

SATIRICAL DANCE TEXTS AS HISTORICAL SOURCES TWO EXAMPLES FROM SPAIN

NANCY LEE RUYTER

Associate Professor of Dance

University of California, Irvine, USA

Texto del Congreso "La Memoria de la Danza". Barcelona

In 1796, under the pseudonym "Don Preciso," Juan Antonio de Iza Zamácola y Ozerín published *Elementos de la ciencia contradanzaria* (Elements of the contradance science)¹. This lampoon of a scientific treatise scoffs at the then fashionable fad of the contradance, a French import and the rage among Spaniards who spurned native culture in favor of foreign styles of dance, dress and manners. In 1807, in a work titled *La Bolerología*, Juan Jacinto Rodríguez Calderón, satirized the bolero, a native Spanish dance that appealed to a different part of the population. His particular focus is on the ubiquitous bolero academies that he had observed in Madrid in 1794 and 1795 and those who attended them².

These two works take opposite sides on the issue of native versus foreign culture (a crucial conflict in their era), but they are actually similar in several ways. Each opposes slavish adherence to fashion (whatever its

¹ Don Preciso (pseudonym of Juan Antonio Iza Zamácola y Ozerin, *Elementos de la ciencia contradanzaria. Para que los Currutacos Pirracas, y Madamitas del Nuevo Cuño puedan aprender por principios a baylar las Contradanzas por sí solos, o con las sillas de su casa, &c. &c. &c.* (Elements of the contradance science, so that the dandies, fops and little new style ladies can learn to dance the contradances by themselves or with the chairs of the house, etc., etc., etc.) (Madrid: La Imprenta de la Viuda de José García, 1796).

² Juan Jacinto Rodríguez Calderón, *La Bolerología o Quadro de las Escuelas del Baile Bolero, tales cuales eran en 1794 y 1795, en la corte de España* (Bolerology, or a picture of the bolero schools as they were in 1794 and 1795 in the capital of Spain) (Philadelphia: Imprenta de Zacharias Poulson, 1807).

focus), draws attention to particular dance forms and reflects the prominent place of dance in the society. They were both written by men who were *not* dance professionals to discredit the respective dances and their adherents in an amusing way. In other words, these books are not dance treatises for the professional dancer or dance master or for the nonprofessional who wished to study independently. Both, however, demonstrate knowledge of dance practice, technique and terminology and one wonders how much time the authors must have spent learning so much about the dances they apparently despised and writing such lengthy exercises in exaggeration, sarcasm and ridicule. After an introduction to these two works and their authors I will discuss their use as sources for 18th-century Spanish dance history.

Iza Zamácola (1756-1826) had apparently developed an interest and facility in native dance and music from his childhood days and his education in the Basque Provinces³. He moved to Madrid in the 1770's to then assume the profession of notary. There he associated with a group of fellow intellectuals who also enjoyed traditional Spanish music and dance. They reportedly amused themselves by mocking those of their countrymen who spurned native culture in favor of foreign manners, customs and social diversions. Among the circle was Friar Juan Fernández de Rojas who, under various pseudonyms, published several works that satirized the imported fashions⁴. It might have been this author's *Crotalogía o Ciencia de las castañuelas* (Crotalogy, or the science of castanets), a parody of French-derived scientific writing⁵, that gave Iza Zamácola the idea of using similar

³ Biographical information may be found in Domingo Hergueta y Martín, *Don Preciso: Su vida y sus obras* (Don Preciso: His life and his works) (Madrid: Revista de Archivos, 1930); J. M. Cossio, "Una biografía de Don Preciso" (A biography of Don Preciso), *Revista de Bibliografía Nacional*, vol. 5 (1944); and Carmen Garcia-Matos Alonso, "Un folclorista del siglo XVIII: Don Preciso" (A folklorist of the 18th century), *Revista de Musicología* (Madrid) 4/2 (1981).

⁴ Hergueta y Martín 8-9; Javier Suárez-Pajares, "Collection of Texts," *Studies in Dance History* IV/1 (Spring 1993): 91-93.

