

Théophile Gautier on Maria Taglioni's 'creation' in 1830 of the Bayadère character, and the Indian Temple Dancers performing in Paris in 1838

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“ (In India) we cannot speak of performances, songs and dances, without mentioning the bayadères. (...) They are superior in their art to the actresses and singers, and we can also say that they would be highly appreciated and admired if they could perform on the stage of the Opéra in Paris: all dance and all play in those lovely girls; their features, eyes, arms, feet, every part of their body seems to move in order to charm; (...). They are so precise in doing the steps and the rhythmic sequences to be able to accompany the other musical instruments with the sound of their ankle-bells, and because their gait is very elegant and their body is fine and lively, all their movements are consequently extremely graceful.”

Maistre de la Tour, *Histoire d’Ayder-Ali-Khan*, Paris 1784.¹

“Inevitably, the very un-Indian bayadère of the Opéra will merge with the devadasi of Pondicherry or Chandernagore ...”

Théophile Gautier, *La Presse*, August 20th, 1838.

Introduction

The Indian temple dancer, commonly known by the generic Sanskrit term *devadâsî*,² made her official entry into the Western literary world³ at the end of the thirteenth century. This happened when Rustichello da Pisa, Marco Polo’s novelist cell-mate, noted down his Venetian friend’s memoirs and also added some personal remarks and fictitious elements. Since then, the majority of European travellers who visited India wrote quite extensively about its dancers, singers and courtesans.⁴ In their own countries, the travellers’ tales inspired quite a number of writers and artists to compose literary and

musical works about them – such as poems, songs, novels, plays, ballets and operas.

Depending on their sensitivity, attitude, cultural and religious background, travellers perceived the Indian dancers in various ways. Despite different approaches, all accounts are important as they kept the interest in these temple artists constantly alive in Europe. Travellers also left detailed descriptions of some of the dances and songs performed in temples and royal courts which later on fell into disuse, representing a precious source of documentation and reference for musicologists and dance scholars.

From the 16th century onwards, Indian temple and court dancers became known in the West under the Portuguese word *Baylhaderas*, meaning ‘female dancers’, which term was later integrated into other European languages (Dutch, French, Italian, German, English, Russian, etc.). Thus the *Bayadère* became a quite important character on the European stages in the following centuries.⁵

In 1838, five Indian temple dancers (*devadâsî*), their master (*nattuvanâr*) and two accompanying musicians left South India by ship and reached Europe. They first arrived at Bordeaux in France and from there they travelled and performed in Paris and in other European cities.⁶ They were attached to a temple located in the French territory of Pondicherry. Their European tour was organized by a French impresario and wherever they danced they were, generally, quite well received. In Paris, the Indian troupe was also invited by the French royal family for a special programme held in their palace. Now hardly remembered, the presence of

authentic *devadâsî* on the Parisian stage had at that time a remarkable effect on French writers and artists. Chief among them, the novelist, librettist and dance-critic Théophile Gautier (1811-72) was their most regular spectator and enthusiastic admirer as well as the critic who wrote about them in the larger number of reviews. In this article I will focus on Gautier's impressions about the Indian dancers and the Parisian audience's reactions to their art. I will also analyse here the construction of the romantic character of the Indian temple dancer, generally known in Europe with the term *Bayadère*, as it has been 'created' by the legendary Italian-Swedish ballerina Maria Taglioni in the opéra-ballet *Le Dieu et la Bayadère ou la courtisane amoureuse*, performed for the first time in Paris in 1830. Her interpretation of the tragic character of the Indian dancing girl strongly contrasted and even 'competed' with the authentic Indian *devadâsî* when they performed in Paris. Behind the romantic emphasis on the beauty and charms of exotic women dancers, I will show how T. Gautier got impressed by the *devadâsî*'s very artistic skills to such an extent that, later on, some of his most famous librettos for ballets were explicitly inspired by them. But let us now start by contextualising historically the arrival in France of the "authentic" *bayadères* in 1838.

Seductive Dancers and Vestal Virgins: The Bayadères of the Parisian Opéra

In 1789, the same year which saw the outburst of the French Revolution, a smaller 'revolution' took also place in the European literary world with the publication of Kâlidâsa's Sanskrit drama *Sâkuntalâ*, translated for the first time into English by Sir William Jones. A few years later the play was published in other European languages, making people aware of the rich heritage of ancient Indian dramaturgy. The poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe read the German translation of it done by Georg Forster (1791) and was very impressed by the lyrics. Soon after, the character of the young heroine, Sâkuntalâ, the plot and the aesthetic rules of Indian drama, began to be highly appreciated

by other Romantic writers and artists. Perceived as new symbols of poetical freedom, they certainly conformed more to their sensitivity and taste than did the heavy and bombastic formalism of Classicism, dominant at that time in European arts and literature.⁷

