

Frederick Gerald Naerebout

Another battle fought and lost.

Seventeenth century Dutch *predikanten* and the dance

Dutch Protestant attitudes towards the dance are an interesting, but little studied part of seventeenth-century cultural history. Research into this subject and its ramifications might contribute something to the present debate on the supposed “civilizing offensive” in early modern Europe.

The dance was condemned by the Synod of Dort in 1578 and by many subsequent synods. The so-called “precise” ministers published a large number of polemical works which fit into the long tradition of Christian anti-dance movements. These ministers also took action, disciplining members of the church and admonishing the civic authorities to ban the dance completely.

The precise never met with much enthusiasm, indeed, the dance, whether theatrical or social dancing, flourished in seventeenth-century Dutch society. Towards the end of the century the church gave in: despite the precise’s vociferation the battle was lost.

1. Introduction

Protestant ministers and their attitude towards the dance have been the subject of a number of studies (Clive 1961; Scholes 1969, pp. 58-80), but none of these is concerned with the seventeenth-century Dutch situation. Indeed, I am not aware of the existence of any publication dealing with this matter in sufficient detail (1). The Dutch sources are not, however, without interest: firstly, our view of the long history of Christian anti-dance movements must remain incomplete when we do not take into account this abundant, varied and influential seventeenth-century source material, which deserves a wider international audience than those few who have mastered (archaic) Dutch (2). Secondly, new arguments might be introduced into the ongoing debate on the Protestant, especially Calvinist or Puritan, stance towards the whole complex of theatre, music, dance, popular festivities, and so on. Thirdly, some light might be thrown upon the history of the dance during the Dutch “Golden Century”. Obviously it is a pity that everybody has focused on to the neglect of all other arts: it is about time we tried to redress the balance. Fourthly, the complicated interplay between lay scholarship concerning the dances of classical Antiquity, religious tract writing and the development of theatrical dancing can be demonstrated very well from the Dutch example (3).

2. Some preliminaries

Of course I cannot here provide anything like a reasonably full sketch of the political, social and religious background to my story, but a few general indications might be helpful (4). Early in the seventeenth century the process of separation between the Catholic Southern and Protestant Northern Netherlands had progressed far enough to have become irreversible. The Northern provinces formed the Republic of the United Netherlands; this Republic was ruled

by an oligarchy, based on the town councils in the sea provinces, while other arrangements existed in the land provinces. Members of this oligarchy manned the States, the governing body of the provinces, which were sovereign regions. Foreign policy, defence and supra-provincial taxation were dealt with by the States-General, meeting in The Hague. We cannot speak of a truly federal arrangement, for the provinces remained autonomous: decisions taken by the States-General had to be unanimous. Local particularism did not stop the Republic from functioning, as one might expect, because of the preponderance, economic, demographic and political, of the province of Holland, especially of the town of Amsterdam, after the demise of Antwerp, the most important port in Europe. The position of the princes of the House of Orange was something of an anomaly: they officiated as Stadtholder in most provinces, and commanded the army and fleet, formally mere servants of several States and of the States-General. But of course their prestige, wealth and personal abilities could, and did, make their position an influential one.

The Northern Netherlands were an officially Protestant nation, but although during the seventeenth century the number of adherents to the Calvinist faith grew steadily, orthodox Calvinists remained a minority. Their religion was never made into a state religion, and they had to share Dutch society with Dissenters, Catholics, Jews, and nondescripts. Not even the ruling oligarchy was predominantly Calvinist. Nevertheless, Calvinism set its seal on the Netherlands. This was largely the work of the more outspoken among the Dutch ministers and their disciples, partakers in a broad seventeenth-century pietist movement, which also included the English Puritans. In assessing the influence of these zealots, called *preciezen*, “precisians”, we should never lose sight of the fact that they did *not* stand apart from the mainstream orthodoxy of this period: seventeenth-century orthodox Calvinism in the Netherlands, as elsewhere, was very pluriform (5). The *preciezen* strove after a society ruled by Christian faith and purity, a theocracy, an unrealisable ideal in a country led by Erastian regents who usually advocated tolerance. A key word here is *pietas*; to bring about this true piety a “further reformation” was preached to continue and complete the work of the first reformation. Typical of the precisian approach is the great value attached to *theologia practica*, which includes ethics, ascetism, and *politica ecclesiastica*. The most famous advocate of this *theologia practica* was Gisbertus Voetius (Groot 1982; Duker 1897-1915), who took a very legalistic view of *pietas*; *this pietas voetiana* is often called *praecisitas*, precisians’ piety par excellence. It is with these precisians that we will mainly occupy ourselves: where I speak of *predikanten* the group of “precise” ministers within the Dutch Reformed Church are meant, unless indicated otherwise.

A final word about Dutch church organisation: every parish was governed by a *kerkeraad*, a consistory consisting of the *predikant*, deacons and elders. Consistories situated in the same region sent delegates to the *classis*, comparable to the Scottish presbytery. At a higher level again we find so-called “particular” synods, that is synods attended by delegates from a number of *classes* in a certain area (usually, but not always, a province). There was no permanent centralized church government, but the church governance provided for general (national) synods. No general synod was held after 1619, however.