⁵ Francisco Agustin Florencio (pseudonym of Friar Juan Fernández de Rojas), *Crotalogía o Ciencia de las castañuelas. Instrucción científica del modo de tocar las castañuelas para bailar el Bolero y poder facilmente y sin necesidad de Maestro, acompañarse en todas las mudanzas de que está adornado este gracioso Bayle español. Parte primera. . . .* (Crotalogy, or the science of the

tactics to express his own strong opinions through satire⁶. In any case, the latter began publishing attacks on Spanish francophile fashions when he was about 40 years of age. In May 1795, in the *Diario de Madrid*, the capital's most important newspaper, there appeared his imaginary exchange between one Don Preciso (Sir Precise) and another invented character, Don Currutaco (Sir Dandy). The Preciso letter mocked the contradance and particularly the young elitists who were so taken with it. The Currutaco response expressed outrage and accused Don Preciso of being cruel and insensitive in his insults against the most brilliant members of Madrid society, i.e., the dandies and fashionable ladies⁷.

These letters were just the beginning. The following year Iza Zamácola published his *Elementos de la ciencia contradanzaria* which comprised 43 pages of preliminaries, including the newspaper exchanges of 1795, and a main text of 174 pages. The latter begins with "histories"—of the dances and science of contradance; of the "Currutacos, Pirracas y Madamitas del nuevo cuño" (Dandies, Fops and Little New-Style Ladies); and of the dispersion of contradancing throughout Spain. The core of the volume is devoted to specific elements of the contradance: one section on its structure and rhythm and the other 19 on individual steps and figures. In succeeding chapters, Iza Zamácola applies his sarcastic wit to contradance music, to the Bastonero (dance leader or caller), to contradance enthusiasts and their fashionable clothing for the dance and to a typical dance occasion. Finally, the work ends with five scenarios for contradances with far-fetched stories

Scientific instruction in the method of playing castanets to dance the bolero and to be able, with facility and without need of a teacher, to accompany all the steps that adorn this graceful Spanish dance. First Part. It contains an exact idea of the instrument called castanets, their origin, manner of use, and the elementary precepts reduced to a rigorous geometric method, together with the invention of some harmonic castanets that can be tuned and combined with other instruments.) (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1792) There were six additional editions in 1792, two in 1798, and reprints in 1882 and 1985. For details on these, see Suárez-Pajares, "Collection of Texts," 95-96.

⁶ Hergueta y Martín 10-11.

⁷ These letters and others attributed to Iza Zamácola are discussed and reprinted in Hergueta y Martín as well as being included in Iza Zamácola's *Elementos*.

of mythical events from the classical world or odd characters from the contemporary social scene.

It is important to note that Iza Zamácola did not limit himself to writing satire *against* what he opposed. He is best known, and has continued to be known up to the present time, for a positive work—one that promotes native Spanish music and dance. In 1799 he published the first volume of his eventual two volume *Colección de las mejores coplas de seguidillas, tiranas y polos, que se han compuesto para cantar la guitarra* (Collection of the best verses of seguidillas, tiranas and polos composed to sing with the guitar)⁸.

The work includes introductory material in which Iza Zamácola not only rails against foreign imports but argues vigorously in favor of the native culture.

These volumes provide a perspective from which to view his *Elementos* and insight into his rationale for ridiculing the contradance and its place in the Spanish cultural scene.

Little is known of the life of Juan Jacinto Rodríguez Calderón. On the title page of *La Bolerología* he identifies himself as an adjutant of the Spanish urban militia on Puerto Rico and interpreter of English, French, Italian and Portuguese for the Captaincy General, the authority that governed the colony. The musicologist Javier Suárez-Pajares writes that "such a position qualified him to be the unquestioned leader of the dandy brotherhood" if such indeed existed⁹. What seems to **be implied here is that** it would require a dandy—committed to the French style—to ridicule and oppose so vehemently the native bolero. In his dedication to his uncle, an abbot in Galicia, Rodríguez Calderón mentions that he had written this work earlier, when serving in the mishaps that kept him from bringing it to completion. In 1798, he published a satirical one-man short scene for amateur performance that also lampooned fashionable affectations¹⁰.

⁹ Javier Suárez-Pajares, "Historical Overview of the Bolero from its Beginnings to the Genesis of the Bolero School," *Studies in Dance History* IV/1 (Spring 1993): 13.

¹⁰ Mentioned in Suárez-Pajares, "Collection of Texts," 93; full citation on p. 127 of the same volume.