After reading Kâlidâsa's drama, the travel accounts of the Dutch missionary in India, Abraham Rogerius (1651), and those of the French naturalist Pierre Sonnerat (1782), Goethe composed a ballad in 1797, called *Der Gott und die Bajadere, Indische Legende* ("The God and the Bayadère, Indian Legend").⁸ The following year the poem was published in Schiller's *Musen Almanach*. From Sonnerat's book Goethe took the term *bayadère* and made a German word out of it: *Bajadere*. From Rogerius' tale he obtained the plot, which narrates the descent of the god Mahadöh (Sanskrit: *Mahadev*, an epithet particularly applied to the hindu god Shiva) down to earth to live as a human being, in order to test the heart of the people. Here he met a young *Bajadere* and spent the night with her. The next morning, entwined in a tender embrace with him, she discovered that he was dead. Without hesitation, she decided to have herself burned alive, along with his body. When the funeral rites were going on and the priests and other people were bringing the corpse to the pyre in a procession, the distraught *Bajadere* tried to join it, but the priests stopped her by saying that as she was just a *Bajadere*, not his legitimate wife, it was not her duty to commit *satî*. But the girl, adamant, jumped into the fire. Miraculously her divine lover, who had just pretended to be dead, arose from the flames and taking her in his arms, brought the *Bajadere* to be among the immortal ones. The beautiful ballad ends with a moral sentence saying that "the god is pleased for the repented sinners and, as his own lost children, takes them in his flaming arms and raises them to heaven."⁹

It is clear that behind the theme of the Indian dancer and courtesan we find the evangelical story of the "repentant" and "redeemed" Magdalene.¹⁰ Perhaps a major difference here

is that in India at the time courtesans were not regarded as “sinners” to be redeemed or reformed. Though in Sanskrit¹¹ and vernacular Indian literature we often find sarcastic remarks addressed to them, they were not the target of moral judgement and condemnation. On the contrary, due to their proficiency in the field of arts and poetry, their profession was considered prestigious and necessary for the maintenance of the socio-religious balance in the world. Rather, what the majority of the Indian texts seem to condemn are the “excesses” of those who indulge without respecting the proper limits of human activity, pleasures included. This is why courtesans were patronized and highly respected by kings, scholars, and local political and religious authorities, as attested to by both Indian and European sources.

In the ballad Goethe celebrated the redeeming force of love, conceived as absolute devotion and surrender to the beloved one. The young courtesan, expert in the secrets of seduction and eroticism, the practitioner of love as an art and a profession, was finally the one who, as a faithful wife, did not have a moment’s hesitation in following the lover of one night to the fire, unafraid of a horrible death. Again a courtesan is taken here as an example of the most sincere affection. Goethe too associated the Indian dancer with the self-immolating *satî*, assuring the birth of the *Bajadere* as a true Romantic heroine. The ballad was soon set to music in 1798 by Carl Friedrich Zelter, followed by Franz Schubert (1815), Daniel Aumer (1830), Carl Loewe (1835), and many others.¹² As we shall see, it was in 1810 that Goethe’s heroine made her first appearance on the stage in a main role.

In 1807, the opera *La Vestale* (The Vestal) was performed in Paris, with the music composed by Gaspare Spontini and the libretto by Etienne de Jouy (1764-1846). Posted in India from 1786 to 1790 as an official of the French army, E. de Jouy attended a number of performances by local Indian dancers. Impressed by their beauty and artistic skill, and with these *devadâsî* in mind, whom he saw as sharing a number of

functions with ancient Roman priestesses, he wrote the lyrics for *La Vestale*.¹³

Three years later E. de Jouy wrote the libretto for another opera, this time dedicated entirely to Indian dancers, and entitled *Les Bayadères*. With the music composed by Charles-Simon Catel, it was performed for the first time in Paris on 8th August 1810 in front of Napoleon Bonaparte. Interestingly, E. de Jouy not only selected the *bayadères* as the main characters for his opera, but also felt it necessary to write a long introduction about them at the beginning of the libretto, to inform the public about the importance of this institution in Indian society:

To the Indian name of *Devedassis*, *Devaliales*, the French have substituted that of *Bayadères*, a corruption of the term *Bellaidera* (female dancers) that the Portuguese employed to define this large community of young girls consecrated both to the cult of gods and to voluptuousness. [...]

The young girl whom the parents choose to be dedicated to the pagodas must be presented to the *guru* (chief Brahmin) before she comes of age; beauty is an essential condition, that no other consideration of birth or wealth can ever substitute. [...] Once the girl is accepted the Brahmins and the dance and music masters take care of her education.

Historians and travellers have spoken of them in different ways; exalted by some, they have been judged very strictly by others. While the former saw them as women of stunning beauty, surrounded by the prestige of their luxury and talent, the others remarked on them as mere courtesans, more or less pretty, who dance at public and private festivals for money, and nothing more that could justify the enthusiasm of their admirers. In spite of the difference between these two pictures of the same topic, both are equally right, though they have not been taken from the same point of view. We will understand better if we take as an example two Indian travellers in France; [let us say that] the first one has visited only the little sea-port where he has disembarked and no other place, whereas the second one has spent a few months in

Paris. Once back in their country if they are requested to talk about our theatres, the talent of our actresses, or how these ladies are considered, they will talk about the same topic in a very different way, both giving the truth. Such is the reason behind those travellers' accounts apparently so contradictory regarding the *Bayadères*. [...] Their dance is essentially a pantomime. [...] Regarding their way of portraying the passions of desire and the transports of love, we can perhaps reproach them with what our actresses rarely deserve to receive as a remark: the capacity to penetrate so deeply in their roles and to mime nature so closely. [...]