3. The Dutch Reformed Church and the dance

Dancing was condemned by the Synod of Dort in 1578 in the following terms: dances are attended with a fickleness and vanity not becoming Christians: tempt to carnal lusts and grieve and scandalize the godly; members of the church found dancers have to be admonished and those who persevere in their misbehaviour will be excluded from communion (Rutgers ed. 1889, p. 273). The tone was set, and subsequent synods, national and particular,

denounced the dance again and again, acting on *gravamina* submitted by the precisians' faction. Only a few fragments of these texts can be offered here in illustration:

Gouda 1589: profanation of the Sabbath causes the Synod to address a remonstrance to the States, mentioning "a sad example, which recently occurred during the *kermis* in Nootdorp, of a man who dropped stone dead in the dance house and of two others who got very ill, and might die as well" (Reitsma & Van Veen, eds. 1892-1898, vol. 2, p. 347)

Franeker 1602: "parents who do not do their very best to ensure that their children are modestly dressed and under Christian discipline and do not attend any dancing schools or singing parties or other indecent gatherings, will have to be reprimanded and censured ... in the same way should be dealt with heads of households as far as the behaviour of their servants of both sexes is concerned" (Reitsma & Van Veen, eds. 1892-1898, vol. 6, p. 128)

Gouda 1640: "in our nation several worldly vanities are being brought much into vogue, signs of vain, carnal hearts, occasions, causes, mothers and nurses of heinous sins, enticing the weak, namely dances, ballets, scandalous misuse of God's bounty in excessive meals or banquets, loose hair of men and women, masquerades, comedies and tragedies, indecent dress, offensive uncovering of the body, etcetera" (Knuttel ed. 1908-1916), vol. 2, p. 269)

Brill 1643: a long list of the corruptive influences of "the old licence and wickedness of the papists", including "dancing, balls and ballets, etcetera, to which also members of the Reformed Church are lured and drawn, according to the example of the Midianites, Numbers 25" (Knuttel ed. 1908-1916, vol. 2, p. 424)

Rotterdam 1660: condemnation of "the crying and calling sins in general and in particular the blasphemous cursing, swearing and abusing of God's holy name, the ghastly whoring, adultery, incest and other unchaste cohabitations, and everything that gives occasion to these sins: stage-plays, God-tempting rope-dancing, obscene comedies leading the young astray, dancing and all other suchlike fruitless doings of darkness" (Knuttel ed. 1908-1916, vol. 4, p. 203)

A very large number of synodal pronouncements on dance and other illicit recreations can be gathered. Careful analysis will reveal interesting differences from the one period to the other and from the one province to the other. Some general patterns can be discerned: most pernicious are mixed dancing and dancing on the Sabbath. Dance is linked with many other damnable practices, such as mummery and masquerade, play-acting and theatre-going, dicing and card-playing, gluttony and drunkenness, whoring, adultery, homosexuality, incest and marriages without love (!), immodest gestures and laughing, cursing and swearing, vain talk and gossip, offensive songs and amorous songbooks, nudity and unseemly dress in art or real life, long hair and wigs, overdressing and all other instances of conspicuous consumption, and a great many instances of Sabbath-breaking. An interesting phenomenon is the explicit association of dancing with heathenism, unbelief, religious non-conformity, and especially with popery. This is charmingly worded in a warning drawn up by the *classis* of Dokkum in 1666, to be read from all pulpits: the Sabbath is being profaned by dancing and the like, and "several so-called members of the Reformed parishes of Jesus Christ behave worse than the blind papists' daughters of Babel who live in our midst, and who feel justified in their idolatrous Samaria and adulterous Sodom because of the abominations of our own people" (Van Veen 1889, pp. 88-90).

In support of and in explanation of the synodal denunciations, the *preciezen* poured out a steady stream of polemical works. Some tracts deal with the dance exclusively. The most famous example is a Latin disputation by Gisbertus Voetius, first of a series of five on the Seventh Commandment, held in 1643 and 1644. This disputation was not printed until much later, but it was translated into the vernacular shortly after it had been held (Voetius 1644). Though published anonymously, a letter by Voetius addressed to Udemans (to whom he sends the book) proves beyond doubt that, despite several differences between the Latin and the Dutch version, the *Tractaetjen* is by Voetius: “a studioso quodam in vernaculum nostrum idioma translata et a me correcta atque aucta” (“translated by some student into our vernacular and corrected and augmented by myself”) (Duker 1897-1915, vol. 2, p. 246). In the present context it is quite impossible to do justice to the wealth of arguments adduced by Voetius to demonstrate the unlawfulness of the dance: Voetius was given by a contemporary the not unequivocally flattering name of *helluo librorum*, “devourer of books”, and indeed his quotations range far and wide. As Voetius’ tract is representative, an outline of its contents should be offered. Voetius first defines his subject, with philological and historical remarks on Biblical, Greek and Roman dancing. Secondly, he offers a short overview of the three main attitudes toward the dance: all dancing is allowed, some dancing is and some dancing is not, no dancing whatsoever is allowed; Voetius himself chooses the last-mentioned. Thirdly, he lists his own arguments why all dancing is illicit and presents a “cloud of witnesses” to support his views. Fourthly, we get the *consectaria*, the inferences: different kinds of dancing are condemned one by one and dance masters and dance schools pronounced illegal. Fifthly, objections that could be brought forward by defenders of the dance are summed up and rejected. The disputation finishes with some exercises on specific problemata, where several arguments are repeated, and with several extensive quotations in support of Voetius’ position. His main assertions are that dancing causes unchastity, lechery and adultery. For this reason dance is considered to be a sin against the Seventh Commandment (as can also be seen in commentaries on the Heidelberg catechism, e.g. Bastingius 1891, p. 617; Voetius 1891, pp. 1042ff.). It is a vain and idle pursuit unbecoming to Christians. Dances described in the Bible are either idolatrous or, if performed by pious Israelites, incomparable to the lewd and offensive modern dances: dances such as David’s were chaste, unmixed, performed out of joy and to honour God. Contradictory is the subsequent statement that *all* dance is wrong *per se*, because of its heathenish origin and because it derives from the devil. Dancing is not, as many say, healthy, and even if it were, the health of the immortal soul is far more important than the health of the mortal body. Thus Voetius; all this and much more is also to be found in the monograph by Wassenburgh: this contains a large introduction and 212 closely printed pages: Voetius might very well have used this book (and the one by Udemans to be mentioned below, most learned as well). The main assertions are identical: “dance is the wick for the flame of evil lust”. Wassenburgh is unique, however, in his extremely negative attitude to the human body: “this poor and stinking bag of maggots” (Wassenburgh 1641, p. 132; introduction, unnumbered).

