

In the end, does this book really help us understand popular culture? Rather than attempting to escape the problems posed by normative, elite texts, as a growing number of historians of popular culture are doing, Chartier continues to wrestle with the same texts, trying to make them yield more information. The assertion that popular culture can be gauged through various literary, and usually elite, artifacts that were offered to the populace is a traditional one. But it has rested on several large assumptions: not only must we “postulate the existence of people such as these...[who]...read posters, broadsides, canards, and chapbooks” (343), we must also assume some kind of predictable response to what they read. Chartier’s achievement lies both in persuading us that the first assumption is plausible and avoiding many of the excesses of the second.

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Judith Chazin-Bennahum — *Dance in the Shadow of the Guillotine*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988. Pp. xxxiii, 209.

Though actors, directors and playwrights were executed during the Terror, the author of this study found “not one mention of a dancer having been killed during the Revolution” (191). The fortune of dancers in France was in shattering contrast to the fate of dancers in Cambodia in the present generation. In the mid-1970s, the Khmer Rouge “killed ninety percent of the dancers in Cambodia and destroyed all the literature on dance” (*Dance Magazine*, October 1990, p. 50). The troupe of Cambodian classical dancers is kept afloat by the memories of a handful of survivors, a sobering reminder of the fragility of source material for the history and art of dance. Fortunately, the book under review is grounded in numerous sources, ably researched and presented with verve.

One of the distinct merits of Professor Chazin-Bennahum’s evocative work is that it transports, indeed propels the reader into the midst of outdoor festivals and indoor theatres in revolutionary Paris. Some spectacles depicted events in the new patriotic calendar and were themselves tantamount to political events. The choral dance drama *La Réunion du Dix Août*, for example, began as an outdoor extravaganza and proved so popular that it was later transferred to the stage of the Opéra. Choreographed by Pierre Gardel with costumes and sets by Jacques-Louis David, it was first shown at the Opéra on the very day that Desmoulins and Danton were executed, 5 April 1794. Crowds filled the stage, scenes changed from the Bastille to the march on Versailles — with women seated on cannon carriages — to the Place de la Révolution. After songs predicting the conquest of tyranny and the unshackling of the enslaved peoples of Europe, “the heroines then do a ballet, that, as we might imagine, is ferocious and triumphant.” At the end of the second act,

a group of blind people, orphans, nurses, and artisans sing out: ‘Do not worry, children, your parents are the nation, the Republic is your mother, you will bless the day of the Revolution...’ (114)

Or consider the striking staging of *La Fête Américaine*, first performed at the Opéra-Comique on 24 August 1794:

In the opening scene, a magnificent alley of trees was displayed. In their midst stood a coconut palm hung with garlands of oak leaves and tricoloured ribbons, the latter fastened to the points of pikes carried by two rows of volunteers who were gathered about an altar to the *patrie*. In the foreground stood a representative of the American people carrying a scale with two children, one black and one white, balanced on it, indicating that no racial distinctions existed in that happy land (120).

One newspaper referred to this work as “a patriotic dream ballet” and that phrase might well be applied to many of the other ballets described by the author.

Her book began as a doctoral dissertation on the *livrets* (printed scenarios) of French ballets and pantomimes in the period from 1787-1801. During that time span, she argues, “ballet changed its look and quality more dramatically and more notably than perhaps at any other time in its history” (166). Part of the change was owing to the example and inspiration of actors and dramatic theorists in the late-eighteenth century who insisted that human passions be given a lifelike representation on the stage. The famous English actor David Garrick was influential here as was the dancer and choreographer Jean-Georges Noverre, who worked with Garrick in London and learned much about acting technique from him. In this connection, the interested reader will consult with profit an article by Chazin-Bennahum in which she has more leeway to develop some of the background information presented in her work: “Cahusac, Diderot, and Noverre: Three Revolutionary French Writers on Eighteenth-Century Dance”, *Theatre Journal*, 35, no. 2 (May 1983), 169-178. There, she noted that Diderot’s dramatic works contained “a unique fermenting element” that markedly influenced the work of ballet masters such as Noverre, Dauberval, Didelot and Gardel (172-173 in article).

