man* was republished under

²⁶ For this reason, I will cite from Hoby's translation rather than from more modern translations.

²⁷ Burke, *Fortunes of the Courtier*, 31, 52. Hoby translates *sprezzatura* as "reckelesness" in book 2.

²⁸ Quoted from Kelso, *Doctrine of the English Gentleman*, 160.

the title *The Scottish Academie, or Institution of a Young Noble-man* in 1611, and a second edition simply entitled *The Instruction of a Young Noble-Man* appeared in 1612.²⁹

Institution of a Young Noble Man addresses the education, responsibilities, and proper activities for young men of elite status and draws directly and indirectly on both Elyot and Castiglione.³⁰ Cleland recommends dance, strongly asserting that “I thinke it one of the best exercises that a Noble man can learne in his young years, and that fashioneth the bodie best” (225). However, the author warns that dance should be used in moderation, “for there is nothing so good, but if it be vsed with excesse wil become bad” (226). Indeed, one should not try to excel too much in dancing: “Imitate not so much the Masters Capers, as to have a good grace in the carriage of your bodie: this is the principal, and without the which al the rest is naught” (226). Grace does not require the spectacular leaps and capers of the professional dancer but can be displayed through posture and movement style. On the other hand, some proficiency is commendable. Cleland writes, “I praise not those Ordinarie Dauncers, who appeare to be druncke in their legs [...] in shaking alwaies their feet, singing continuallie, one–two–three: foure; & five” (226).³¹ A man should seek the golden mean between the novice dancer who must count the steps of the galliard aloud in order to keep his place, and the low status, if high capering, professional dancing master.

Dancing masters and conduct writers advocated grace through controlled strength as essential for male dancing and grace through modest movement as essential for female dancing, but it is difficult to measure the extent to which dancers heeded their recommendations, as dance instruction focused on learning by doing, a practice which generates few records.³² However, one occasionally catches glimpses of the concerns of those who studied dancing. Justin Pagitt, a lawyer of Middle Temple in the Inns of Court, kept a commonplace book, his *Liber miscellaneorum*, which contains the following instructions in an entry from 1633:

²⁹ Tenney, “Tacitus in the Politics of Early Stuart England,” 157.

³⁰ Kelso, *Doctrine of the English Gentleman*, 118, 160.

³¹ Counting the steps out loud or under the breath instead of listening to the music is a common bad habit of dancers. “One—two—three: foure; & five” refers to the galliard basic step, which has five steps for six beats of music; hence the “and” which denotes time in the air during the jump or caper that precedes landing for the fifth step.

³² Ravelhofer, *Early Stuart Masque*, 15.

De arte Saltandi [The Art of Dancing]

- I. ffollow y^r dauncing hard till you have gott a habit of dauncing neatly
2. Care not to daunce loftily, as to carry y^r body sweetly & smoothly away with a graceful comportment
3. In some places hanging steps are very gracefull & whill give you much ease & time to breath
4. Write the marks for the steps in every daunce under the notes of the tune, as the words are in songs.³³

These instructions may be notes that Pagitt wrote down after attending a dancing class, general observations on his own or others' movement, or the recommendations of a peer on how to improve his dancing.³⁴ Regardless, they show the concern with grace discussed above, and provide some hints as to what graceful male dancing entails. Pagitt writes that in general one should dance "smoothly" and avoid dancing "loftily," that is, with high jumps and kicks. He specifies hanging steps as both a practical trick to give the dancer an opportunity to pause and catch his breath and because of their graceful appearance.³⁵ He also stresses that dancing "neatly" is not easily done; it requires long practice and attention to the relationship of the steps and the music. Even if Pagitt never took his own advice, his instructions show that he shared Castiglione and Cleland's concern with graceful carriage and the seemingly effortless execution of steps.

Castiglione also discusses the attributes and responsibilities of the lady or gentlewoman of the court, although in much less detail than those of the male courtier. Regarding the perfect gentlewoman's physical activities,

³³ British Library, Harl. MS 1026, fol. 7^r, c. 1633–35; quoted in Walls, *Music in the English Courtly Masque*, 114.