Passages on the dance can be found in several other works, such as Bible commentaries and devotional works describing everything wrong in society together with the requisite remedies. Udemans, in his *Practice, the true cultivation of the main Christian virtues*, first published in 1612, thinks dances, “these basilisk’s eggs and cobwebs”, should be rooted out completely: no dance escapes his harsh ruling (1640, pp. 279-285). Wittewrongel, in his *Oeconomica christiana*, first argues that the unmixed dances of the ancients are *middelmatig*, indifferent: a deceptive start, because Wittewrongel too concludes that no dance is any good. And he is vehement: “dancers are idolaters, actors without honour, brothel keepers, brothel-keepers, Venus wailers, and epicurean wantons”. Again a “cloud of witnesses” is cited, even some Catholics opposed to the dance, though “usually the conscience of popish teachers on this part

is as wide as a monk's sleeve". As Wassenburgh before him, Wittewrongel warns that the actual situation is getting worse: dancing is gaining popularity. This means, says Wittewrongel, that now we should stand firm: we elect must be a beacon in the surrounding darkness (1661, pp. 1118-1139).

The precisians are much concerned about the keeping of the Sabbath: sabbatarianism occupies a special place in Dutch Calvinism (Van Veen 1889; De Vries 1899). Teellinck in his *Necessary disquisition on the present sad condition of the people of God* fulments against dancing in alehouses on the Sabbath day (1627, p. 38). A very lively description of Sabbath-breaking is to be found in Koelman's *Points of necessary reformation* (1678, pp. 300-304): amongst the many examples of disorderly behaviour we encounter dancing, singing and violin playing in village inns. Also of much interest are tracts that provide "registers of sins": Van Houten's *Little confession book for Christians* (edited by Voetius), in discussing sins against the Seventh Commandment, singles out the dance as a most dangerous temptation to unchastity (1681, pp. 210-211); Hondius, in his *Black register of a thousand sins*, condemns dance and ballet as sin number 133. Further on he adds an extra sin (number 489): guilty of this offence are parents who send their children to dance schools or invite dance masters to their homes, in order to provide "worldly fashion and smartness". Hondius warns us to remember Romans 12.2: "and be not conformed to this world" (1679, pp. 72-75, 228). As in Wittewrongel's words paraphrased above, we get the impression of a small band holding out against a corrupt dance-loving world.

The *predikanten* did not stop at a simple condemnation but took action, reprimanding those who danced, and if they persisted, excluding them from church and holy communion, as prescribed by the Synod of Dort. This so-called "censure", church discipline, related to members of the church only (members were those who were baptized and had made their confession of faith) and in the case of lay parishioners was put in the hands of the consistory. Examples of the consistory acting on instances of dancing by members of the church being brought to its attention, or observed by the consistory itself, are manifold; several have been published (Dordrecht: Schotel 1841, pp. 382ff.; Holland: Van Deursen 1978, pp. 18f; Utrecht: Duker 1897=1915, vol. 2, pp. 237ff.; Amsterdam: Evenhuis 1967, pp. 128-130), but many more are waiting to be brought to light. We will return to these consistorial acts below, when discussing the actual behaviour of church members in the seventeenth century.

The church also tried to enlist the help of the civic authorities, not only to keep their own flock under control, but to enforce a ban on all public performances, dancing masters, and whatever else was considered sinful, arousing God's wrath and offending or leading astray the members of the church. To give such help was considered the duty of all magistrates (Voetius 1891, p. 1051). Indeed, hundreds of placards, that met some, but not all, of the demands of the Church, were published by local authorities, States and the States-General. A few examples: in Utrecht in 1602 a lot of activities considered Sabbath-breaking were forbidden, from keeping shops open to throwing snowballs (!); between 9am and 4pm all fencing and dancing schools had to be closed; nobody should invite others for a dance, nor should one "hang a wreath" or gather beneath such wreaths to dance and sing in streets or in churchyards (Van Veen 1889, pp. 280-281). The National Synod of Dort in 1619 requested the States-General to combat many abuses, including the profanation of the Sabbath by *tripudia*, "dances", and *gymnasia saltatoria*, "dance schools" (Kuyper ed. 1899, pp. 269). The same year the States of Holland issued a placard forbidding plays and the like during divine service. Holland published a placard in 1653 against "profane exercises and debauches" on the Sabbath day, but when the year after the church presented a remonstrance, asking to have all plays, dances, dancing schools etc. banned permanently, the States, after some hesitation, did not support the *predikanten*. In 1656 the States of Holland decreed against profanations of the Sabbath as in

1653, but plays, dancing schools and dances were explicitly “placed beyond further deliberation”. And so on: sometimes town councils or the States went along with the church, sometimes they did not, and they rarely went all the way. Though there does not seem to have been a consistent policy, extremes were avoided: we do not find something like the English *Book of Sports*, but complete bans upon popular recreations were rare and probably not strictly enforced. In general, the oligarchy extended its tolerance to dance and drama (6).

