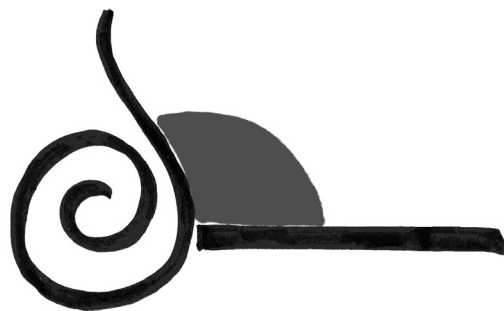


MORGENRÖTE DES BAROCK

Tanz im 17. Jahrhundert



1. Rothenfelder Tanzsymposion

9.-13. Juni 2004

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von

Uwe Schlottermüller und Maria Richter



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An Introduction to the Court Ballet Texts at the Time of Queen Christina of Sweden

With a Reading of *Ballet vom Lauff der Welt* (1642)

PETER BOHLIN

Introduction

Thirteen court ballet texts were printed during the regency and reign (1632-1654) of queen Christina of Sweden. In an often frustrating lack of supplementary material, the texts themselves give the best informations about the heyday of court ballet in Sweden. The attached list is no way near being definite, but it could perhaps serve as a first introduction to the field.

Five of the court ballets were intended for royal birthdays (*Le parnasse triomphant* was delayed), three were connected with noble weddings, one celebrated queen Christina's ascent to the throne, and one celebrated the end of the thirty years' war, in 1648. In four cases, I have doubts about the occasion.

It seems easier to suggest purposes of the court ballets. With the exception of *La Masquarade des Vaudevilles*, they all seem to have had a political purpose,¹ from the very first ballet, performed in 1638, when the queen was only 11 years old.

The ballets were performed only once, with one exception: *Le vaincu de Diane / Die Überwundene Liebe*, where queen Christina played the part of Diana, was given twice. The ballet was performed in november 1649, shortly after the queen's declaration for parliament that she would not marry. The role of the chaste Diana was, of course, perfect for the occasion.

Another role that would have been perfect for the queen was that of Pallas in *La Naissance de la Paix / Des Friedens Geburtstag*, but we don't know who participated in that ballet. A portrait engraving by the German engraver Michel Le Bion (born in Frankfurt a.M.) combines queen Christina's two favourite aspects of herself. There, she is depicted wearing a Minerva/Diana attribute, a helmet with a laurel. Two other Minerva attributes are an olive branch and an owl, sitting on three books, which shows the precedence of wisdom over learning. These attributes prove the queen to be victorious, peaceful and wise. The engraving's verses add that, being the daughter of the Jupiter of the North (Gustavus Adolphus), she is also the Pallas of the North. With this 1649 engraving – by combining portrait, character and lineage – Le Bion introduced the allegorical portrait in Sweden.

There is one more piece of evidence that queen Christina took part in a court ballet: In *Les liberalitez des dieux*, in 1652, gods of antiquity (Jupiter, Mars, Neptune,

Minerva/Diana, Apollo, Mercury, Victoria) and nymphs, graces, heroes, amazones and emperors (Hercules, Alexander, Caesar) arrive in Stockholm to honour the queen. The text actually reports that the queen took part in the Grand ballet! (These thirteen court ballets all end with a Grand ballet.)

Of course, queen Christina was always the centre of attention. Twelve of the printed texts report (or imply) on the title page the fact that the ballet was danced in her presence. The exception is the 1652 *Masquarade des Vaudeuilles*, about which there are very few facts.

There is generally much important information on the title pages. The word for the performing of the court ballet is nothing else but danced (11 of 13). The ballets were performed in Stockholm (8 of 13), and in the Royal castle of Stockholm (6 of 13). It is generally believed that, perhaps with an exception, they were all performed there, but there is no hard evidence. In six cases, the day of the performance is stated. The title pages stress that the ballets were »danced« (in past tense), implying that the texts were printed after the performance, but here problems start. Earlier historians seem to have wished to believe that the prints were handed out like program leaflets. There is however no hard evidence to support this idea. A fact is that the prints are very rare. In many cases they are known to exist in one copy only. This is the case with both the German and French version of the 1642 ballet.