³⁴ Dancing was a common feature of Inns of Court seasonal revels and masques presented to the monarch. Choreographies for a series of processional dances known as the measures, or old measures, have survived among the papers of Inns of Court associates, and while none contain music, historical dance reconstructors have been able to fit the described steps with music of the same name from other sources. See Payne, *Almain in Britain*; Wilson, "Dancing in the Inns of Court"; Wienpahl, *Music at the Inns of Court*.

³⁵ There is no step description in extant dancing manuals of hanging steps, but the term may refer to steps like the *trabucchetto*, or falling jump, where the dancer balances for a moment on one foot on relevé or tiptoe before descending; Caroso, *Nobilità di dame*, 113–114.

Lord Julian (Giuliano de’ Medici) says in book three that she should be “skilfull in daunsinge” (sig. Cc2^r). However, her dancing style should reflect “the soft mildnesse that we have said is comelie for her” (sig. Cc1^r) and express “a certain bashfulness, that may declare the noble shamefastnes that is contrarye to headinesse” (sig. Cc1^v). Indeed Lord Julian would prefer that the gentlewoman eschew more vigorous and energetic dance steps; “in daunsynge I would not see her use to[o] swift & violent trickes [...] that declare more counninge then sweetnesse.” (sig. Cc1^r). Overly boisterous dancing “doeth both cover and take away that sweete mildenes which setteth so furth everie deede that a woman doeth” (sig. Cc1^v).

At first, Castiglione may seem to be opposed to women dancing in any but the most mild and sedate manner, but the author sanctions a very different sort of dancing gentlewoman through an anecdote told by Count Lewis (Count Ludovico da Canossa). The Count tells of a gentlewoman who asked a man to dance with her at a public assembly. He refused on the grounds that “suche trifles” did not become his profession, which was to fight (sig. D1^r). She then observed, much to the amusement of those standing by, that:

seing you are not nowe at the warre nor in place to fight, I woulde thinke it beste for you to bee well besmered and set up in an armorie with other implementes of warre till time wer that you should be occupied, least you waxe more rustier then you are. (sig. D1^r)

With her conclusion that a man who is interested only in fighting should be put away in the armoury alongside other weapons until the next war, the gentlewoman clearly wins the argument. The anecdote thus encourages the reader to condone the gentlewoman’s playful, almost aggressive style of interaction. Her character might be “more counninge then sweetnesse,” but the story casts this cleverness as admirable. Finally, it is the gentlewoman who asks the man to dance in the first place, but this detail does not generate comment from Count Lewis nor surprise or condemnation from his listeners.³⁶ By considering Lord Julian’s recommendations for dancing alongside Count Lewis’s anecdote, one gains a more nuanced picture of the range of acceptable

³⁶ Choreographies such as “Ballo del fiore” by Caroso, described above, confirm that women asking men to dance was an established and uncontroversial practice in courtly circles.

dance practices for gentlewomen. Women could ask men to dance, and the high jumps and complex tricks that Lord Julian found offensive when danced by women were the same steps that Sir Fredericke discouraged gentleman from dancing in public. It was the excess effort required to successfully execute such steps, rather than the gender of the dancers, that made these steps unsuitable for gentlewomen and gentleman.

Sir Thomas Elyot's education and conduct manual, *The Boke Named The Governour* (1531), also describes the ideal properties of male and female movement, but Elyot goes further than Castiglione in his approbation of dancing by recommending it as a means to teach virtue.³⁷ Elyot (c. 1490–1546) was a humanist scholar, member of Parliament, clerk of the King's Council, and royal ambassador for Henry VIII.³⁸ *The Boke Named The Governour* is his best known work, and was dedicated to Henry VIII. Aimed at the guardians and parents of young men “destined to be members of the governing class,” it was well-received by a broad audience of educators, scholars, and students, going through eight editions in the sixteenth century, and influencing later education treatises.³⁹

In *The Boke Named The Governour*, Elyot proposes an educational program that includes physical training and arts as well as classical philosophy and history.⁴⁰ Elyot suggests dancing as a teaching tool in order that “children of gentill nature or disposition may be trayned in to the way of vertue with a pleasant facilitie” (fol. 83^v). Elyot pairs steps of the basse dance such as the bow and reprinse with virtues such as prudence and circumspection.⁴¹ He also looks to dancing to exemplify the proper characteristics of men and women.