The church also appealed to scholars not to defend or further the cause of dancing in any way, as the Synod of Delft put it in 1648: “the *professors philosophiae* will be asked by the *deputati Synodi* not to speak in defence of anything that will in whatever way advocate dancing, dicing or other vanities” (Knuttel ed. 1908-1916, vol. 3, p. 96). In the works of non-theologians, that is mainly classicists, dealing with the dance, we do not find much of a response to the ministers’ urgent plea: their attitude might be exemplified by the words written earlier in the century by the famous scholar Meursius. In the dedication of his *Orchestra sive de saltationibus veterum* (1618), Meursius expresses some concern that the addressee might not think a book about some dance commensurate with his dignity, but, argues Meursius, the Ancients honoured the dance, and “praeterea, cum tu Antiquitatem universam, ejusque studium, magni facias, non te quicquam, quod ad illustrandam illam pertineret, contemnere posse statuebam! [“above all that, if you think much of all of Antiquity and the study thereof, I am of the opinion that you cannot disdain anything that is suitable to illuminate that Antiquity”]. Meursius studiously avoided making any reference to contemporary dancing and does not comment on the condemnation of the dance by the *predikanten*.

On the other hand, some of the religious tracts show a good grasp of the studies of the dances of Antiquity, such as the writings of Ricchieri, Scaliger and Meursius. People like Udemans, Voetius, Wassenburgh and Wittewrongel show themselves, if seldom original scholars, always well-read. Indeed, the more learned amongst the *predikanten* could be called the unwitting popularizers of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholarly work on the dance! It is not inconceivable that several of those who developed an interest in the “saltatory art of the Ancients” (an interest that during the second half of the seventeenth and all of the eighteenth century would be a main driving force in the development of European theatrical dancing, cf. Naerebout forthcoming) were put on the right track by the writings of *predikanten*.

Apparently support for the *predikanten* was not wide-spread: we have already seen that political and intellectual elites were, if not hostile, often indifferent. Nor does there appear to be much anti-dance writing other than the tracts: some edifying poetry is all I could find, such as an emblemata book by the god-fearing poet Van der Veen (1642, pp. 58ff.) which contains poetic condemnations of the dance, together with references to appropriate passages in the Bible. A few lines:

What godless thinks in dance are found,
What endless wickedness a partner in the round!
Lewdness and flaunting, wanton gluttony,
Whoring, drunkenness, and Venus’ praise to sing,
Vile talk, a fight, a hundred things of hollow ring.

But if the *preciezen* lacked support, how about the dance? Did anybody come to its defence? As stressed above, Dutch Calvinism was pluriform: the precisians formed only one section of the Dutch Reformed Church, and even they show no complete agreement of thought. Opinions on every conceivable subject differed, not seldom widely: polemics between *predikanten*, precise or latitudinarian, raged fiercely. Dance, however, does not seem to have

found many defenders, at least within the church. Probably several of the more moderate *predikanten* were indifferent as far as the dance was concerned. Amidst the precisians' vociferous attacks on the dance it is not easy to perceive any dissident voices. Of course, some of the many arguments in favour of the dance quoted at length (and rejected) by the tract writers might have come from moderates within the church. A good example of the moderate side in the debate whether dances are *adiaphora*, indifferent, or bad in themselves is an *exercitatio* by M. Schoock, a *predikant* who set out as a pupil of Voetius, but after a conflict became his most outspoken opponent. Schoock defends, with much display of learning, the thesis that dances are *adiaphora*, and might in certain circumstances be permissible, even to Christians, even when mixed. He stresses, however, that he wants "in no respect to defend the modern dances" (1663, p. 327). Schoock's position is rather extreme: usually it is only unmixed dances that are allowed by the moderates. They could base themselves on the classics: thus the famous scholar Gerardius Vossius distinguished carefully between *honesta saltationis genera* and *saltatio obscaena* or *ignobilis*, a distinction ultimately going back to Plato (1647, vol. 2, pp. 9, 16, 28ff., vol. 3, p. 15; 1650, pp. 23-25, 52-54).

Quite unique is the religious dancing by the pietist minister Jean de Labadie and his followers. An inquiry into the heterodox opinions and acts of De Labadie *cum suis* includes an appendix dealing with "the dancing, kissing and embracing by De Labadie and his companions". It describes the conversation between some "Labadists" and their orthodox opponents. To the shocked surprise of the orthodox *predikanten* they did not even attempt to deny their terrible deeds and even propagated the dance as the one and only way in which to act like a true Christian and to communicate with the Holy Spirit. Of course the reader is sternly warned to see this behaviour for what it really is. That we learn from an extensive quote from a work by Thevenot, concerning the dancing dervishes, those "hypocrites" replete with "wickedness" (Borstius ed. 1671, pp. 54ff; cf. Duker 1897-1915, vol. 3, pp. 223f).

For further defences of the dance we have to look elsewhere. In much secular poetry the dance is eulogized, conduct books recommended dancing as a civilizing force, and so on. But that is not our present subject, though I cannot resist quoting a charming poem by Constantijn Huygens (Worp ed. 1892-1899, vol. 8, p. 111), titled "Dancers' innocence" (the peace meant in the poem is the peace concluded with England in February 1674):

Government has taken a good tuck-in and boozes till completely tight,
Its head and stomach overburdened, of peace so madly glad.
The young folk dance till hot, to legs' and lungs' delight.
is gorging ever so virtuous, and dancing ever so bad?

The precisians said both gluttony *and* dancing were bad; but most of them would have agreed that of these two sins dancing was by far the more heinous.