Another problem concerns the use of the texts. Were they spoken or sung during a performance – or not used at all? Again, there is next to no evidence. And there are no ideas about the music actually used for performances. There is, though, a massive collection of music preserved from the time, in the »Düben Collection«, at the University of Uppsala, named after a German family that had a crucial importance in Swedish music life from 1620 well into the 18th century.

The dancing master behind the first court ballets was Antoine de Beaulieu, who arrived in Stockholm about 1637 and remained in Sweden until his death, about 1663. He married and had seven children. In 1650 he was promoted to the post of Royal steward / master of ceremonies. He was succeeded as dancing master by Jacques de Sonnes (whose name was also spelled des Ausnes, Desaunai and Desaunez).

Ballet vom Lauff der Welt

In 1642, the court ballet *Ballet Vom Lauff der Welt* was performed to celebrate a noble wedding. No exact date is stated, but the marriage ceremony was held November 30. The marrying couple was Markgraf Friedrich von Baden-Durlach, son to Friedrich V of Baden-Durlach, and Kristina Magdalena von Pfalz-Zweibrücken (1616-1660). She was sister to Karl Gustav (who was to be king of Sweden 1654-1660), and cousin to Queen Christina. Before the wedding, Markgraf Friedrich (1617-1677) had been a cavalry

colonel and fought with the Swedish forces during the thirty years' war. Later he had a brilliant military career: in 1655 he was appointed cavalry general, and in 1656 general field marshal of the Swedish troops. In 1659 he succeeded his father, Friedrich V, as Markgraf Friedrich VI of Baden-Durlach. The couple had a son, who succeeded his father as Markgraf Friedrich VII of Baden-Durlach.

It is known that Friedrich was in Sweden in 1642, that he married there, and that the ballet was performed in the presence of Queen Christina. The text was printed in Stockholm, and it is reasonable to believe that the ballet was danced in Stockholm. It is assumed that the dancing master was de Beaulieu, rather from the fact that no other dancing master is known in Sweden at the time. There is, however, no hard evidence. Participants are not known.

As the other 13 court ballets, this is a »ballet à entrées«, with the following scenes. [For reference I have added numbers; original orthography has been retained.]

1. Der sichtbare Geist – L'esprit visible
2. Die Amazoner – Les Amazones
3. Die Alte Verliebte – Les vieillardz amoureux
4. Die Zaubersche – La Magicienne
5. Die Alten verjunget – Les vieillarde raieunis
6. Die Italiener welche da spielen auff die Chitarra – Les Italiens iouans de la guitarre
7. Jason überwindet das güldene Fließ – Jason conquestant la toison dor
8. Die glucksehlige Zeit – Le tempz heureux
9. Die fünff Lands-Völcker – Les cinq nations
 - Der Schwed – Le Suedois
 - Der Frantzois – Le Francois
 - Der Engelschman – L'Anglois
 - Der Spaniardt – L'e Spagnol
 - Der Schweitzer – Le Suisse
10. Die Götter wiedergebende den Fünff Lands-Völckern das Leben – Les deitez redonnans la vie aux cinq nations mortes
11. Der Käyserliche / welcher lest sich durch eine Zatersche guth Glück sagen / dannen er wird verliebt – L'Imperialiste se faisant dire sa bonne aduantage par une egiptienne dont il est amoureux
12. Die alte Tatersche schneident den Beutel von den Keiserlichen – La vielle Egiptienne coupant la bource a l'imperialiste
13. Welche die Oblaten verkauffen – Les oublieux
14. Die Alchimisten – Les Alquimistes
15. Das grosse *Ballet* – Le Grand Balet an die Königl: May:tt – A la Reyne
- (16) An die hohe Fürstl. Eheleute – Au Prince, & a la Princessemariez
- (17) An das Frauen-Zimmer – Aux dames

A Reading of the Ballet

A few entrées were independent ones (i.e. entrance and exit). Some were, I think, linked together. Here follow my suggestions.