First Elyot describes the ideal man and woman:

³⁷ See Bryson, “The Rhetoric of Status.”

³⁸ Lehmborg, “Elyot, Sir Thomas (c. 1490–1546),” *ODNB*.

³⁹ Lehmborg, “Elyot, Sir Thomas (c. 1490–1546),” *ODNB*.

⁴⁰ For a discussion of Elyot's influences, including Lucian, Plato, and Aristotle, see Major, “Moralization of the Dance in Elyot's *Governour*,” 27–36.

⁴¹ See Elyot, *Governour*, ch. 22 (“Howe daunsing may be an introduction unto the firste morall vertue called prudence”) and ch. 24 (“Of the fifthe braunch called circumspection shewed in reprinse”). Elyot explains the reprinse as a single step backwards, which embodies the mental action of looking back, which is central to engaging in circumspection; Elyot, *Governour*, fol. 85^v.

A man in his naturall perfection is fiers, hardy, stronge in opinion, covaitous of glorie, desirous of knowledge, appetiting by generation to brynge forthe his semblable. The good nature of a woman is to be milde, timerouse, tractable, benigne, of sure remembrance, and shamfast. (fols. 82^v–83^r.)

In this description, which focuses on traits pertaining to emotions, desires, and interpersonal interactions, what is most notable is the difference in degree or intensity in the characteristics that Elyot ascribes to men and women. A man’s personality should be bold and expressive; a woman’s mild and retiring. Elyot then explains that the manner in which men and women dance (or ought to dance) corresponds with and conveys these gendered traits:

And the meving of the man wolde be more vehement, of the woman more delicate, and with lasse advancing of the body, signifienge the courage and strenthe that oughte to be in a man, and the pleasant sobreness that shulde be in a woman. (fol. 83^r)

Elyot implies that by simply being male, a man’s dancing will automatically be more vigorous than a woman’s movement and thus demonstrate the masculine attributes of courage and strength. However, he recognises that this is an ideal (“the courage and strenthe that *oughte* to be in a man;” “the pleasant sobreness that *shulde* be in a woman” [my emphasis]), and so he offers specific instructions as to how to dance properly. Somewhat reluctantly, Elyot acknowledges that masculinity and femininity are not inherent but are rather performances that can be directed and influenced.

In *The Boke Named The Governour*, Elyot focuses on clarifying the gender-specific movement styles dancers were supposed to adopt. Later English conduct and education manuals marry this concern with those of Castiglione, turning to dancing as a means to display both gender and elite status. Richard Brathwaite discusses concerns and expectations for male and female dancing in his pair of conduct manuals, *The English Gentleman* (1630) and *The English Gentlewoman* (1631). The manuals, addressed to the English gentry “of selecter ranke and quality,” were well received in the author’s lifetime, with an expanded edition of *The English Gentleman* published in 1633

and both manuals reprinted together in a single volume in 1641.⁴² Richard Brathwaite (1587/8–1673) was a gentleman poet and writer who owned estates in Westmorland and Yorkshire, attended Oxford and Cambridge, and studied law briefly at Gray’s Inn in London.⁴³ At Oxford and Cambridge and at the Inns of Court, he would have had ample exposure to dancing, which was a prominent part of holiday revels and official ceremonies.⁴⁴ In *The English Gentleman*, he recommends dancing along with fencing as “especial Ornaments to grace and accomplish” for young gentlemen, especially those who “intend to *Court* or *Gallant* it” by seeking advancement at court (204). As for Castiglione and Cleland, it is graceful carriage and style that Brathwaite deems essential, not the execution of difficult steps. Gentlemen should dance “with a reserved grace” in order to “come off bravely and sprightly, rather than with an affected curiositie” (204). This is because a “gracefull presence” garners respect and commendation, but affectation leads to ridicule and scorn (205). Moreover, Brathwaite’s phrasing suggests that a gentleman should be able to simultaneously dance in a masculine style, “bravely” and “sprightly,” and gracefully, displaying subtle rather than overt skill, so as to avoid affectation. Both men and women attended revels, masques, and other dance-filled entertainments at court, so Brathwaite’s recommendations likely reflect the expectations of both male and female viewers as to how gentlemen ought to dance.