Ballet was further influenced by boulevard theatres, comic operas, and pantomime in the adoption of a new use of gesture to depict character. A dancer’s training came to comprise the use of expression, including expressive pantomime, as well as movement technique (166-167). Also important were the changes brought about in costumes in a relatively short time. Heeled shoes gave way to sandals. Movements became still more natural “as a result of the new soft slipper and more flexible clothing — looser corsets and lighter, freer-flowing material. The elimination of wigs and leather masks brought the head and face into a clear focus, allowing facial expressions and emotive pantomime” (xxiv). These experiments and precedents in dance during the revolutionary era naturally exerted a formative influence on the development of ballet during the nineteenth century.

Despite the limited space at her disposal, Chazin-Bennahum effectively compresses a cornucopia of material into a coherent, balanced narrative. She groups her selected ballets into three categories: those based on classical mythology; ones evoking “Revolutionary Spirit”, with heavy reliance on choral processions and movement positioning; and those which explore “middle-class themes from pastoral drama, traditional comedy, and exotic settings...[thus showing] the development in the approach of ballet to myth, revolutionary spectacle, and bourgeois drama” (xxv). There were well-chosen quotations from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts, an excellent variety of illustrations, and an array of telling anecdotes scattered throughout the notes.

The most engaging feature of the book is the author’s enthusiasm for her subject. This is especially evident in her description of the plot and action of Pierre

Gardel's *La Dansomanie, Folie Pantomime*. The succession of scenes in this immensely popular ballet, first performed in 1800, are presented with delight and amusement (155-158). Here as elsewhere, Chazin-Bennahum's approach is that of a dancer — during her professional career, she was principal soloist with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet Company — as well as that of an historian. Indeed, after reading about *Dansomanie*, it is virtually inconceivable that a reader would not wish to experience this ballet in the theatre. Its choreographer, Pierre Gardel, deserves special mention for still another talent, the art of survival. Gardel reigned as *maître de ballet* of the Opéra from 1787 until 1820. As a survivor, he might well join the ranks of Barère and Talleyrand.

The overlap between political, social and cultural history in this study of dance at the time of the French Revolution makes it a natural resource for those teaching courses on the period. Inevitably, one is led to think of other works which serve to complement the study under review. One book which springs to mind is Robert M. Isherwood's *Farce and Fantasy: Popular Entertainment in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). This fascinating study is not referred to by Chazin-Bennahum, perhaps because it appeared too close to the deadline for submission of her manuscript to the press. Yet Isherwood's book nicely complements her own, as in his discussion of Charles Favart's *La Chercheuse d'Esprit*, a comic opera created in 1741. It was later transformed by Maximilien Gardel into a ballet-pantomime in 1777, revived during the revolutionary era, and is one of the ballets discussed in *Dance in the Shadow of the Guillotine* (137-139).

Interestingly, only one ballet created during the revolutionary era remains in the international repertory, Dauberval's *La Fille Mal Gardée*, first performed in Bordeaux on 1 July 1789. And as Chazin-Bennahum reminds us, the original choreography is not known (4). The most evanescent of the arts has been well served in this stimulating analysis of a watershed period in the history of dance. It includes a choice bibliography and serviceable index. Highly recommended for university libraries.

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Lyle Dick — *Farmers "Making Good". The Development of Abernethy District, Saskatchewan, 1880-1920*. National Historic Parks and Sites, Canadian Parks Service, Environment Canada, 1989. Pp. 259.

*Farmers "Making Good"*, the author informs us in the preface, was written in support of the interpretive and restoration program at the W.R. Motherwell Homestead National Historic Park near Abernethy, Saskatchewan. Lyle Dick's specific assignment was to provide a basis for understanding Motherwell as a representative of Anglo-Canadian settlement on the prairies and as an agrarian activist. Dick does this by studying the socio-economic structures of Abernethy district while also assessing "how people behave, interact and conduct their daily affairs" (10). In the process, he revises his employer's initial assessment of Motherwell as a "typical prairie settler" (200).