

## Interpreting the Dances of Gregorio Lambranzi

### Or: A Portrait of the Artist as an Heir of Greek Theatre

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#### Introduction

Gregorio Lambranzi's principal legacy to us is the lavishly illustrated 'picture book' entitled *New and Curious Theatrical Dance School*, published in Nuremberg in 1716 [Fig.1].<sup>1</sup> The *Dance School* is essentially a textbook on stage dance, which seeks to impart its knowledge by a "curious and graceful method".



**Fig. 1.** Frontispiece of the 1716 publication

The book consists entirely of whole-page illustrations, each corresponding to a single

dance, with a minimum of accompanying words describing the dance, and a line or two of single stave music at the top of each page. Words and music are both incorporated into the illustrations. Apart from this, there is virtually no explanatory text. How the pictures with their rudimentary dance descriptions are to be interpreted is left entirely to the viewer. As such, the book is wholly enigmatic and inevitably leads one to wonder just how it is meant to be interpreted; just what is the 'curious and graceful method'?<sup>2</sup>

One must infer that the puzzlement of the viewer is intentional. In other words, it is these visual puzzles themselves that comprise the 'curious' teaching method. Picture puzzles hidden behind the illustrations of the *Dance School* are meant to be discovered by the viewer, while explanations, reasons, or generalizations on the part of the author are withheld. Much of the responsibility for the visual complexity of the illustrations must, of course, be laid at the hands of the engraver, Johann Georg Puschner.<sup>3</sup> The original manuscript by Lambranzi was discovered in 1936 in the Bavarian State Library. This contains 85 pen drawings out of the 101 that appear in the printed version. But the drawings in the manuscript are far less detailed than those of the final print, and show just the music and the principal figure(s) without the text underlay or stage representation [Fig. 2]. The assumption is that all of the added detail in the printed version comes from a close collaboration between Lambranzi and his engraver Puschner.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the *Dance School's* repertory of almost one hundred dances, Lambranzi shows

himself as a proponent of the new ‘gallant’ style of dance and theatre, which captured the attention of audiences at that time. The intellectual centre and the creative potential of the gallant style lay in its translation of the artistic canon of classical antiquity into forms that were familiar to the early 18th century. Thus, if the illustrations of the *Dance School* are picture-riddles depicting the gallant style, then it is to be expected that they point to the form and content of classical mythology.



Fig. 2. Plate1 of original manuscript

## 1. Apollo

As an illustration, we will consider the first plate of the printed edition of Lambranzi’s book.

What do we see in this figure of a gentleman when we look at his position relative to the observer? The figure is placed in a central position in the picture, showing his profile. The audience follows the line of action, from right to left across the stage.

What does the figure’s body posture say? It is following something that the observer is not allowed to see. The action is driven forward by the left half of the body and is taken back by the right half. The figure is composed and assertive. This action describes the antique topos of the archer, that of the ‘hunting Apollo’ [Fig.4].<sup>5</sup>

What does the costume tell us about the figure? He is wearing the clothing of the male nobility, fashioned after the nostalgic style of the *ancien régime*. The jacket covers no more than the buttocks. It is the suit of a young man.

What does the mask and the wig tell us about the figure? The face (or mask) is accentuated with a prominent nose which creates a classical profile. The wig is slightly matted. This negligence follows a common rule of education: A young nobleman was not allowed to place too much emphasis on his appearance, in order not to be considered an attention-seeker.



Fig. 3. Plate1 - Entre - from the 1716 publication



### Stage

The view of the observer is led to the right half of the stage, suggesting that the actor has entered from this side. An entrance against normal 'reading direction' [that is, from left to right of the page] means that the actor is a stranger to this place.

The direction and intensity of shadows indicates that a strong light has been set in the hall to the right of the stage. This shows the actor the way. He throws out a strong shadow in front of him, demonstrating that he has the advantage. The light is more diffused to the left; something there seems strange to the actor, who initially holds back. But he then decides to encounter the imaginary challenge and begins the dance.

The horizontal pattern of the floor-boards make the narrow stage appear wide. Hat, arm and stage flooring emphasize the intense concentration and penetrating gaze of the performer.

