

Edward Nye (editor). *Sur quel pied danser? Danse et littérature. Actes du colloque organisé par Hélène Stafford, Michael Freeman et Edward Nye en avril 2003 à Lincoln College, Oxford*. Rodopi BV, Amsterdam/New York, 2005. ISBN 90-420-1608-6. 330 pp. EUR 66 / \$83.

This conference, held at Lincoln College Oxford in 2005, looked at the relationship between dance and literature. The proceedings are edited by Edward Nye, who in addition to being one of the organisers is the author of two of the papers in this collection. He is also known to some in early dance through his presentations at New College's annual Oxford Dance Symposium.

Nye's preface explains that the sub-title 'danse et littérature' is intended to reflect the variety of links between the two arts, including no link at all, and to fill a gap since there are very few recent studies in this area. The volume is aimed at both academic researchers and the general reader with an interest in the topic. Nye draws attention to the inclusion of dance demonstrations at the conference, although not all could be represented among the published papers.

The topics of the papers range in period from the 15th to the 20th century and are as diverse as allegory and fiction in relation to 17th-century ballet, the changing tastes in dance performances round 1900 as viewed through Alfred Jarry's novel *Messaline* published that year and energy in post-modern dance as seen through the writings of Laban and Lacan. This was a bilingual conference and the papers are in French or English. The abstracts are given in the same language as the papers they summarise, which may be appropriate but is not helpful to those readers whose language skills have limitations. Quotations are not generally provided with translations, which is a pity for those of us who cannot cope with some of the less familiar sources (for example early French poetry). Most of the authors will be unknown to early dance practitioners and researchers, and it seems likely that many will be unfamiliar beyond their own specialist parts of the academic world. It is a shame, therefore, that there are no brief biographies to tell us who they are. There are footnotes but no bibliographies for each paper, and the volume as a whole lacks an index. These

omissions are regrettable, but understandable in that it must have been difficult to find a publisher for such a specialised book and costs would have had to be kept to a minimum.

The papers are organised in chronological order of their topic, and only the first seven are concerned with dancing before 1800. They cover, in turn, the 15th-century danse macabre, conflicting attitudes to dance in the 16th century, the integration of dance and action within *the commedia dell'arte*, mutual influences between burlesque ballets and novels in the early 17th century, the concept of 'grace' in dance and in poetry in the early 18th century (two papers) and an exploration of the notion of 'caractère' in dance and literature at the same period. All the papers focus on literary works, performances and developments in France. Four are in English and three (the third, fourth and last listed above) are in French. With the exception of Jennifer Thorp's paper, which examines the notion of 'grace' in dance treatises and surviving choreographies, none concern themselves with actual dancing. Indeed, most of them entirely overlook and seem to be completely unaware of the published work of specialist early dance researchers and practitioners.

This is an interesting but slightly worrying book. Most of the early dance papers are well worth reading, yet they mark an increasing trend towards wider academic interest in the history of dance without an accompanying understanding of the physical reality of historical forms of dancing. Most of these writers will never have encountered early dance in practice – some of them may have attended few dance performances if any, even if they participate in social dancing. The papers underline the marginal place of early dance within academic research and the near-total absence of historical dance from stage performances including baroque opera. Sadly, the early dance world seems to be making little headway with either problem.

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