The *Bayadères* enjoy such honorific privileges which in other countries would hardly be accorded to them due to the unevenness of their customs. In many regions of Hindustan, particularly in Bengal, only the superior Brahmins and the *Devadassis* can approach the prince and sit in his presence; during public ceremonies they always occupy the first ranks, and any insult addressed to them is punished as strictly as those addressed to the Brahmins. Like them, the *Bayadères* are vegetarians, and are compelled, during night and day, to recite prayers and to carry out ablutions, and nothing can exempt them from performing such duties.

Depending on their wealth, all the temples maintain a more or less considerable number of *Bayadères*; the biggest temples, like those of Jagannath or the one of Chidambaram, can have up to 150 of them, who are very beautiful and whose ornaments are extremely valuable. [...] During religious ceremonies, they dance in front of the images of the gods which are taken in a procession, and sing sacred hymns in their honour.¹⁴

Though E. de Jouy begins by relating the story of the god and the *bayadère* along the lines of Goethe, he adds some new, personal variations to the tale. In his story the god, who came to earth as a king, enjoyed the pleasures of *eros* and at the same time was just and honest towards his subjects. Advised by his ministers to get married, he finally agreed to look for a wife. But how could he find a sincere woman who truly loved him?

Here again, the god adopted the same strategy: he pretended to fall seriously ill. Knowing of his imminent death only one among his thousands of concubines (who kept quiet since the throne and the nuptial bed were too close to the funeral pyre) agreed to become his wife. She was a young *bayadère* deeply in love with him, the only one ready to follow him in death by committing *satî*. The king, as expected, died after the marriage, and when the girl jumped into the fire he manifested his divine nature. Touched and pleased by her devotion he took her with him to heaven. Etienne de Jouy adds in the libretto that this was the reason why from that time onwards, honouring the memory of the sacrifice of his beloved and faithful *bayadère*, the god ordered that *devadâsî* should be the only privileged women permitted to be close attendants of the gods in the temples.¹⁵ Here too, as in Rogerious's work, the tale is presented as a sort of "foundation myth" for the institution of *devadâsî* in India.

Thus in the scenario of this opera, set on the banks of the Ganges, we again find the faithful love of a *bayadère* being tested – in this case not by a god or a "divine rāja", as in the tale quoted by De Jouy in his introduction, but by a "human" king. Here the characters and the story maintain a "human dimension" throughout the opera, with no celestial intervention, nor miracles. On the contrary, the allusion to precise political and military events, like the invasion of the city of Benares by the Maratha army, keeps the historical dimension in the action. The *bayadère* Laméa and king Demaly are both in love, but she refuses to marry him because she belongs to the temple and has to remain faithful to her presiding god. Though the character of the Roman heroine of E. de Jouy's previous opera *La Vestale* seems to influence Laméa's choice to remain faithful to her deity, her role of courtesan is never denied here. She and her fellow *bayadères* are portrayed as "beautiful priestesses of love and pleasure" and she uses all her charms to allure Holkar, the chief of the Maratha army attracted by her beauty, in order to disarm him and his soldiers. By doing so she saves the king and the people

from the Maratha invaders. Afterwards, in spite of her deep love for the king, she still refuses to become his bride. Sad because of her refusal, Demaly wants to test her affection, and makes her believe that soon he will die. Only after hearing the horrible news does she accept his proposal of marriage. The ceremonies of the wedding and the coronation of the queen are performed close to the pyre of the king, getting ready for his cremation, followed by the preliminary rituals of the *satî*. In the libretto the description of this scene is very touching and on stage its effect must have been quite dramatic and impressive. When Laméa is about to sacrifice herself, Demaly prevents her from dying. He reveals the truth and finally the couple is united, among the general happiness of all the people. The play ends with a magnificent feast to celebrate the marriage of King Demaly and the faithful *bayadère*, now “Queen Laméa”.

Again in this opera, as in Rogerious’s tale and Goethe’s ballad, we see the two extreme aspects of Indian femininity as commonly perceived in the West joined together, aspects which intrigued and at the same time shocked and fascinated European eyes: the seductive temple dancer and the devoted self-sacrificing wife. Both were indeed good subjects for the stage at that time, being highly romantic and dramatic as well.¹⁶

In 1811, one year after the first performance of *Les Bayadères*, the French translation of Jacob Haafner’s lively journey on India’s east coast was published in Paris from the original Dutch version. This book, which includes a long chapter on *devadâsî*, soon had a big impact in France and Italy where it became a major source of reference for any future historical and theatrical work related to Indian temple dancers.¹⁷

Ten years later *Le Paria* (The Pariah), a tragedy by Casimir Delavigne, was staged in Paris at the Odeon Theatre. One of the main characters is a young *devadâsî* called here not a *bayadère* but a “priestess of a Benares temple”. The play was quite successful, not only in France. A ballet version called *Il Paria* was performed in 1827 at La Scala

theatre in Milan, with the music composed by Paolo Brambilla and the choreography by Salvatore Taglioni. In the libretto, along with the characters of the “priestesses”, we find those of the “*bagliaderes*”. One year later, again in Italy, there was an opera version of Delavigne’s *Il Paria*, in which the music was composed by Gaetano Donizetti and the libretto by Domenico Gilardoni. Here too “*baliaderes*” are listed among the various roles.