### Written commentary

The written commentary [text in German in the box below the stage] gives four dancing themes for the scene: *pas capriole a coté*, left and right, *pas pirolet*, *pas rigaudon* and *pas coupé*. The *pas capriole* captures the hunting motive of the figure, the *pas pirolet* reflects the turning viewpoint of the dancer towards something or away from something, the *pas de rigaudon* demands something, and the *pas coupé* sets something in motion. All four actions create the affect of 'attention'. You can follow something with your full attention, you can give your attention to something. You can demand attention and use attention. The *pas capriole* is a dancing paraphrase of Apollo hunting with bow and arrow. The *pas pirolet* refers to Apollo, leader of the muses, and the *pas rigaudon* and the *pas coupé* show Apollo's competitive nature, like the lute-playing Apollo. The manner of execution of all four movement themes should relate to the figure. The action is motivated forward from either the right or the left half of the body, and at the same time is taken back by the opposing half. The action is not allowed to

stumble, nor is the view allowed to tremble. This behavioral ideal is one that is imperative for a young graceful nobleman in his daily life at court, with its formalities and intrigues. We might interpret this as necessitating a kind of 'stoic resolve' in confronting the challenges of court life.

### ● Figure: second view

The figure does not suggest or represent anything too beautiful. The pictured performer, presumably Gregorio Lambranzi, is small and thick-set. Posture and fashion work together to make the dancer appear tall and imposing. The slight belting of the jacket plays a role here. The upper body is not confined, but rather it is completely over-formed. On the other hand, the posture is held right to the tips of the fingers. The slightly lifted ring finger of the relaxed, raised hand shows inner stability. The view is concentrated without gazing and is slightly shadowed by the fold in the hat. Together with the matted wig, the courtly, precise figure is surrounded by an adventurous flickering. It is stoic restrained rage, which can break out at any time into decisive action.

### Music

*Pas capriole*, *pas pirolet*, *pas rigaudon*, and *pas coupé* are familiar French step composites, or 'themes', in which two or more step elements are combined.

The music which is suggested for this dance is consistent with this composition. Two short melodic motives are connected to one bar. This type of dance, which is also the approach of the music, is given in the title of the scene: *Entré*. The melody line of the composition can be found in the upper third of the picture.

Also the French sources from this period show Lambranzi's *entré* music to be out of the ordinary. It is generally called *entré grave*. Two of Feuillet's publications of *entré grave* carry the title *Entré d'Apollon*. Lambranzi is thus dealing with a dance subject that was well-known at this time. The corresponding French dances also use *caprioles*, turns in place, jumps in place and *coupés*. However, they are performed in the opposite order. A

French *entré grave* begins with *coupés* and ends with a phrase on *caprioles*. In addition, French *entrés* are danced with the body facing front, and not in profile, as in Lambranzi's illustration. The French form is based on the convention of a polite visit. Such a visit goes through three phases: proper entrance, short stay, and quick exit. Lambranzi's performer comes unannounced. He ambushes the place, but does so with refined manners.<sup>6</sup>



**Fig.4.** Hunting Apollo from Flötner's Apollo Fountain (Nuremberg, 1532)

### Dramaturgy

●What can we say about the physical space in which the performer prepares to release his stoic resolve through this simulated display of controlled anger?

The stage space is presented equally as both representative and impersonal, typical of an open public building. The wide-open 'fourth wall' or hallway implies that we are dealing with an entrance hall which breaks off into a right and left corridor. In this way, a central meeting place is removed from direct view, a construction typical of a temple complex. The flecked marble *craquelé* of the wall

decoration points to the use of fire. Steam rising from the floor of the left corridor points to the use of water. A temple in which fire and water are used is a 'source' temple [that is, one with a hidden spring or hot gaseous vent].

Thus, the performer prepares to release himself from his stoic resolve [by a display of controlled anger] within a source temple, as Apollo did when he hunted the fleeing Python into the Oracle of Delphi and killed it. There the hunt of the Python into the Oracle was not simply an act of defense, but a demonstration rather of Apollo's desire for power.

- The performer stands in stage space, but also on a stage pedestal, and from this position another story is told. It is the story of the text medallion. It is designed with swinging rococo arabesques and is casually leaning against the stage podium. The medallion is crowned with a sea shell. That associates the medallion with the production of water. The medallion is a fountain. The entire form is surrounded by grapevines. The fountain brings life to the earth and gives fruitfulness. The elements of water and earth, which are responsible for bringing fruit to the earth, easily submit themselves under the nonchalant confident posture of the figurine as the muses willingly accept the leadership of the god Apollo. In the context of the stage space, the angry confidence of the figure is emphasized. Regarding the text medallion, the casualness of the figure takes form. It stands growing out of the top of the text medallion like the statue in a fountain.