La Bolerología is a cautionary tale. The preliminaries, which take up 13 pages, begin with the dedication to his uncle followed by a prologue to the "extremely knowledgeable" students of the bolero academies in Madrid, Cadiz, Seville, Cordoba, Murcia and other towns which established bolero schools. The body of the work is headed "Anti-bolerología o la total ruina del baile bolero" (Anti-bolerology, or the total ruin of the bolero dance) and runs to 123 pages. It is a rambling story of the narrator's chance visit to a Madrid bolero academy where he meets an assortment of bolero enthusiasts. Prominent among them are the Maestro Caldereta, the teacher and director of the academy; Doña Porcia, a fanatical mother intent on promoting her daughter's social standing; and Doña Clara, the unfortunate and snippy young daughter who sustains a permanent injury from showing off while dancing. In the course of the narration, Rodríguez Calderón has Caldereta deliver a long lecture in which the maestro refers to people he associates with the bolero's historical development and other real or invented individuals, describes **aspects of the bolero's context and practice**, and also discusses 12 of its movements or figures. It is information from this lecture that is most often quoted or paraphrased in subsequent historical writings.

While to the 20th-century reader these works seem to go on interminably, with their exaggeration, minute details and tedious repetition, this style of writing was popular in its time. The mocking letters written by Iza Zamácola and other such items were published in a major newspaper. And, there was apparently a market for the satirical books. Fernández de Rojas' *Crotalogia*, for example, went through several editions from 1792 to 1798 (see note 5), and Iza Zamácola's biographer, Domingo Hergueta y Martín, states that the *Elementos de la ciencia contradanzaria* came out in two editions in 1796 with two different publishers; that within a few months it had sold three thousand copies; and that it was still being announced and sold in 1799¹¹. I have no idea to what extent *Bolerología* was distributed;

¹¹ Hergueta y Martín 28-29.

how it happened to be published in the United States; how many copies were printed; and whether they were sent off to Spain, distributed in Latin America, or what.

Both of these volumes (as well as those of Fernández de Rojas) have been used as historical documents for the study of late 18th century Spanish dance.

Some scholars take them as reliable sources of historically valid information that is merely couched in a satirical style, while others identify the satire as primary and suggest (hope) only that there *may* be some genuine historical data embedded in it. Some examples of the varying approaches may be found in Serafín Estébanez Calderón's *Escenas Andaluzas* (1847)¹², Charles E. Kany's *Life and Manners in Madrid, 1750-1800* (1932)¹³, Aurelio Capmany's "El baile y la danza" (1944)¹⁴, Anna Ivanova's *The Dance in Spain: A History* (1970)¹⁵, Maurice Esses' *Dance and Instrumental Diferencias in Spain during the 17th and Early 18th Centuries, Volume I* (1990)¹⁶, and Javier Suárez-Pajares articles of 1992 and 1993 on the history of the bolero and the bolero school" (1993)¹⁷.

In his broad presentation of many aspects of Andalusian life, Estébanez Calderón devotes three chapters to the dance –one of which is on the bolero

¹² Serafín Estébanez Calderón, *Escenas andaluzas . . .* (Andalusian scenes . . .) (Madrid: Imprenta de Baltasar González, 1847; Facsimile edition Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1983).

¹³ (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1932; reprinted New York:AMS Press, 1970).

¹⁴ In *Folklore y costumbres de España* (Folklore and costumes of Spain), Carreras y Candi (Barcelona: Casa Editorial Alberto Martín, 1944), pp. 169-418.

¹⁵ (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970). It was published in Spanish as: *El alma española y el baile* (The Spanish soul and the dance) (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1973). References here will be to the English edition.

¹⁶ Volume I. *History and Background, Music and Dance* (Stuyvesant, New York: Pendragon Press, 1990).

¹⁷ *Studies in Dance History* (Journal of the Society of Dance History Scholars) Vol. IV, No. 1: *The Origins of the Bolero School*, eds. Javier Suárez-Pajares and Xoan M. Carreira (Spring 1993), pp. 1-19. An earlier version of this essay (in Spanish) is "El bolero, síntesis histórica" (The bolero, historical synthesis) in *Encuentro Internacional: La Escuela Bolera*, ed. Roger Salas (Madrid: Instituto Nacional de las Artes Escénicas y la Música, Ministerio de Cultura, 1992), pp. 187-193.

and its history. For sources he read major Spanish texts on dance such as those of Juan Esquivel Navarro (17th century), Pablo Minguet e Irol (18th century) –and Rodríguez Calderón¹⁸. The problem is that he fails to distinguish between the serious nature of the earlier works and the satirical intent of *La bolerología*. Thus, he takes information straight out of the maestro's lecture in the latter work (on the origin of the bolero, the inventors of various steps or variations, etc.) as if it were historical fact¹⁹. The irony is that subsequent historians have sometimes used Estebanez Calderon as an authority without realizing (or caring about) the source of his data.