Maria Taglioni’s ‘creation’ of the Bayadère character in “Le Dieu et la bayadère ou la courtisane amoureuse”

The opera-ballet *Le Dieu et la bayadère ou la courtisane amoureuse* (*The God and the Bayadère or the Courtesan in Love*) was first staged in Paris in 1830, with the music composed by Daniel Auber, the libretto by Eugène Scribe and the choreography by Filippo Taglioni. Like E. de Jouy’s *Les Bayadères*, this opera-ballet is important as it was entirely dedicated to the Indian dancers. In fact, both those productions gave the “final touch” by transforming the *bayadère* from a literary heroine into an accomplished stage character. For the story and the title, Eugène Scribe was directly inspired by Goethe’s ballad, but he elaborated the plot by adding new roles and actions, most probably due to the need to employ all the members of the chorus and the *corps de ballet*. Conforming to the conventional rules of the eighteenth-century opera-ballet, in *Le Dieu et la bayadère* “the dancing was combined with the action expressed by the singers.”¹⁸

While in E. de Jouy *Les Bayadères* the role of Laméa was performed by a singer, here the role of the heroine Zoloé was assigned to a dancer, Maria Taglioni (1804-84). Her father, Filippo Taglioni, carefully composed the choreography for the character of the *bayadère* Zoloé, represented here as a young dumb girl who expressed herself with the help of hand gestures, facial expressions and dance sequences. In a previous play entitled *La Muette de Portici* (1828), with the music composed by the same Auber, the role of a

young dumb girl, named Fenella, had already been employed. That time the role of Fenella was danced by French *ballerina* Lise Noblet. Once again this formula was well chosen here, and it soon sealed the tremendous success for both the character of the *bayadère* and Marie Taglioni as a talented and sensitive performer. On stage she immortalized the character of the Indian dancer, even though she had already danced this role in Etienne de Jouy's opera *Les Bayadères*, staged in Munich in 1828.¹⁹



Maria Taglioni as a *Bayadère*

Maria Taglioni's hour came on October 13th, 1830, with the first performance of the operaballet *Le Dieu et la bayadère*, which Auber and Scribe conceived with the express purpose of giving her a role of the same order as Fenella.

Unlike Noblet, Taglioni still had to prove herself as a mime, and the part of Zoloé had therefore been constructed not as a purely dramatic role like Fenella, but as one which depended on both dance and mime. The wisdom of this was soon made clear, for Taglioni's miming was generally found disappointing, while she surpassed herself in the danced passages. There was one unforgettable moment when, her love spurned by the god Brahma, Zoloé dances before him with her hands clasped in a gesture of despair and her eyes filled with tears. Another

imaginative passage in her father's choreography was the dance with shawls. This was an outworn formula, but it had seldom been employed to such striking effect before. The pink scarfs of the dancing girls floated and hovered in the air in the most ingenious combinations, at times streaming in undulating folds, now hanging loosely, and at one moment, stretched out fan-wise with their ends gathered together beneath Taglioni's foot so that she appeared like Venus emerging from the waves in her shell.

To many who saw her in this part, Taglioni appeared as the very image of perfection. An American visitor, Nathaniel Willis, having heard her name "constantly over the hum of the cafés and in the crowded resorts of fashion," went to see *Le Dieu et la bayadère* and was conquered:

"She takes the part of a *dancing girl*," [...]. Taglioni's part is all pantomime. She does not speak during the play, but her motion is more than articulate. [...] She looks not more than fifteen. Her figure is small, but rounded to the very last degree of perfection; not a muscle swelled beyond the exquisite outline; and not an angle, not a fault. [...] No language can describe her motion. She swims in your eye like a curl of smoke, or a flake of down. Her difficulty seems to be keep to the floor. You have the feeling while you gaze upon her, that, if she were to rise and float away like Ariel, you would scarce be surprised. And yet all is done with such a childish unconsciousness of admiration, such a total absence of exertion or fatigue, that the delight with which she fills you is unmingled; [...]

Taglioni's triumph was so great that when the régisseur stepped forward to announce the names of the composer and the librettist at the end of the first performance, the audience would not allow him a hearing until they had given the *ballerina* an ovation.²⁰

Adding some innovations in the libretto, Scribe tells the story of the god (this time Brahma) who appears among human beings as a king. The god can return to heaven only if he meets a woman who truly loves him. Soon he realizes that court people are quite

cunning and all the beautiful ladies he likes are selfish. Even his minister betrays him, usurps the throne, and tries to kill him. In order to save his life, he is obliged to leave the palace and to disguise himself as a poor man among the common folk. There he understands their struggles and all the other difficulties that his poorest subjects have to face. He then meets a young dumb *bayadère* named Zoloé who, along with the other courtesans, was forced to leave the city and to live outside its walls, through a law approved by a corrupt judge who condemned Zoloé's profession. She falls in love with the god and helps him by offering hospitality. To save his life she prevents him from being captured by his enemy and the perfidious judge who tries to seduce Zoloé. Finally she dies inside her burning house, which the god's pursuers have set on fire. The opera ends with an apotheosis: thanks to the sacrifice of the *bayadère* the king gets back his divine nature, and as Brahma he takes the soul of his faithful and redeemed Zoloé to be among the immortal ones.

Le Dieu et la bayadère was revived many times during the nineteenth century in France and abroad. In England and America the opera was known as *The Maid of Cashmere*, and it was staged in London in 1833 and in America in 1836. A shortened version of it entitled *La Bayadère*, was performed in London in 1831 with the choreography by André Deshayes.