The Apollo fountain has been a particularly popular subject ever since the late Renaissance. In Nürnberg, where the *Dance School* was published, one can still see an example created by Peter Flötner [Fig.4].<sup>7</sup>

Two of the four movement themes suggested by Lambranzi - the hunting theme, *capriol à coté* and the 'turning towards something' motive, *pas pirolet* -- have now been dramaturgically introduced.

This background allows one to create a menacing main theme and a cheerful side

theme. Remaining are the third and fourth themes - the *pas rigaudon* and the *pas coupé*.

- Just as the figure can be examined in relation to the stage space and the stage pedestal, it can be seen and interpreted in relation to the formation of the proscenium sulfite. The designer Puschner creates the proscenium curtain in the form of a festival tent awning, with scalloped edges. The figure is holding court like Apollo at a musical competition. The *pas coupé* becomes the theme of the lute-playing Apollo. He can become cunning even during a musical competition, when he is threatened with losing.

The upper section of the proscenium screen is attached to the stage frame with three large nails -- a reference to the ill-treated satyr Marsyas. He had unwisely challenged the god to a musical duel. Apollo, being a god, defeated the satyr and as punishment for his temerity in challenging him had poor Marsyas flayed and his skin nailed to a tree.<sup>8</sup> The *pas rigaudon* becomes the theme of the flute-playing and later ill-treated satyr.

- If you put together the stories chosen by Lambranzi and Puschner, the detailed behavioral portrait of a young courtly favorite who models himself on Apollo emerges. The courtly minion finds his power on violence and is therefore covered from the highest side. He solidifies his influence by building the power of his own house and legitimizes his position through gifts of all sorts. Any remaining resistance he destroys through brutal intrigue. He is not likable, but there is almost no one who can resist him. He goes his way, continuously and relentlessly. If he enters the stage from the right, then he will exit from the left.

### **Conclusion and Perspectives**

Lambranzi and Puschner's *Entré d' Apollon* is an action-orientated solo dance meant to be performed with strict technical execution. It is the behavioral portrait of a young courtly minion.

The dance is oriented horizontally on the stage from right to left and is danced to a large extent in profile.

The gestures of the action are demonstrated through the body posture of the figure. His posture resembles the ancient topos of archery, that of the hunting Apollo.

Lambranzi gives four movement themes for the dance -- *pas capriol a coté*, *pas pirolet*, *pas rigaudon*, and *pas coupé*. The first etude of the dance coordinates these four themes with the body posture of the figure.

The music for the dance, an *entré grave*, follows the French pattern. But the French *entré* follows the rules of a visit to court. Lambranzi and Puschner's *entré* follows the rules of a surprise visit.

Lambranzi and Puschner present three distinct possibilities for the interpretation of the figure: in connection to the stage space (with its visual features and layout), to the stage pedestal (with its text description) and to the proscenium curtain (with its music notation). Following this information the reader is able to understand the dramaturgical background of the dance. The movement themes are related to singular episodes from the mythology of the god Apollo and to the life design of a young courtly minion.

The detailed structural and dramaturgical directions derived from the information carried by each illustration make it possible for the reader to discover his own goals when he sets these directions into his dance. In this way the reader has the possibility to grow with the book. Since information is given in the form of a puzzle, each reader will discover only as much as he seeks.



## 2. Scaramuzza

Our second example is taken from a set of eight illustrations [Plates 23-30] that occur later in the book, those of Scaramuzza [or Scaramouche].<sup>9</sup> The commedia character Capitano Scaramuzza is a representation of ‘everyman’. He wants everything and everything he wants has to be the best. But Scaramuzza has a handicap. He is a little shorter than everyman [as shown in this first plate, where he enters as a dwarf (Plate 23), Fig.5]. So he does everything in the manner of ‘everyman’ -- but a little bit larger. The little bit makes a big difference.

The Scaramuzza dances of Gregorio Lambranzi demonstrate the transformation from ‘everyman’s action’ into ‘heroic action’. If everyman is acting straight, Scaramuzza is acting even straighter. But what is straighter than straight? – the deformation of straight.