For his rich and detailed account of Spanish life in the 18th century, Charles Kany draws heavily on many satiric writings of the era as well as on other kinds of materials. Well aware of the pitfalls of gleaning historical information from satire, he cautions, "It would be regrettable if . . . an injudicious reader were to take the exaggerations at their face value. His distorted impressions would then be similar to that made by an essay on Boston society, for instance, compiled from the satiric and comic sections of the Sunday newspaper"²⁰. And yet, in Chapter Ten, "The Tertulia," in which he describes dance practices, Kany draws heavily on Iza Zamácola's newspaper letters and *Elementos* and apparently does take at least some of the statements at full face value. He presents information about the contradance, its specific variations and the role of the Bastonero without either discussing Iza Zamácola's intentions as presented through the persona of Don Preciso or comparing any of the data to serious 18th or early 19th century treatises on the contradance²¹. Another historian, Aurelio Capmany, similarly stresses the humorous quality of Iza Zamácola's *Elementos* –but also neglects to analyze the statements in the book in terms of intention or reliability²².

¹⁸ Estébanez Calderón 26.

¹⁹ Estébanez Calderón 28-29, from Rodríguez Calderón 23-26, 35-46.

²⁰ Kany xiii.

²¹ Kany 273-279.

²² Capmany 217-218.

In *The Dance in Spain*, Anna Ivanova provides more extensive coverage of Iza Zamácola's *Elementos* than Kany or Capmany. She quotes or paraphrases passages from this work and from Rodríguez Calderón's *Bolerología* to illustrate what she terms the new "danceologies." Unfortunately, her presentation contains misspelled names and misinterpreted passages. In addition to such errors, she often rearranges the material and with utter abandon –and no indication whatever– adds and subtracts from passages that are presented as direct quotation. She also sometimes makes unfounded conclusions.

With all that, Ivanova nevertheless provides a somewhat informative overview of what these works contain. What is missing is scholarly rigor and critical questioning.

The kind of problems one finds in Ivanova can be seen in her treatment of a passage from the Caldereta lecture in *La Bolerología*. The maestro makes the ridiculous claim that the bolero is universally popular (under different names) particularly among Swedes, Russians, Lapps, Tartars, Poles, Frenchmen and Italians –and then the passage continues with the believable statement that the bolero is originally Spanish, best performed by Spaniards, popular throughout Spain, and considered necessary in Spain as an element of education. Ivanova states, "This extract makes it quite clear that at the end of the eighteenth century, the bolero was in the forefront of Spanish social dances, even superseding the French dances in public favor"²³. Whether or not the bolero had superseded the French dances by then, this extract cannot be taken as evidence. In the first place, it doesn't say what Ivanova would have it say. Secondly, half of it is clearly ridiculous. Finally, the statement is not presented by Rodríguez Calderón as credible fact, but rather as part of that long lecture by the fictional Maestro Caldereta who is thoroughly mocked and discredited throughout the book.

In contrast to the preceding authors, Maurice Esses –in his exhaustive study of 17th and early 18th century Spanish dance and music– is very

²³ The original passage is in Rodríguez Calderón, pp. 47-48; Ivanova's version and interpretation in *The Dance in Spain*, pp. 108-109.

careful to point out that all the passages he cites from *Elementos* are satirical and should be taken with caution²⁴. His only lapse is in a note where he refers the reader to Kany for descriptions in English of some of the contradance figures, without considering that Kany took them straight from the satirical *Elementos*²⁵.

With a similarly cautious approach, Suárez-Pajares makes extensive use of *La Bolerología* with frequent references to its satirical nature. While details in the Caldereta lecture that are presented as historical, may not yet (or ever) be confirmable, Suárez-Pajares finds them "important at the present stage of research"²⁶. In most cases they are all we have and worth being checked out –but not worth being believed without corroboration. And in all his uses of information from Rodríguez Calderón, this scholar carefully compares, contrasts and evaluates everything in terms of statements from other sources.

When I began this project, my basic questions were: 1) to what extent satirical works such as these can provide the dance historian with reliable information; and 2) do such works require strategies of analysis and critical evaluation different than those we use in dealing with any historical documents. To take up the first question: in studying these works and the various uses that have been made of them, I conclude that one cannot make general statements about the reliability of satirical works. Each one is unique and presents its own measure and type of credibility or in looking at only these two works, one finds extreme differences in content, form, style and the nature of the satire employed. For example, Iza Zamácola's is a tightly organized work in the form of a treatise which occasionally includes narrative passages, while Rodríguez Calderón has written a loosely organized soap opera narrative that is interrupted for some 25 pages by a rambling lecture. Iza Zamácola's characters –the Currutacos, Pirracas and Madamitas de Nuevo Cuno– are generalized caricatures, often with totally

²⁴ See, for example, pp. 458-460.