Marie Taglioni, the rising star in the dance world at that time, became internationally known by playing the part of the *bayadère* Zoloé. From then onwards the audience associated the image of the Indian temple dancer with this ethereal Italian-Swedish ballerina, and elected her as the real "Terpsichore" of India. She was so acclaimed in this kind of role that curiously, when in 1838 a troupe of South Indian artists – including five *devadâsî*, their master and two accompanying musicians – arrived in Europe and performed in our theatres, people were rather reluctant to accept them as "true" Indian temple dancers! When these authentic

devadâsî danced in Paris, their peculiar way of moving and beating vigorously with their bare feet on the ground, their costumes and ornaments, their black tattooing on their arms, their make-up and facial expressions, as well as the accompanying music were perceived as "strange", "excessive" and "barbarous" by the audience. They had become used to the familiar image of Taglioni's portrayal of a "tamed" *bayadère*, with her weightless jumps, flimsy *tutu*, satin ballet shoes and amazing point elevation, to believe her to be as "authentic" as the real ones.

Maria Taglioni's Bayadère and the Devadâsî's Everlasting Impact on Théophile Gautier

The South Indian artists were attached to a Vishnu temple located in the French territory of Pondicherry. They arrived in France in the summer of 1838.²¹ First they performed in Bordeaux, then in Paris, and later on in other European capitals.²²

When the Indian troupe arrived in Paris, the young and rebellious Théophile Gautier (1811-72) was working as a critic for the Parisian newspaper *La Presse*. At that time he was twenty-seven years old, and following his Romantic ideals, he was living in Paris as a bohemian in a small flat which he shared with his closest friend, the Romantic poet Gerald de Nerval.

In 1836 Gautier wrote an article for *La Presse*, reviewing the special performance that Maria Taglioni gave, on the 29th of September, for the French monarch Louis Philippe, in his palace at Compiègne. On this occasion she danced some items from the opéra-ballet *Le Dieu et la bayadère* enchanting both the king and the dance critic.

Marie Taglioni dances at the Palace of Compiègne

Being in the mood for amusement, His Majesty summoned Mlle Taglioni, the chaste and divine dancer whom you well know, to Compiègne. Happy the king who

can call on Mlle Taglioni to dance for him alone, when and where he pleases! [...] Taglioni danced, or rather hovered awhile in the air, with such languid abandon, with such sensually yearning poses, such artistry and naturalness, and such semplicità and decency that the delighted king expressed his satisfaction by presenting her with a magnificent sapphire brooch, surrounded by brilliants of great price, that did honour to both the hand that bestowed it and to the hand that received it. [...] What is more, this favour could not have been better placed, for Taglioni is one of the greatest poets of our time. She has a wonderful understanding of the ideal side of her art, and it can be said of her, [...] that she is not just a dancer, but the dance itself. The name of the muse terpsichore will inevitably fall into oblivion and be replaced by that of Taglioni. She is as great a genius, using the word to mean a faculty carried to its furthest limits, as Lord Byron. Her *ronde de jambe* and the undulations of her arms are, by themselves, the equal of a long poem.

La Presse, October 13th, 1836.²³

In 1837, at the Théâtre des Variétés in Paris, Gautier attended the dance performance by a Spanish couple, Dolores Serral and Mariano Camprubì, that impressed him a lot. In his review he expressed the wish to see in future not only those talented Spanish artists, but also the *bayadère* character performed by authentic Indian dancing girls, on the stage of the Opéra.

The Spanish Dancers

[...] It is strange that this delightful couple has not been engaged at the Opéra, for it would have been very easy to find employment for them. Those national dances, so original in character, would have introduced a wonderful variety into the choreographic repertory, which by nature is so monotonous. In my opinion the Opéra should seek out the finest dancers in the world, anyone with a reputation in this field. Can one believe, for example, that a *bayadère* role would not assume a very

lively attraction if performed by a genuine *bayadère* from Calcutta or Masulipatan?

La Charte de 1830, April 18th, 1837.²⁴

In that same year, 1837, Gautier published a novel entitled *Fortunio*, in which he mentions Indian dancers.²⁵ And a few months before the Indian artists performed in Paris, he wrote a rather polemical review about the ballerina Louise Fitzjames, interpreting the role of Zoloé in Scribe's *Le Dieu et la bayadère*, staged at the Opéra in November 1837. I quote here a passage in which he explains his personal conception regarding dance and his ideal type of dancer, which fitted in well with his perception of the Indian *devadâsî*:

There surely could not have been a more unfortunate idea than to cast Mlle Louise Fitzjames in the rôle of the *Bayadère*. There is not the slightest connection between Mlle Fitzjames and a *bayadère*. [...] Dancing is nothing more than the art of displaying elegant and correctly proportioned bodies in various positions favourable to the development of line. It is essential for a dancer to have a body which, if not perfect, is at least graceful. Mlle Fitzjames has no body at all. She would not even be substantial enough for ghost parts, for she is as diaphanous as the horn of a lantern [...]. Dancing is essentially pagan, materialist and sensual. Mlle Louise Fitzjames' arms are really too spiritualistic and her legs too aesthetic [...].