Whereas *The English Gentleman* cautiously encourages dancing for gentlemen, *The English Gentlewoman* strongly discourages dancing for gentlewomen. Brathwaite argues that even though “to lead a dance gracefully” may seem one of the “commendable qualities,” or at worst, a harmless diversion, dancing is actually one of the “wanton and immodest revels” descended from ancient “prophane feasts by Pagans” (76–77). Moreover, “in the opinion of the Learned,” Brathwaite writes, dancing was considered, “the Divels procession: Where the Dance is the Circle, whose centre is the Devil” (77). Although it is possible for a gentlewoman to dance modestly and with dignity, “to shew a kinde of majesty in a Dance,” the author argues that such superficial accomplishments pale in comparison to “the Complement of a Religious taske” (77). Those who are “so delighted in songs, pipes, and earthly

⁴² Sanders, “Brathwaite, Richard (1587/8–1673),” *ODNB*.

⁴³ Sanders, “Brathwaite, Richard (1587/8–1673),” *ODNB*.

⁴⁴ See Elliott et al., *Records of Early English Dance: Oxford*; Nelson, *Records of Early English Dance: Cambridge*; and Wienpahl, *Music at the Inns of Court*.

melody, shall in hell rore terribly and howle miserably” (77). Brathwaite’s anti-dance conclusion could not be clearer: gentlewomen who insist on participating in the fleeting pleasures of dancing will have all of eternity to regret their misplaced priorities.

Richard Brathwaite’s opposition to dancing was hardly novel, and *The English Gentlewoman* was only one of several conduct books for women that discouraged dancing.⁴⁵ What is noteworthy is that while Brathwaite strongly condemns dancing for the gentlewoman, he condones dancing for the gentleman. As *The English Gentlewoman* was only published a year later than *The English Gentlemen*, Braithwaite’s difference in attitudes towards dancing based on gender is unlikely to be the result of a change of opinion, especially since in 1641 the author oversaw the reissue of the two works bound in a single volume. Therefore, it seems safe to conclude that Brathwaite simultaneously approved of dancing for gentleman and disapproved of it for gentlewomen. As he gives no explanation for these conflicting views in the 1641 reissue, it appears either that he did not notice this contradiction or that he did not find it problematic. Nevertheless, Brathwaite’s views created a paradox. As previously noted, the vast majority of courtly dances were for one or more male-female couples. If gentlemen were allowed to dance, but gentlewomen were not, with whom were gentlemen supposed to dance?

Richard Brathwaite believed that even if dancing were useful, or at least harmless, for gentlemen, it led to the moral downfall of gentlewomen. There were proponents, however, of the opposite view that dancing encouraged virtuous thoughts and actions for both men and women. In *The Boke Named the Governour*, Elyot presents the male-female dancing couple as the logical symbol for conjugal harmony and happiness. As Skiles Howard has observed, “Elyot carefully promoted the dancing couple as an image of ideal marriage, with the ‘vehement’ movements of the man and the ‘delicate’ movements of the woman expressing the ‘sundry virtues’ of each partner and the perfection of their intercourse.”⁴⁶ Elyot argues that dancing represents marital concord because the gentleman and lady dance in step to the music together, “bothe observing one nombre and tyme in their m[o]vynges” (fol. 82^r). Yet, Elyot’s dancers performing their gendered movements present a logistical problem.

⁴⁵ There are more conduct manuals directed towards men than women, but an initial survey suggests that a higher percentage of the works aimed at women condemn dance, perhaps because works for women focus more on morality than gentility or civility.

⁴⁶ Howard, “Hands, Feet, and Bottoms,” 330.