**Fig. 5.** Scaramuzza enters as a dwarf ‘everyman’ (Plate 23)

The Scaramuzza dances present a catalogue of ways to deform ‘straight’ action through

dancing – how to bend, bow, turn, wing, crack, angle, buckle, break, smash and pick straight action. The result shows a double-face, both tragic and comic. Lambranzi is stressing the comical side of the subject. The following examples show this in more detail.

### Example 1: Walking straight

The action of walking straight from A to B is fundamentally a matter of mistrust, because you can get a victim everywhere. If everyman is doing it he follows his nose and transforms the weight starting with the heel of the forward leg. If the stomach is relaxed, one walking step extends about two feet to the front. The intention is to reach the destination as quickly as possible and without attracting anybody’s attention.



**Fig.6.** Scaramuzza as Gran Alesandro (Plate 25)

If somebody is shorter than everyman he is in danger, because he is slower than everyman and actions away from the standard attract everybody’s attention. Following the impulse to reach the standard, the short man is in a

dilemma. If he walks quicker, he has to tense the stomach, that makes him look thin and malnourished (or ‘underprivileged’) and he provokes the ridicule and scorn of the public. If he walks with larger steps, he can’t keep his nose straight without the risk of losing balance, but to turn the nose looks offensive.

Both these options for the short man to reach and conform to the standard are risky. He might appear underprivileged or very privileged. Scaramuzza decides to take the path of offensive behaviour, in the manner of a conqueror like Alexander the Great [ie. Gran Alesandro] [Fig.6].

**Example 2: Running straight**

The action of running straight is fundamentally a matter of trust - no matter if playful or martial - it follows the hunting impulse.



**Fig.7.** Scaramuzza as Achilles (Plate 24)

If everyman is running straight, he lifts the ankle bones in little *jetés*, the legs form a right angle, the torso follows the upper thigh in a diagonal, the arms are balancing the legs symmetrically, the nose upright stays right to control the action.

If somebody is shorter than everyman, he is a possible victim. But he has two options to escape: to hurry or to jump. To hurry means to fall into running by an impulse of the stomach. The torso stays straight, legs and arms form acute angles but the neck breaks the straight line of the torso, nose and focus are lifting up in danger of losing control of the action.

To jump means to lift the wrists in a forced manner like throwing a stone. The torso reacts by forming a diagonal and the legs are forced to follow the rest of the body to find a new standpoint.

If the short man starts to hurry, everyman know that he is a loser. But if he takes the risk to jump he has the chance to appear as a winner, just as Achilles jumped from his boat on the beach near Troy.<sup>10</sup>

**Example 3: Carrying straight**

Carrying straight is a matter of trust. To carry a weight like your own weight is standard. If everyman is carrying straight he is relaxing the stomach, breathing out, bending the wrist while stretching the ankle bone of the walking leg in front. The head follows the straight line of the torso. To finish the transformation of weight all actions go the opposite way around. The result is a perfect economic gliding step.

If the weight of everyman is the standard weight to carry, a short man has difficulties to reach this standard. The short man has two possibilities to solve this problem. He can give more emphasis to the action of the wrist, but this blocks the transformation of weight needed to step across cracks from one foot to the other.

The other possibility is to emphasise the breath and transform the weight by swing. In



this case one inspires the weight to move by itself, just as Prometheus inspires his creatures in the illustration [Fig.8].



**Fig.8.** Scaramuzza as Prometheus and his creatures (Plate 26)

**Example 4: Catching straight/arguing straight**

Catching and arguing are two versions of the same action, both are matters of trust. It is the trust that the arm or the argument is reaching its destination, the partner's shoulder or the partner's ear.

If everyman is catching straight, he is lifting one wrist and the opposite ankle bone, the spine reacts with a quarter turn, the focus follows the spine and initiates the transformation of weight. It's a step forward with a quarter turn. The second part of the movement leads back to the former position.

A person, who is shorter than everyman has a shorter catching radius. That's a handicap. To enlarge these steps, to make up for this disadvantage, the person can emphasise all four regions of the body which are

coordinating the action. To stress the movement of the wrist is a martial version, the new standing leg falls into the catching position. To stress the movement of the spine is an angry way. The body turns completely on the new standing leg. To stress the movement of the foot is a crafty way, the way of Odysseus arguing with Circe. This version coordinates arm and leg of the same side. To stress the movement of the head is an offensive trustful way, the way of Circe arguing with Odysseus. In this version the torso has to leave its upright position during the quarrel. The first part of the movement ends in an extremely weak balance position. But be careful, the movement has a kick gesture in its second part.