La Presse, 27 November 1837.²⁶

In the summer of 1838, the Indian troupe arrived finally in France. Along with a few other writers and artists, Théophile Gautier attended a private performance given by them in their residence at the *Allée des Veuves* in Paris, and subsequently wrote an article describing the dancers and the musicians in detail, as well as their costumes and ornaments. The following quotation expresses Gautier's personal ideas about India, its dancers, and his trepidation and expectations about such an exceptional event, which truly gave a new direction to his work. At the same

time Maria Taglioni's interpretation of the bayadère character and the opéra-ballet *Le Dieu et la bayadère* are constantly evoked :

The Devadasis, otherwise known as Bayadères

The very word *bayadère* evokes notions of sunshine, perfume and beauty even to the most prosaic and bourgeois minds. [...] Imaginations are stirred, and dreams take shape of latticed pagodas, monstrous idols of jade and porphyry, transparent pools with marble steps, bamboo-roofed *choultries*, palanquins hung with mosquito nets, and white elephants with vermilion howdahs on their backs. There is a sensation of dazzling light, and through the pale smoke of burning incense appear the unfamiliar silhouettes of the East.

You will also be reminded of the slender legs of Mlle Taglioni beneath billowing clouds of muslin, the rosy shades of her tights plunging you into dreams of the same hue. Inevitably, the very un-Indian *bayadère* of the Opéra will merge with the *devadasi* of Pondicherry or Chandernagore. [...] In actual fact they are called *Devadasis* (the favoured ones of God), a name that derives from a fable in the Hindu mythology that has provided the subject for *Le Dieu et la bayadère*.²⁷

This scented poetry that, like all poetry, existed only in our dreams, has now been brought to us lazy Parisians who never stray from the gutters of the Rue Saint-Honoré and for whom the world ends at the suburbs. India, realising that we would not do to her, has come to us, like the Prophet who decided to go to the mountain when it did not come to him. For India, wild and remote as it is, cannot dispense with the opinion of Paris. It is imperative that Paris should pass judgment on its *devadasis*, and India should know what impression the priestess-dancers Amany, Saoundiroun and Ramgoun will make alongside the sisters Elssler and Noblet.²⁸

[...] A vague aroma of Oriental perfumes permeates the house, aromatic sticks of benzoin and amber burn slowly in a corner of the room, and on the other side of the door can be heard the tinkle of little bells on the dancers' feet.

Only a door now separated us from the realisation of one of our life's dreams, one of our last poetic illusions, and we felt strangely moved, half in expectation, half in anxiety.

[...] Before going on to describe the bayaderes and their dances, let us hasten to record that they are charming, unimpeachably authentic whatever certain minor journals may have said, and they coincided exactly with the idea we had formed of them.

[...] We shall start with Amany, the most beautiful and the tallest woman in the troupe. Amany might be eighteen years old. In color her skin is like a Florentine bronze. [...] Amany has blue-black hair, long, fine and flowing like hair of a dark European. Her hands and feet are extremely tiny and refined. Her ankles are slender and bare, the big toe being separated from the others like the foot of a lark, and as in ancient Greek statues. For delicacy and elegance, the sides and front of her torso and her back could compete with the most perfect surviving examples of the art of antiquity. Her arms are charming, unequalled in their rounded form and slenderness. [...] As for her eyes, they are incomparably beautiful and brilliant. They are like two jade suns revolving in crystal sky. They have a transparency, a limpidity, a creamy, velvety brilliance, a sensual, exotic languor that are beyond one's power to imagine. All the vitality of the features seems to have settled in those miraculous eyes, for the rest of her face is as immobile as a bronze mask, only a suspicion of a smile slightly parting the lips to give life to such tranquillity.

Amany's adornment is as strange and charming as her person. [...] Enormous pendants, strangely worked, sparkle and quiver at the end of her ears, [...]. And again, quite contrary to our idea of elegance, the left nostril has been pierced, together with the nasal septum, to allow a silver ring, encrusted with precious stones, to pass through it and rest on the upper lip. [...] Five or six strands of gold filigree encircle Amany's neck, two or three copper circlets dangle on her wrists, and her upper arms enclosed by a sort of bracelet in the form of an upside-down V that compresses

the flesh rather tightly. Large rings resound above her ankles, accompanying every movement with a clink of metal, and silver rings sparkle on her toes, for it is on their feet that Indian women wear their rings. Amany's hands are striped with black tattooing, done with great taste, that extends half way up the forearm, for all the world resembling lace mittens.

Wide Oriental trousers, [...], fall in wide folds down to the ankles. A little bodice with very short sleeves encloses and compresses the breasts. This bodice is very pretty, with sequins, tinsel, glass jewellery and silver and gold decoration forming the most capricious and elegant arabesques. [...] The chemise, it must be said, is unknown among the bayadères. A wide scarf of striped material, its ends falling in front and floating on the stomach, completes this highly original costume.

[...] This dance has nothing in common with our dancing, being a highly stressed pantomime rather than an actually choreographed *pas*. [...] What is strange is the noise that the bayadères' small feet make on the floor. They might be dancing a mazurka with heels and steel spurs. The clear, dry sound they produce when beating out the rhythm makes one wonder they are shod with iron. [...] Amany stands between her companions, Saoundiroun and Ramgoun, and with gestures and poses of profound melancholy and voluptuousness, recites a sad tale of love and betrayal, something like the Song of Songs, the romance of Saul, [...]. She lifts her arms and dreamily throws them back before allowing them to fall languorously like garlands of flowers wilting in the heat of the day. [...] After the *Dance of the Doves* the troupe withdrew, leaving the sweet scent of amber and sandalwood. The doors closed, and we were brought back to earth from the temple of Pondicherry to find ourself in Paris, in the *Allée des Veuves*.

