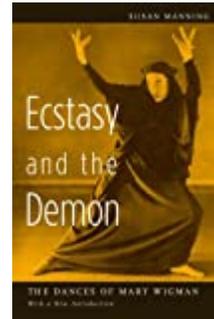




Susan Manning. *Ecstasy and the Demon: The Dances of Mary Wigman.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006. xxxvii + 353 pp. \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8166-3802-4.



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Published on H-German (July, 2007)

Dancing with the Devil

Susan Manning's persuasive study of Mary Wigman, one of the most influential dancers during the first half of the twentieth century, is based on her earlier *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman*, which was first published in 1993. Rather than a "new edition," then, as the publishers claim, this is a reprint with a new introduction.

In her extensive new introduction, however, Manning manages to relate her book to new research and contemporary discourses. She also makes clear that her own approach has shifted since 1993, even as she insists it was important not to change the original book. Manning claims that her original approach, while illuminating "representations of gender dissidence," occluded "representations of sexual dissidence" (p. xiv). Manning also realises that her focus on "nationalism in Wigman's choreography precluded sustained attention to how her choreographic works crossed national borders" (p. xiv). In her earlier approach Manning used the concepts of the "male gaze and female spectatorship," but now claims this strategy precluded her from differentiating between sexual orientations of performers and audiences alike (p.

xvi). Wigman's possible bisexuality is a case in point. Manning had decided not to mention Wigman's alleged love affairs with her former students Berthe Tr mpy and Vera Skoronel, among others, but rethought her assumptions afterwards as Wigman's sexuality almost certainly played a crucial role in the development of her choreography. Manning rightly points out that questions of sexuality mattered not only in relation to her personal aesthetic decisions but also in the wider public arena, and especially under National Socialism. Although the Nazis tried to incorporate 1920s *Ausdruckstanz* into *v lkisch* concepts of *Deutscher Tanz*, homosexual artists suffered severe restrictions and persecution. This aspect is further complicated by the active engagement/entanglement of dancers and choreographers like Wigman with the Nazi dictatorship, a fact Wigman herself successfully erased from the postwar discourse by means of her memoirs. This action, in turn offers Manning the opportunity to challenge convincingly claims of a sharp break between Weimar and Nazi culture and to relate Wigman's career to a more general phenomenon in the arts.

Regarding the other aspect of crossing national bor-

ders and overcoming conventional approaches to write “dance histories in relation to the nation-state” (p. xxi), Manning stresses that her earlier approach was insufficient as it left the international perspective of Wigman’s career aside. She is certainly right to assert that an exploration of Wigman’s influence through her pupils who went to teach in countries worldwide is significant. Manning also raises the intriguing question of how Wigman’s cultural allusions (for example, her use of Noh masks) changed significance when crossing national boundaries.

Given this influence and the importance of the dance reform movement in Europe and beyond, it is all the more surprising that Wigman as a dancer/choreographer and *Ausdruckstanz* more generally have been marginalized since 1945. The first serious re-engagement with the movement only took place during the 2003 retrospective exhibition “Krokodil im Schwanensee: Tanz in Deutschland seit 1945” in Germany.[1]

Manning detects similar attempts by commentators to sideline the importance of *Ausdruckstanz* in general and Wigman in particular when she notes the failure to acknowledge their influence on the development of modern dance in the United States. In fact, many commentators have tried to erase this tradition and constructed “an artistic heritage based on native sources” alone (p. xxxiii). Although this fact is interesting, it does not become entirely clear why Manning intervenes in this debate in this particular study. Apart from the fact that Wigman toured the United States and influenced American modern dance (an influence also noted elsewhere), the last chapter on “Mary Wigman and American Dance” sits oddly with the rest of the book, which is almost entirely concerned with Germany (with an excellent chapter on Wigman’s reception in the divided Germany). To her credit, however, Manning addresses this unevenness at least in part by questioning the importance of national boundaries for dance history in her new introduction.

Manning, however, is not only concerned with “rescuing” *Ausdruckstanz* from oblivion. She is also fascinated by Wigman’s attempts to construct an identity untainted by her entanglement with the Nazi regime. She

presented herself as a victim of Nazi oppression, an artist branded “degenerate” by the regime. This version of events was largely taken for granted by postwar commentators, and it only later emerged (thanks largely to Hedwig MÅ¼ller’s biography) that Wigman was not only supportive of the regime but also received generous funding and commissions from Goebbels.[2] In fact, she remained the figurehead of German dance all through the Nazi years.

Susan Manning convincingly locates Wigman’s dances “at a convergence between feminism and nationalism” (p. xxxiii). This red thread runs through her entire study—and is both an original statement and a highly persuasive one. In slight contrast to this innovative assertion, the book’s structure largely follows a traditional approach, tracing the chronology of Wigman’s life from her first experiences with dance before the First World War, the taking-off of her career during Weimar Germany, her entanglement with the Nazis, and her life, work, and reception after 1945 in Germany and the United States. At the same time, Manning is able to frame this traditional structure in an approach that questions conventional dance scholarship. Her book significantly adds to our knowledge of *Ausdruckstanz*, Mary Wigman, and more generally to the historicization of dance. In this sense Manning’s study links well to recent critical scholarship on dance under National Socialism.[3] At the same time, and in particular with this new introduction to her volume, Manning successfully develops crucial issues further and enriches the debate.

Notes

[1]. Hedwig MÅ¼ller, Ralf Stabel, and Patricia StÅ¼ckemann, *Krokodil im Schwanensee: Tanz in Deutschland seit 1945* (GieÅen: Anabas, 2003).

[2]. Hedwig MÅ¼ller, *Mary Wigman: Leben und Werk der grossen TÅnzerin* (Berlin: Quadriga, 1986).

[3]. Lilian Karina and Marion Kant, *Tanz unterm Hakenkreuz. Eine Dokumentation*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Henschel, 1999).

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Citation: Anselm C. Heinrich. Review of Manning, Susan, *Ecstasy and the Demon: The Dances of Mary Wigman*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. July, 2007.

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