4. The *predikanten* put into perspective

The opinion of the *predikanten* as expressed in synodal pronouncements and tracts was nothing new: it fits into a tradition which is very long indeed. They took most of their examples from the writings of the Fathers of the Church and "a cloud of witnesses" from the Middle Ages and the early modern period: conciliar acts, sermons, tracts and even *warnlegenden* (7). Most *predikanten* did not go to these sources directly, but based much of their work on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century foreign tracts, adding references relevant to their local Dutch audience. Most influential was probably Geneva itself, where Calvin personally combatted the dance, and where Daneu published a very influential anti-dance tract (Clive 1961). From the 1620s onwards there is a strong Puritan influence from England and Scotland: the work of authors like John Northbrooke and William Prynne certainly must have

been eagerly read and was partly translated into Dutch. The link between Puritans and Dutch precisians was strong in all respects: scores of ministers from England and Scotland worked in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century, most of them Puritans, Presbyterians or Covenanters, amongst them famous men like William Ames and William Perkins (Sprunger 1972; Sprunger 1982). In the forming of opinion about the dance some of these men certainly played a part. The Dutch material was quite influential in its turn, at least that part of it that was published in Latin. Increase Mather's well-known tract, for example, is heavily based on the work of "the great Voetius" (1975, pp. 34, 42-3, 56). To trace these manifold influences criss-crossing over Europe and America all the material will have to be gathered (including re-editions of translations) and the texts, with all references and quotations, compared. Meanwhile we should never lose sight of the Catholic anti-dance tracts. The Counter-Reformation entailed a tightening-up of moral restrictions in a way comparable to Puritanism. Now of course an Arbeau, a churchman writing a *technical* book on dancing, is not very conceivable in the Calvinist Netherlands: if we are prepared to generalize rather boldly we can argue with the *predikanten* that dancing is linked to popery after all. And within the Protestant fold the Lutherans were very lax in this respect. But to admit these things makes it all the easier to forget about non-Calvinist condemnations of the dance. These should be taken into account, however: Voetius, for instance, was an avid reader of Catholic books. We will end up by studying an important aspect of that wide-ranging phenomenon which has been called the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century civilizing offensive", to which we will return below.

5. Dancing in seventeenth-century Dutch society

If we wish to be able to judge whether the complaints of the *predikanten* about the "persistence of these filthy sins" were justified, and if we want to assess what their efforts brought about, we have to take a closer look at seventeenth-century Dutch society and the place of the dance therein. Alas, studies on the dance in the Dutch "Golden Century" are scarce (8). This is often blamed on a dearth of material, but it is rather that no-one has ever taken the trouble to collect what there is. The following is a first, very impressionistic attempt only. The sources that we can call to our command are many:

1. in the present context pride of place should go to the *predikanten*, the synods, the classical and consistorial acta, and the placards: as we have seen above, this material can inform us about the ideas on dance of a segment (small but influential) of Dutch society and at the same time about what was going on *in real life*.
2. a wealth of both published and unpublished writings other than the above, such as *archivalia* of a governmental, juridical or notarial nature, diaries, letters and memoirs, writings by classical scholars, poets and playwrights, and descriptions by foreign travellers: some random testing shows there is much waiting to be discovered by the determined scholar. Obviously, a concerted effort will be needed to tap these rich resources.
3. music books: much music was published in the seventeenth century Netherlands, including much dance music (Oey-de Vita 1983, p. 77; cf. Rimmer 1986 on comparable eighteenth-century material).
4. iconographical sources: these have never been systematically collected: the material is very copious.

These sources will be very helpful in studying the position of the dance in seventeenth-century Dutch society: there is much information on how dance was considered and on the contexts in which dancing took place. I suspect, however, that only very little can be found on the *formal* aspects of the dance and I think we should not strain our sources to

yield such information: we ought to be very wary as far as reconstructions based on non-technical sources are concerned (cf. Naerebout forthcoming), and it is seventeenth-century Dutch technical material that seems to be almost completely lacking. The many dancing masters in the Dutch towns were obviously no Playfords.

We will start our short overview with the best researched area: the theatre (9). The origins of an indigenous Dutch theatrical dance tradition are mainly to be found in dances performed at high-days of the Catholic year, such as dances in religious drama, and dances at carnival or kermis, performed by travelling comedians, clowns, acrobats, rope dancers and mime artists. In a more secular context we can think of the performances connected with state entries, and of the dancing and acrobatics in plays put on by the so-called chambers of rhetoric, local literary associations. To these belong established forms of entertainment we should add foreign influences. Around 1600 there is a positive influx of English groups (Riewald 1960). Dutch “sung farces” of the early sixteenth century must owe much to the English jogs (Baskerville 1965). As the seventeenth century progresses, French influence becomes prominent; thus the Stadtholder’s court supported travelling French drama groups, who did not limit their activities to The Hague, but brought French drama and ballet to every major town in the Netherlands (Fransen 1925). Towards the end of the century Italo-French opera and *Commedia dell’arte* harlequinades become very popular with Dutch audiences. The prevalence of French tastes is clearly illustrated by the publication, after French example, of the *Recueil des opera, des ballets et des plus belles pieces en musique* in Amsterdam from 1690 onwards. These indigenous and foreign elements combined into quite a flourishing stage dance tradition.

In Amsterdam in 1617 Coster founded his *Academie*, a first (abortive) attempt at a permanent theatre. In 1637 the first *Schouwburg* (Municipal Theatre) was opened. Much dancing went on there throughout the century. There were many danced interludes interspersed between tragedies and farces, or ballets taking the place of a farce; sometimes these are merely indicated as “interlude” or “a ballet”, but several titles are known, the most intriguing of which I think is the *Nudists’ Ballet* of 1659 (Wybrands 1873; Oey-de Vita & Geesink 1983). In the season of 1658-1659, about which we are informed in detail, at least 37 out of 105 performances had danced interludes or a ballet. More dancing was to be found in the plays themselves: as interludes between the acts or as an integral part of the drama. From about 1680 onwards we might speak of true opera-comiques in the French manner. The many printed texts of plays and librettos of operas are a rich source. One example should suffice for the present: an allegorical play by Thomas Arendsz (1689) produced on the occasion of William III being crowned as King of England, which has dances by Violence, Murder, Spite, Vindictiveness, Fury, Despair, Thames, Rhine, Danube and Tagus.