²⁵ Esses 456, n. 163, referring to Kany 277-279.

²⁶ Suárez-Pajares, "Collection of Texts," 110.

unbelievable aspects (a dwarfish physical size, for example), while Rodríguez Calderón's are believable individuals, even if exaggerated. Who has not known the ambitious mother trying to push her offspring onward and upward to glory? Or the pedantic teacher so confident in his often poorly founded knowledge?

And some of the other characters in this work are not even mocked, but presented in a more or less realistic light. On the other hand, Iza Zamácola gives far more detailed (and often apparently reliable) information on contradance steps and variations than Rodríguez Calderón provides for the bolero. One gets the very strong impression that, for all his professed hatred of the contradance, Iza Zamácola knew while Rodríguez Calderón's knowledge of the bolero appears to be superficial. In short, the reliability of any aspect of these satiric works varies with the author, his knowledge, his intention, etc.

Regarding the second question, there seems to be little difference in the methods of analysis and evaluation that should be applied to satiric or non-satiric works. The most basic principle—that of attempting to corroborate information by consulting other sources—is really what should be done with all documents. Any text can provide erroneous information. The author of a non-satirical text may have incorrect data; may be careless in his or her own selection, analysis or evaluation of it; or may simply have an agenda that leads to its willful distortion. What is additional in the satirical text is the author's clear and overt intention to exaggerate and distort in order to be humorous, mocking or even venomous. The subsequent historian's task then is to try to determine what the author has made up or intentionally distorted and what might be intended as credible information. For example, the people referred to in Rodríguez Calderón's work are probably mostly fictitious characters with the possible or probable exception of a few names featured in the Caldereta lecture (such as Anton Boliche and Requejo). As noted by Suárez-Pajares, when passages concerning such figures are compared with other sources, it appears that they may actually be

historical²⁷. A question to ponder is to what extent Rodríguez Calderón intended Caldereta's lecture to reflect what was generally believed to be the history of the bolero at that time.

In these works both authors use dance terminology that can be verified in serious dance treatises of the 18th century. A potentially useful project is to compare the use and descriptions of these terms in both the serious and the satiric texts. Can statements in the latter shed light on any dance practices that may be unclear in the former? Or, are they simply parodies of what may be found in the serious writings?

Another line of pursuit is to analyze the kinds of people associated with the dance genres in satiric works and the attitudes of the authors toward them. In the works discussed here, for example, Rodríguez Calderón and Iza Zamácola identify the same urban subculture with the bolero and other Spanish native dances—the workers and craftsmen of certain neighborhoods in Madrid.

But where Iza Zamácola sees virtue and patriotism among these people, Rodríguez Calderón criticizes them as irresponsible idlers who ignore their practical and useful trades to waste time on the bolero craze. Perhaps there is some truth in both views.

In conclusion, I would argue that works such as Iza Zamácola's *Elementos de la ciencia Contradanzaria* and Rodríguez Calderón's *La Bolerología* do have much to tell us about the past—as long as we approach them with a healthy scepticism and don't believe everything they say. Even more important, perhaps, is that they have much to suggest to us. After all, they are not totally imaginary works; they are satires on what the authors observed and experienced in their own environment. They are based on reality, so they may be able to put us on the trail of some aspects of reality that might elude us otherwise.

Iza Zamácola, Rodríguez Calderón and other satirists may have clues for us that would not find their way into serious dance treatises. So let us

²⁷ "Historical Overview," 4-5, 7, 9, 14-16.

not dismiss them out of hand, but take a chance –with eyes wide open and minds alert. Let us join in their satirical dances, cavort and play with these Jocular Gentlemen, and see where their whimsy might lead us.

Abstract

Este artículo comenta dos textos españoles: uno sobre la contradanza, publicado en el 1796, y otro sobre el bolero (1807). Ambos fueron escritos por profesionales fuera del mundo de la danza para satirizar lo que vieron como excesos de moda durante sus respectivas épocas. ¿Hasta qué punto pueden textos satíricos como éstos proporcionar al historiador de danza datos y un entendimiento de la misma en sus contextos social y de época y lugar –en este caso entre la élite urbana a finales del siglo XVIII y al inicio del siglo XIX en España– que sean seguros? ¿Cómo podemos distinguir entre lo que es una exageración satírica o información errónea, y lo que puede ser información seria?