**Fig.9.** Scaramuzza and Scaramuzza Donna as Odysseus and Circe (Plate 27)

**Example 5: Passing straight**

Passing straight is a matter of trust, the trust to see and to be seen. If everyman is doing it he is opening the eyes in line of the nose and relaxing the stomach, the weight transfers



almost automatically into a step forward. The toes touch the ground first and the ankle of the opposite foot lifts in front of the body, as if holding a marionette. The ankle bone of the free leg comes near to the ankle bone of the standing leg. The second part of the movement forms a bowing pose. The eyes close a little, the stomach contracts a little. The arms are open to the side and the free foot slides towards the front. In the bowing pose, everyman signals that he is impressed by something or somebody he has seen and accepts its, his or her existence. For this reason the bowing pose is essential for social life.

of everyman. There is a courtly, a martial, a genteel and a busy way.

To go the courtly way the short man has to enlarge the actions of the wrists from the stomach to the head. To balance this pose the ankle bones form a half circle while sliding forward. To go the martial way the short man has to enlarge the actions of the stomach. In reaction to that the passing step is going straight sideways instead of to the front. This posture is a base for the arms to handle weapons. To go the genteel way the short man has to enlarge the activities of the head. The ankle bones follow, lifting up the whole body, the step crosses the other leg to keep balance, the wrists stay down to stress the upright appearance of this walk. It's a walk on the sunny side of the street. Short men use this walk to appear taller, like Arlequin or Gran Alesandro [Fig.10].

To go the busy way the short man has to enlarge the activities of the ankle bones like a merchant man or a blind man or the wise man Diogenes with the lantern, or Hermes with the winged sandals.



**Fig.10.** Scaramuzza and Arlequin as Diogenes and Gran Alesandro (Plate 29)

A person who is shorter than everyman is seeing everyman but often overseen by everyman. To rebalance the situation short people cultivate strategies to get the attention

### Summary

The Scaramuzza dances by Gregorio Lambranzi follow step by step their corresponding models from classical antiquity:

Scaramuzza is an 'everyman', a bit shorter than an everyman like Achilles, Prometheus or Alexander the Great.

Scaramuzza is continually dealing with an exaggerated sense of 'everyman's' contrasting affects, such as trust and mistrust, which others barely notice in the normal course of daily life.

Scaramuzza is never satisfied with himself and his body, all with tragic-comical results.

Scaramuzza is not a character we **want** to see. He is a character we **have** to see.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Edition Peters, Leipzig published the German version ( 1975) and Dover Publications, New York (2002) the English version. The original manuscript was published by Dance Horizons, New York (1972)

<sup>2</sup> „My aim is not to describe in detail the choreography of these dances or any particular *pas*.... but by means of the illustration and its accompanying air, I shall portray a principal character in appropriate costume, the style of his dance and the manner of its execution”. Lambranzi, Author’s Foreword to *Dance School*

<sup>3</sup> Few biographical details of Puschner are to be found, according to Derra de Moroda. At the same time, marginal notes in the manuscript indicate a close working relationship between Puschner and Lambranzi

<sup>4</sup> The published version of the manuscript (Nuremberg 1712) contained much greater detail in the illustrations – not all of which is visible in the modern Dover edition (Peters edition of 1975 has better reproduction of the engravings)

<sup>5</sup> The image of the hunting Apollo is represented in the statue of Apollo by Flötner (see below)

<sup>6</sup> That Lambranzi was well aware of the French repertoire of ‘noble style’ dances is indicated by the appearance on the frontispiece of a sheaf of paper in Feuillet notation (it is recognisable, in fact, as that of a *Loure* from Pecour’s *Recueil de Dance*, Paris 1704).

<sup>7</sup> The Apollo fountain created by Peter Flötner (1490-1546) in 1532 now resides in the Germanisches Museum in Nuremberg. Both Lambranzi and Puschner would have been familiar with this image of Apollo as archer.

<sup>8</sup> The story of Marsyas and Apollo was well-known during the 18th century (and earlier) with many representations in painting.

<sup>9</sup> Plates 23 to 30, on pages 51 to 58 in the Dover edition.

<sup>10</sup> The ruins of Troy appear in the background of the stage illustration of Plate 24