Theatrical dancing outside Amsterdam has never been properly researched. But undoubtedly much can be brought to light: travelling groups brought drama and dance to many towns and villages, especially when there was a kermis. Thus in 1656 the bailiff of Heemstede allowed plays to be presented at the kermis, “which will be embellished with the dancing of ballets and masquerades ... and we promise the aficionados after every play a rare and funny farce, together with an uncommon ballet” (playbill reproduced in Koster 1970, 106). Apparently the smaller Dutch towns had their balletomanes by the middle of the seventeenth century.

We also find ballet at the The Hague court of the Stadtholder. Prince Maurice seems not to have been a lover of the dance, nor did court life in general flourish under this rather dour soldier with little dynastic ambition. Still, in 1613 a ballet seems to have been performed in honour of Frederick V, Elector Palatine of the Rhine and future King of Bohemia, and his bride Elizabeth Stuart, passing through The Hague on their way to Germany (Schotel 1859, p.

34). The successor of Maurice, his brother Frederick Henry, strove to create something of a true court life: the House of Orange now pretended to be on a par with foreign monarchies (and indeed Frederick Henry succeeded in marrying his son to Mary Stuart). Ballet seems to have been part of the new modishness at the Stadtholder's court (Poelhekke 1978, pp. 542ff). The Bohemian court, exiled in The Hague from 1622 onwards, was very dance-minded (Schotel 1859), pp. 72ff, 113, 136), especially Elizabeth Stuart, ancestress of the present British royal family, is supposed to have been a great lover of plays and ballets. Prince William III during the first Stadtholderless Period (1651-1672) propagated the arts, in imitation of the French and Austrian courts. In 1668 a large scale *Ballet de la Paix* was given at The Hague, at the conclusion of the peace between Holland and England. A temporary theatre to contain an audience of several hundred was built, and several noblemen and the prince of Orange himself rehearsed for months. The printed programme (Anon. 1668), full of grandiloquent French poetry, lists the *entrées* and the cast: the Prince performed as Mercury, herdsman and peasant woman; noblemen young and old appeared as Peace, Renown, Holland and England, Discord, Bellona, furies, nymphs, tritons, etc, etc. An interesting description of this true court ballet and its adjuncts, such as French dances and a set dance for the Prince and noblemen and 24 ladies, is to be found in the records of the travels of Cosmo de' Medici, who happened to be in The Hague at the time (Hoogerwerf ed. 1919, pp. 133ff., 169ff.).

Seventeenth-century Dutch high society certainly did not shun the dance. Not even dances of a very special kind: in 1644 a party was given by John Maurice of Nassau after his return from Brazil; *pièce de résistance* were some dances performed by stark-naked Indians; some *predikanten*, who had been invited along with their wives were not amused (Worp ed. 1911-1918, vol 4, p. 52). In 1660 Constantijn Huygens describes in a letter to the Duchess of Lorraine the more ordinary dancing at the marriage of his daughter: "Durant ce glorieus repas, sale plus glorieuse fut mise an ordre et parfumée et esclairée d'environs cinq à six flambeaux, pour servir à la gambade des jeunes gens ... La dance s'entama, et de toute celles qui suivirent après les bransles, celle qui se nomme la duchesse se trouva la plus belle ... Dans la sale du bal le baladinage y fut continue jusqu'à quqtre heures du matin". Huygens said he would have preferred to go to bed a bit earlier, surrounded by "tant de jupes clinquantées" who never would stop dancing (Worp ed. 1911-1918, vol. 5, pp. 332ff.). In 1663 a ballet was performed in the house of Prince John Maurice, where some young, rather "desrespectueux" Frenchmen from the court took the liberty to teach the ladies present some dances, with many pleasantries and antics (Gonnet ed. 1899-1909, vol. 1, p. 171). Remarkable is the existence in The Hague of a so-called *ordo laetitia* after a French model: *Le précieux ordre de l'union de la joie*, the membership of which included people like Constantijn Huygens and Johan de Witt. De Witt's diploma on becoming a member has been preserved (Fruin ed. 1906-1913, vol. 1, 267 n. 3): "ayant cognu l'envie de rire, danser, gambader et de ce réjouir de M. de Wit et son humeur aprochante de nostre approbation, nous l'avons bien voulu gratifier de nostre ordre de l'Union". Of course it remains to be seen how many dances were actually performed by these gentlemen.

Naturally we expect several dancing masters to operate in high society; but the desire to be taught the latest fashions in dancing did not only exist in court circles in The Hague. Scores of dancing masters and dancing schools are mentioned in the sources, all through the century. Synods, *classes* and consistories condemn dancing masters at every turn: one of the more intriguing instances is found in 1607 in the province of Groningen, where to the disgust of the delegates at the synod the verger of the village church of Den Dam appeared to run a dance school (Reitsma & Van Veen, eds. 1892-1898, vol. 7, p. 134). Even several names of dancing masters are known, providing some extra opportunities for research: one Nicolas Vallet, a lutenist, wanted to open a dance school in Amsterdam in 1626 (Balfort 1981, pp. 35-37); in Dordrecht in the 1650s we find a Mr Jacques (Schotel 1841, p. 382); in 1692 there must have

been a dancing master Hermette in Utrecht, as he is mentioned in “a dirge on the departure of Frans van Bergen from Utrecht to Middelburg, the 6th of May 1692” published in a collection of poetry, the *Parnas-loof* (“Parnassus-foliage”) (Anon. 1693, p. 6):