[...] P.S. It is reported that the *Bayadères* will make their début at the Variétés. Their proper place is at the Opéra, in *Le Dieu et la bayadère*.

La Presse, 20 August 1838²⁹

On 22nd August Gautier attended their public performances at the Théâtre des Variétés, where the eager audience, some of them familiar with previous plays on an Indian theme and with travel accounts of such charming artists, rushed in large numbers to see them. Certainly some went there hoping to see "half naked" Indian beauties dancing lasciviously on the stage, becoming rather disappointed by seeing them not only so heavily dressed and decorated, but also moving as vigorously and majestically as warriors, and whose behaviour was very disciplined, self-restrained and decorous. If in the previous review Gautier was totally mesmerized by the Indian dancers, only focusing his attention on their art, here he relates the spectators' reactions as well:

Théâtre des Variétés: Début of the Bayadères

The public's curiosity was whetted to the highest degree. The wonderful descriptions of the few privileged journalists who were admitted into the mysterious retreat in the *Allée des Veuves* had stirred the imagination of their readers, and everyone was talking and dreaming about the Bayadères.

"Have you seen the Bayadères?" was the question that had taken the place of the banal "How are you?" But how to set about seeing them? Will they be dancing at a theatre? At the Opéra, the Variétés, the Porte-Saint Martin, or the Palais Royal [...]? There is a rumour that *Le Dieu et la bayadère* is being arranged for them – an excellent idea. It is said that they are black. Rubbish! Yellow, red? No. Chocolate brown? What a dreadful idea! And what about Mlle Taglioni, who is so white and pink?

[...] On the day of the first performance the public was in a state of great agitation, for at last they were going to see something strange, mysterious and charming, something completely unknown to Europe, something new! And the less enthusiastic spectators could not avoid being moved by that timid curiosity that takes hold of you when suddenly the long impenetrable doors of the harem open before you.

The audience was so impatient that it would not hear out a very amusing little prologue [...], and forced the curtain to be lowered after the first few scenes.

The curtain rose again, and standing in front of a scene that was as Hindu as it was possible to make it, the five *Bayadères* came into view in all their sparkling finery.

[...] At first the dancers' movements, so rapid and sudden as to seem more like the shivering of frightened gazelles than the attitudes of human beings, the prodigious winks in which the whites and the darks of the eye vanish in turn, and the outlandishness of their costume caused astonishment among the audience, which was taken aback rather than charmed.

But when the lovely Amany recited her melancholy plaint, the antique beauty of her poses, the supple sensuality of her figure, the sorrowful languor of her gestures, and the plaintive sweetness of her half-smile aroused general applause. She could have been the dark-skinned Shulamite of the Song of Songs, swooning with love, and seeking her beloved on a mountain of balsam or in a garden full of aromatic plants.

[...] The *Malapou* or the Dance of Delight, is a little like the *Jota aragonesa*. Its movements are lively and full of joy, with the dancers bending back and lifting their arms over their heads with infinite suppleness.

This is the pose that has been chosen by M. Barre, who is engaged in making a statuette of Amany. [...] Mme la Duchesse de C** is busy with a statuette of Saoundiroun. The Bayadères are therefore lacking no type of illustration. Art, society and fashion are all combining to pay tribute to them; they are truly the lions of the season. [...].

La Presse, 27 August 1838.³⁰



La bayadère Amany. Gravure d'après une statuette d'Auguste Barre. Musée Thomas Dobrée / Nantes.

Two years after the performances of the Indian troupe, the character of the *bayadère* as a seductive dancing beauty appears again in a ballet called *Le Diable amoureux*, staged at the Opéra of Paris in 1840. Performed in London at *Her Majesty's Theatre* one year later, it was then presented in 1843 at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, this time with the title changed into *The Devil in Love*. Théophile Gautier attended the ballet in Paris and mentions it in his writings.

In 1841 he wrote the libretto for a new ballet, one of the few of this period still performed today: *Giselle ou les Wilis*. Staged for the first time at the Opéra in Paris, it casted Carlotta Grisi and Lucien Petipa as main performers. The music was composed by Adolphe Adam, the choreography by Jean Coralli and Jules Perrot, and the scenery designed by Pierre-Luc-Charles Cicéri. Gautier's original libretto was adapted for the stage by Jules-Henry

Vernoy de Saint-Georges. The plot was taken from a novel by the German Romantic writer Heinrich Heine: a peasant girl, Giselle, loves a noble young boy who hides his true identity from her in order to approach her. When she discovers that he is already engaged to an aristocratic girl, shattered by the sorrow she loses her mind and dies. According to local belief, her soul becomes a Wili, a tormented ghost which does not get peace until it revenges the culprits. In the second act of the ballet her beloved young man, distressed, goes to pay a visit to Giselle's tomb and there he perceives her ghost. In spite of the fact that he was responsible for her premature death, she is still in love with him, and saves his life from the fury of Myrtha, the queen of the Wilis, a true triumph of love which defies even death.