If, as Elyot recommends, a gentleman were to dance at a “vehement” pace while holding hands with a female partner proceeding at a “delicate” pace with “less advancing of the body,” it would be difficult for the couple to stay together as they progressed around the floor.

Examining the structure of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century choreographies suggests a probable solution. It was common to have the opening and closing figures and intermediary choruses danced by the man and woman together, with several alternating men’s and women’s solos in between. Caroso’s “Passo e Mezzo,” for example, features an opening figure danced together, two sets of alternating solo variations for the gentleman and the lady, a circular figure danced jointly, two more sets of solo variations, and a coda “for both to do together” (177–179). Almost all of the dances in *Nobilità di Dame* follow a similar pattern. It is likely that these solos gave the gentleman the opportunity to show off his “masculine” grace with jumps, turns and large, “vehement” steps. Likewise the woman’s solo enabled her to demonstrate her “feminine” grace with smooth styling and small, “delicate” steps. During the rest of the dance, the man and woman could dance in tandem, as previously suggested, with steps smaller than in his solo, but larger than in hers. In this way, a dancing couple could embody Elyot’s harmonious concord by having their movements define a middle ground between the “extremities” of masculinity and femininity.

Interest in dance was not restricted to dancing manuals and conduct guides. Sir John Davies’ *Orchestra Or a Poeme of Dauncing* (1596) also stresses the importance of a dancing couple moving together in harmonious accord. Sir John Davies (1569–1626) was a poet, lawyer, and Parliament member, remembered as much for his legal and administrative activities in Ireland as for his poetry.⁴⁷ While it never received the acclaim of his *Nosce Teipsum* (c. 1594), *Orchestra* was sufficiently successful to receive a second printing in 1622.⁴⁸

In *Orchestra*, Davies uses dance as a model and metaphor for perfect relationships between men and women:

And every one doth daunce a severall part,
Yet all as one in measure doe agree,
Observing perfect uniformitie:

⁴⁷ Kelsey, “Davies, Sir John (bap. 1569, d. 1626),” *ODNB*.

⁴⁸ Krueger, “Sir John Davies,” 20.

All turne together, all together trace,
 And all together honor and embrace. (119–120, stanza 111)

In this passage, Davies emphasizes the similarity of men and women’s movements. The male and female dancers turn, step, bow, and embrace “all together.” While the dancers may perform different or “several” parts, all these parts fit together perfectly, “as one in measure,” to form the dance. Thus, Davies’ description of the dancers as being in “perfect uniformitie,” refers to movements that are complementary but not necessarily identical. Nevertheless, when dancing a pavan or another dance for couples, Davies emphasises that the man and woman must stay together, if only because they are holding hands:

For whether forth or back, or round he goe,
 As the man doth, so must the woman doe. (119–120, stanza 111)

These two lines are of particular interest to the dance historian because they indicate that the man leads the woman in the dance. Yet dancing manuals such as Caroso’s *Nobilità di Dame* and Montagut’s “Louange de la Danse” make no mention of men leading in couple dances.

One of the few choreographic references to leading in a dance is in “The Montarde Branle” in *Orchésographie* (1589), the dancing manual published by French canon Jehan Tabourot (1520–95) under the pseudonym Thoinot Arbeau.⁴⁹ *Orchésographie* provides step descriptions and choreographies with music for courtly dances like the galliard, but also includes instructions for simpler, more rustic dances such as branles. Although some of the dances described in *Orchésographie* were already out of fashion by the first printing, the dance manual was popular enough to be reprinted in 1596.

“The Montarde Branle” is a line dance for an even number of men and women. As Arbeau explains, one of the men leads, followed by the first woman, and so on, alternating by gender so that the last woman brings up the rear (167). The man leading the dance chooses the path that the rest of the dancers follow. This scenario could possibly fit Davies’ description of the woman having to follow the man’s lead, especially since the beginning of the dance requires holding hands. However, after he has led one playing of the music, the leader goes to the end of the line and the woman who has been

⁴⁹ Arbeau, *Orchésographie*, 1, 207.

