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The Most Elegant Collateral Embellishment of Taste

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The Most Elegant Collateral Embellishment of Taste

A Treatise on the Art of Dancing: “The Most Elegant Collateral Embellishment of Taste” In A Treatise on the Art of Dancing (1772), by Giovanni-Andrea Gallini, explains how dancing originated from religious ceremonies, and how important the notion of dancing was to the early Roman and Egyptian cultures. According to Gallini, “As an exercise, the virtue of dancing was well known to the ancients, for its keeping up the strength and agility of the human body” (30). Throughout the book’s entirety Gallini kept referring to the strength provided by dancing, and how it was a great form of exercise. He also stressed how important it was to be able to make your arms adapt to the movements of the dance. Apparently, the placement of the arms was an extremely important aspect of dancing. After going into depth about the history of dancing, Gallini went on to explain that different characters exist within dancing. These dancing characters include: “the serious, the half serious, the comic, and the grotesque” (Gallini 56). The book goes on to explain that each of these characters serve different purposes and are appropriate for certain dances, but in order to fulfill each of these positions one must first master the steps of the serious character. In other words, a person who would be considered an accomplished dancer would be able to stand in as either of the dance characters. An accomplished dancer might also indicate a certain class, those who were “well bred” had the best dance masters and it definitely paid off in the assembly room, for they were the ones who could dance as either character.

From the Treatise on the Art of Dancing I found many things that correlate directly with Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice. One thing that caught me off guard was when Gallini mentions dancing and first impressions, to which he states “To whom can it be unknown that a favorable prepossession at the first sight is often of the highest advantage; and that the power of first impressions is surmountable” (128). In other words, the best way to make a good first impression is through dancing. Elizabeth’s first impression of Darcy is formed while they are at the Meryton Ball, where Darcy’s lack of dancing makes an awful first impression. I also found it interesting that Gallini laid out the different characters of dancing. If these dancing character descriptions held to be true then I would say that Elizabeth had the privilege of dancing with two of these types of characters at the Netherfield Ball. Elizabeth found a serious and accomplished dancer in Darcy, and a grotesque dancer in Mr. Collins. I was surprised to not find anything about patterns of dancing and romance in A Treatise on the Art of Dancing, as this was a common correlation in Pride and Prejudice; however, the Treatise on the Art of Dancing did briefly mention that one was not to show any type of affection towards their partner. This was something that Jane abided by and almost lost Mr. Bingley over. After reading both A Treatise on the Art of Dancing and Pride and Prejudice, there is no denying that dancing had a huge impact on Regency culture. Dancing definitely held a prominent place in entertainment, for a person’s character and fate were often judged by their dancing.