The ballet opens with a water spirit (»Wasser-Geist«), perhaps a little surprisingly. It declares that it has the power to free humans from death. In another independent scene, amazons confess that they are subject to the laws of Amor (»Liebe«). Quickly, the main elements have been introduced: death, immortality, love – and magic water.

Then follows the first set of combined scenes 3-6. Old men deplore their fate, and say to the ladies they love:

Ihr mercken solt / auß besten Brunnen / Das beste Wasser holet man.
[You shall discover, that in the oldest wells, the best water is to be found].

A sorceress enters, waves her magic wand, adding: »By this well goes the road to immortality« – and the old men are rejuvenated. This set of scenes comes to an end in scene 6, where Italians, playing chitarra, encourage the old men to let their sorrows fly, and instead to tread a happy dance to the music. In this set, the elements from the beginning are slightly varied: old age, love, magic water, new youth. Happiness and music are added.

Scene 7, with Jason, seems to be independent. The next scene, »Die glucksehlige Zeit« (»The blessed age«) is an invocation of Amor, and it could well serve as an introduction to the next set of scenes. Brave soldiers from five countries introduce themselves, and they seem to die on stage, even if there is nothing in the actual texts to suggest that. In the following scene 10, however, the gods enter to give the soldiers their lives back. The gods are unspecified, and there is no indication in the text on the way in which the soldiers are revived. I imagine, after the opening scene that water was somehow involved. If so, we have the same elements again: death, resurrection and magic water. Another set of scenes 11-12 starts with a representation of the Emperor (since 1637 Ferdinand III). The representative deplores his sorry state, appeals to the god of love, asks the advice of a fortune-teller – and falls in love with her. But she fools him and steals his money, cutting off his purse. In this set we have something quite different. I imagine that this was a highly amusing set at the Swedish court, ridiculing the enemy of the war. With the words »schneident den Beutel von den Keiserlichen« (»cutting of the purse«) the text gives one of the few indications in this ballet of practical action, probably with the help of a knife. At the same time, that action could have given an opportunity for laughter of a much more vulgar kind. The two following scenes are closely associated. The first one ridicules the catholic custom of selling consecration wafers (»Welche die Oblaten verkauffen«). This was probably supposed to be a highly amusing scene in a protestant society. Scene 14 ridicules alchemists, who see their vain hopes of quick fortune being crushed.

The finishing Grand ballet is divided into three parts, with texts wishing prosperity for queen Christina, the married couple and the ladies present. In short: here we have a libretto full of life, death and resurrection, with several opportunities for different kinds of laughter. Then there is the magic water. The best I can make out of that, which would perhaps be appropriate for a wedding celebration, is that it is a symbol for man's holy fluid which eternally makes new life grow. But perhaps that says more about my imagination than I would have wished. At least it is a suggestion.

Concluding remarks

These thirteen ballet texts were printed in French (all of them), four of them also in German and five in Swedish. Four French authors are known: Le Sr de Monthuchet, Hélié Poirier, René Descartes (for *Naissance de la Paix*, but that is disputed) and Urbain Chevreau. Only one author of a German version is known: Johann Freinsheimius, for *Des Friedens Geburtstag*. He was one of the learned Europeans that queen Christina managed to attract to Sweden. In 1642 he was appointed professor at the university of Uppsala, and in 1647 librarian to the queen and Royal historiographer.

It is generally assumed that the French versions are the original ones. In this case, already the title pages make one wish to dispute that. The German one is most carefully designed, with eight different sizes and fonts. Compared to that, the French version looks very flat – there are not even any indications of printer, place of printing or year of publication. But that is a subject which would need much more time and space.

Note

- 1 The matter of political purposes is discussed in GUSTAFSSON, LARS: *Amor et Mars vaincus; Allégorie politique des ballets de cour de l'époque de la Reine Christine*. In: Queen Christina of Sweden: Documents and studies. Ed. Magnus von Platen. Stockholm 1966, pp. 87-99.