*Adieu putains, adieu, Mes dames!
Pour vos attraits, c'est tout foutu ;
Je suis encore prêt (par mon ame!)
De faire vos maris cocus!
Adieu Maître à dancier Hermette,
Adieu Maître d'écriture, enfin
Et tous les Musiciens de cette
Charmante ville; adieu le vin!*

Most of this poem is in Dutch, only a few more racy fragments are in French: but it is not only the *putains* and the *maris cocus* that are in French, also the dancing master! But possibly this was only because dancing, at least dancing *à la mode*, was considered something particularly French. Most of the dancing masters known by name seem to have been French or at least to have carried French names. French manners, French polish, became more and more important as the century progressed: the latest French dances must have been part of the upbringing of every town dweller aspiring to some civilization. As Mountague wrote towards the end of the century: “all the Dutch are not such very boors as reported” (1696, p. 231). Another poem in the same *Parnas-loof* illustrates these developments (Anon. 1693, p. 333):

*Dancing is a good thing for both young and old,
Which one should teach each child to feet,
To move with elegance among the human fold,
To know how to walk and to know how to greet,
As is, according to manner and custom, meet;
Who of this art knows not a thing,
Moves like a lout along the street,
And once inside does a Westphalian fling.*

The inhabitants of Westphalia were considered the *nec plus ultra* of inelegance: boors performing boorish dances. But the inhabitants of the Dutch towns obviously frequented the dance schools: towns had their “dance chambers” and “music chambers”, sometimes brothels but not seldom establishments really dedicated to the arts. Dance must have been a popular pastime, and, as we have already seen above, also indulged in by members of the church; the many instances of consistories or *classes* taking action against members of the church found to be dancing are sufficient proof. And they did not dance in secret: in 1658 the consistory of Utrecht castigated gatherings of members on fast-days and days of prayer, mentioning parties visited by some 80 persons, who danced until 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning (Duker 1897-1915, vol. 2, p. 240). Consistories and *classes* regularly decide to exact promises not to dance from new members, to warn members or future members, to admonish the flock from every pulpit, and so on. Obviously it was not self-evident to members of the church that one should not dance. Especially it proved impossible to suppress dancing at weddings. Cases of ecclesiastical censure regarding dancing *predikanten* are of course very piquant. The Synod of 1603 in Groningen for example decided to suspend Gerhardus Hedingius, *predikant* in Sitzwert, from office, because of his dancing and drunkenness (and lying about these facts)” (Reitsma & Van Veen, eds. 1892-1898, vol. 7, p. 64).

Many Dutch obviously never came near a French dancing master: their dances must have been as equally unfashionable as those of our poet's Westphalians. We can once again learn

much from the predikanten about the dancing of the common Dutch peasant. The villagers' profanation of the Sabbath and disorderly behaviour in general by the playing of games, partaking in processions, feasts, ales and dances, keeping of Catholic holy-days, attending *kermissen*, erecting of maypoles, etc, etc, came under frequent attack. Thus the Synod of Rolde in 1601 condemned the dances at St. John the Baptist, the Synod of Groningen in 1615 the dressing up and dancing on Shrove-Tuesday (Reitsma & Van Veen, eds. 1892-1898, vol. 7, p. 269; vol. 8, p. 25). These are only two examples from many. A final word about a subject that I have never seen mentioned in connection with the dance in seventeenth-century Netherlands: skating! This was a very popular form of recreation for large sections of the population. Men and women often skated in pairs, linking hands (Mountague puts it thus: which they do very much, and promiscuously", 1696 p. 222). Some of the well-known seventeenth-century skating scenes show goings-on which one might very well call a dance. The *predikanten* do not seem to have been opposed to this sport: did they think the ice and fresh air would cool the passions?

6. Conclusion

Scholes (1969) has argued convincingly that the Puritans in England and New England were not as puritanical concerning music and dance as is often thought, except for some uncompromising characters. Scholes' conclusions are supported by the research of Wagner (1979) on New England Puritans and their attitude towards physical recreation in general. In the Netherlands, however, the situation seems to have been slightly different. Admittedly, Puritan thinking on human recreations (and any other subject) was rich and varied, in the Netherlands as anywhere else. But there the compromising section, led by the energetic and vehement Voetius, was very vociferous. On the one hand, these precisians cherished the idea of a *purior ecclesia* : a chosen people, set apart; on the other hand, they strove for a reform of all of Dutch society: "a Puritan who minds his own business is a contradiction in terms" (Hunt 1983, p. 146). Despite their diligence and their attempt to interest secular government in their mission, the precisians seem not to have had success. This they admit themselves often enough. The frequent repetition of synodal announcements against the dance shows as much. Sometimes the oligarchy met some of the demands of the precisians. But once again the frequent repetitions of admonitions and bans seems a sure sign that the placards either were not enforced or were not heeded. Possibly even active resistance to enforcement of the placards occurred; there are some indications of this, and we know that the population was quick to riot if dissatisfied, and that most of them were not members of the church.

Towards the end of the century both the quantity and the quality of the anti-dance tracts seem to be falling off: though publication never ceased altogether and existing works were reprinted, the public's and the publisher's appetite seems to have waned. Works by authors like Casparus Streso (1680) or Daniel le Roy (1722) are excessively compilatory and the Greek, Latin or Hebrew is too consistently garbled to suspect the typesetter only. From the 1670s onwards the synods start losing interest in the dance. But had nothing happened at all? This is the moment to return to the idea of a "civilizing offensive", mentioned above: a two-pronged attack by church and public authorities to effect a further christianizing and disciplining of Europe, which Keith Thomas called the "decline of magic" and Peter Burke "the reform of popular culture" (1). Folk and elite culture grow ever further apart; folk culture is denounced, and eventually destroyed. This theoretical framework might lead us to expect the church to lose interest in combating the dance because the battle was actually *won!*

A serious problem here is of course whether we can actually distinguish clearly between elite and folk culture: is this not rather a continuum, are not born elite and folk culture (and especially the last, being locally based) highly varied, are we not in danger of resurrecting

the old romantic idea of a static folk culture, while it is obvious that cultural phenomena and/or their meaning have been changing all the time? Where I use these concepts it is strictly as an analytical tool and as a most rigorous abstraction of a many-faceted reality.