in the second place becomes the new leader. The dance then repeats with the woman leading, then the next man, and so on until all the dancers, both men and women, have had a chance to lead the dance (167–169). Arbeau’s “Candlestick Branle” and Caroso’s “Ballo del Fiore,” described above, call for similar alternations of male and female leading, with the leader getting to choose his or her partner for the next section of the dance.⁵⁰ In these choreographies a man is always the first leader, so there is some nod to patriarchal hierarchy, but all the male and female leaders have all of the same privileges and responsibilities within the dance.⁵¹ This evidence suggests that Davies fabricated the seeming convention of having the man lead the woman throughout the dance, presumably to heighten the effect of his opposition of masculine strength and vehemence with feminine delicacy and modesty. Alternatively, Davies may simply be referring to logistics. When a couple was holding hands, as they did frequently in early modern dances, wherever the one dancer went, the other was bound to follow.



According to John Stanhope, a gentleman of the privy chamber, in 1589 Elizabeth I was accustomed to dance “six or seven galliards in a mornynge” for her daily exercise, and André de Maise, the French Ambassador, described the queen as “a mistress of the art, having learnt in the Italian manner to dance high.”⁵² As dancing “high” referred to a vigorous and athletic style that featured high kicks, turns in the air, and capers, these reports suggest that Elizabeth I openly danced in a “masculine” style. Dancing even one galliard requires a substantial amount of energy, so to dance half a dozen galliards highlights the queen’s physical strength and stamina, again characteristics associated with male rather than female dancing. The queen managed her image very carefully, so her overt usage of masculine dance styling must have been intentional. Perhaps she wanted to evoke memories of her father, as Henry VIII was a much lauded dancer in his youth, impressing ladies with

⁵⁰ Arbeau, *Orchésographie*, 161–163; Caroso, *Nobilità di dame*, 281–283.

⁵¹ Arbeau, *Orchésographie*, 161; Caroso, *Nobilità di dame*, 281–282.

⁵² Ravelhofer, “Dancing at the Court of Queen Elizabeth,” 109; Brissenden, *Shakespeare and the Dance*, 5.

“leaps like a stag.”⁵³ Perhaps, by dancing as vigorously as a man, she wished to suggest to observers that she could rule as vigorously as a man as well.

As Queen of England, Elizabeth I could ignore or defy gendered movement expectations more easily than could her subjects. Early modern didactic literature provides evidence of the significant social pressure exerted on gentlemen to balance displays of masculine strength with noble grace, and on gentlewomen to demonstrate grace and proficiency without compromising their modesty. At the same time, by dancing masked or in a private setting, early modern English gentlemen and gentlewomen were able to circumvent social expectations and restrictions. Dancing manuals and conduct guides indicate, if only through their authors’ complaints and qualifications, that not only were elite dancers adept at modifying their dancing styles to fit different contexts such as dancing solo or with a partner of the opposite gender, they also were able to shape their performances of gender and status by controlling their movements on and off the dance floor.

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⁵³ Ravelhofer, “Dancing at the Court of Queen Elizabeth,” 108.

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DANCE MANUAL CHOREOGRAPHIES
CLASSIFIED BY NUMBER AND GENDER OF DANCERS

Number & Gender of Dancers	Number of Choreographies with Configuration		
	<i>Nobilità di Dame</i>	<i>Le Gratie d'Amore</i>	<i>Orchésographie</i>
1 man	–	–	2
1 woman	–	–	–
Group of men	–	1 (4 men) , 1 (6 men)	1 (4 men)
Group of women	–	1 (6 women)	–
1 couple	42	19	6
2 couples	–	11	–
3 couples	4	1	1
3–6 couples	1	1	–
1 man, 2 women	1	–	–
2 men, 1 woman	–	2	–
Any number of couples	1	2	23
Ambiguous or multiple options	–	3	6
<i>Total choreographies</i>	49	43	39

Table 16.1. The statistics are drawn from Caroso, *Nobilità di Dame*; Negri, *Le Gratie d'Amore*; Arbeau, *Orchésographie*. Montague's *Louange de la Danse* describes many of the same dance types but does not give specific choreographies so is not included here. In the chart, "couple" denotes a male-female couple.