Undoubtedly, it is possible to demonstrate that cultural differentiation increased during the seventeenth century, but the idea of a cultural split should not be exaggerated: There was homogeneity as well (Ingram 1984b). Certainly in the Netherlands: “the tastes, the ideas and values of the social elite were perhaps less different from those of the mass of the population than in any other seventeenth-century society. It may well be, for example, that many of the manners and beliefs attacked by clerical precisians were not so much condemned as shared by much of the social elite, and that such moral reformers were not trying to impose the values of the ruling group on the people but a new set of manners and beliefs on commoners and elite alike” (Price 1986, p. 248). This analysis is supported by the data on the social position of the Dutch predikanten: most were of lower-middle-class or working-class origin. As in England (Ingram 1984a, pp. 182ff., 188), we find pious people amongst the lowly, and disorderly people amongst the oligarchy. The precisians did try to stop the elite from dancing or watching dance, though sometimes they did not dare to attack the oligarchy too openly (Evenhuis 1967, p. 129). The Stadtholder’s court and its surroundings were beyond their reach. But in the end the elite kept going to the theatres and partaking in dances, often dances in a new French guise, but dances all the same. Dancing had always been part of their culture and so it remained, even if this culture was separated more clearly from folk culture.

The destruction of folk culture has to be doubted as well. Though recent studies of the eighteenth-century Dutch regents throw some doubt on the “Frenchification” of the oligarchy, it is undeniable that the urban patricians turned into a semi-noble, aristocratic governing class. But this same group soon developed an interest in the culture of the common people, now an alien world to be studied by antiquaries. That is a proper Burkian account. But apparently there was something to study! One can distance oneself from folk culture without attempting to destroy it: increasing differentiation is definitely not the same as a loss of pluriformity. While in the towns people tended to imitate the French tastes of their superiors, in the country many people still went on (re)creating their own local culture. Survival or adaptation of old dance traditions outside the urban milieu is difficult to ascertain: many eighteenth-century sources will have to be carefully examined. It is most likely that regional differences will loom large: some areas were thoroughly Protestantized, other areas remained largely Catholic; nor is the one amusement the other: where the Dutch sport of bekkesnijden, “cutting up faces”, disappeared towards the end of the seventeenth century, the rather less disorderly dancing may well have survived. The precisians’ drive against the commoners’ dancing is most likely to have met with only a partial success.

Many questions will still have to be asked, before we can say anything more definite about the cultural developments in early modern Europe. The study of the anti-dance movements in the seventeenth-century Netherlands may contribute something to the answering of these questions. We can conclude for the time being that the Dutch precise predikanten lost their battle against the dance: theatrical dance flourished more than ever, the elite and the towns-people danced the latest French dances, at least part of the country folk still enjoyed their local dances. The predikanten could not have won: they put the stakes too high by setting themselves the happily impossible task of eradicating the dance completely and for all time.

Bibliography

Albach B. (1977) Langs kermissen en hoven. Ontstaan en kroniek van een Nederlands toneelgezelschap in de zeventiende eeuw, Zutphen: Walburg Pers

Andresen C. (1961) Altchristliche Kritik am Tanz. Ein Ausschnitt aus dem Kampf der alten Kirch gegen heidnische Sitte, Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte, 4th series, 10, pp. 217-262

Anon. (1668) Ballet de la Paix, The Hague: Van Wouw

Anon. (1693) Gemengelde Parnas-loof: bestaande in verscheidene soort van gedichten, zo ernstige als spotdichten, Amsterdam: De Coup

Arendsz T. (1689) De Krooninge van haare Majesteiten, Wilhem Hendrik én Maria Stuart, tót Koning, én Koninginne van Engeland, Vrankryk, én Yrland, Amsterdam: Erfgenamen Lesailje

Balfoort D.J. (1981) Het muziekleven in Nederland in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw, The Hague: Nijhoff [revised edition; first published Amsterdam 1938]

Baskerville C.R. (1965) The Elizabethan jig and related song drama, New York: Dover [reprint of the edition Chicago 1929]

Bastingius H. (1891) Verclaringe op den Catechisme der Christelicker religie, Amsterdam: Wormser [after the second edition of 1594]

Berg J. van de & Dooren J.P. van (eds 1978) Pietismus und reveil, Leiden: Brill

Bogaers L. (1985) Een kwestie van macht? De relatie tussen de wetgeving op het openbaar gedrag en de ontwikkeling van de Utrechtse stadssamenleving in de zestiende en zeventiende eeuw, Volkskundig Bulletin, 11, pp. 102-126

Borstius J. (ed. 1671) Getuygenis en verklaringe van eenighe predikanten uyt Schotland, Rotterdam: Borstius

Boxer C.R. (1965) The Dutch seaborne empire 1600-1800, London: Hutchinson

Burke P. (1978) Popular culture in early modern Europe, London: Temple Smith

Burke P. (1984) Popular culture between history and ethnology, Ethnologia Europaea, 14, pp. 5-13

Dr. Mr. Frederick Gerald Naerebout
Netherlands

=====

Naerebout01.doc