After coming to know, or perhaps concocting, the demise of Amany in London, mentioned in one of his reviews,³¹ though no precise information about this tragic event has yet been found,³² Gautier included the character of the beautiful *devadâsî* among the Wilis in the libretto:

Giselle, Act II, Scene IV:

[...] like bees moving around their queen, in the same way Myrtha spreads her blueish wings on the Wilis, then gives the signal for the dance to start. Some of them, one by one advance towards their queen. Here is Moyna, the odalisque, performing an oriental dance; soon followed by Zulmé, the *bayadère*, who takes various Indian postures [...].³³

At midnight from various points of the horizon, preceded by will-o'-the-wisps, arrive the shadows of the girls who died because of their dance [...] then arrives a *bibiaderi*³⁴ with a costume similar to that of Amany, a bodice with sandalwood covering for the breasts, golden striped pyjamas, golden girdle and necklace which reflect the light as mirrors, long flying scarves, peculiar jewels, nose-rings, ankle-bells, and finally the last one, a shy *petit rat*³⁵ with her daily uniform for the ballet class, with a small scarf around her neck and her hands in a muff. All those different costumes, the exotic ones as well the others, must appear

faded in order to create a ghostly uniformity.³⁶

In 1844, Gautier once again reviewed a performance of Scribe's opera-ballet *Le Dieu et la bayadère*, for its revival in the Opéra of Paris with Maria Taglioni in the role of Zoloé. Though he admired the famous ballerina, the memories of the Indian troupe (especially the beautiful Amany) arose in his mind. If earlier, against his will, the image of Taglioni had imposed itself on the Indian dancers, now on the contrary, while attending the farewell performance of the most famous among the Opéra's *bayadères*, Gautier intentionally evoked the young *devadâsî*. The art and talent of Amany, he regretted, had been understood and fully appreciated in Paris only by a few sensitive artists. In a vivid description not devoid of humour and nostalgia he left a lively portrayal of the pretty Amany, not only as a skilled dancer but also as a young woman in her daily life:

Opéra: Marie Taglioni in Le Dieu et la bayadère

The performances of Mlle Taglioni continue, and are drawing unbelievable crowds. The other day *Le Dieu et la bayadère* was given, [...]. Everyone who has seen her wants to see her again, and anyone who has not takes advantage of a heaven-sent opportunity.

[...] Some years ago, in a small house in the *Allée des Veuves*, that for a short time was transformed into an Indian hut, there lived a troupe of *bayadères* [...]. All Paris flocked to the Théâtre des Variétés to see them perform [...] sacred dances, accompanied by liturgical songs. The wonderful beauty of Amany, the perfection of figure of Saoundiroun and Ramgoun were only appreciated by painters, sculptors and artists. But having admired and accepted Taglioni as the typical *bayadère*, the French public did not appreciate the genuine article. The white gauze tutus and the delicate pink tights of the Opéra ballet were too much for the gold-striped trousers and the spangled brassières of the *Bibiaderis* who were not forgiven for being as yellow as a tobacco leaf from Havana or bronzed like Florentine statuettes. Their

wonderful eyes, in which ebony stars seemed to float in a crystal firmament, their bare flanks of polished agate, their fabulously tiny feet, their arms curving like the handles of antique vases, created only a slight impression. White powder, rice powder and vegetable rouge had the upper hand. But to have seen *Le Dieu et la bayadère* performed by an Indian company with the bronzed Amany taking the rôle of the white Taglioni would have been a strange and fascinating experience. We are amazed that nobody grasped what was possibly a unique opportunity. But it is true to say that the desire to do something new does not worry a fussy literary man like ourself, who is not like other Frenchmen. Morals, beliefs, governments, religion can be changed, but the substitution of one type of pirouette for another is one of those unpardonable violations. [...] They say that she went into a depression in London and hanged herself, poor girl, no doubt on one of those days of yellow fog when one cannot see the candle in one's hand.

[...] She was a well brought up girl of high caste. The musicians who accompanied her did not have the right to sit down before her, and in her presence they stood with their backs against the wall and their eyes lowered. She had very good manners, full of dignity and grace. Her smile was charming, particularly when she had not drawn indigo lines between her wonderful white teeth, with which she once tried to crunch the glass cherries on Mme Sand's bonnet. It was the only savage action we saw her commit, although admittedly the cherries were absolutely lifelike and as red and shiny as the real thing.

[...] Such were the thoughts that were running through our mind as we watched Mlle Taglioni moving in her cloud of white muslin.

La Presse, 10 June 1844³⁷

In 1846 Gautier went to London to attend the ballet *Lalla-Rookh or the Rose of Lahore* at Her Majesty's Theatre. The music was composed by Felicien David and Cesare Pugni, the choreography by Jules Perrot, and the scenery by Charles Marshall. The

principal role of the Indian princess was performed by a brilliant Italian dancer from Naples, Fanny Cerrito (1817-1909).³⁸ Gautier was very impressed by this new ballet on an Indian subject, especially its elaborate special stage effects such as a sand-tempest blowing when the royal caravan was crossing the desert.³⁹ Inspired by the special effects of *Lalla-Rookh* Gautier started to work on the libretto of his ballet version of Kâlidâsa's drama, *Sacountalâ*. No doubt, the performances of Amany and the other *devadâsî* had increased his personal interest in Indian culture, motivating him to read and study the ancient Indian literary works more systematically. In 1850 his close friend, the poet Gérard de Nerval, together with the novelist Joseph Méry, had staged an ancient Indian drama by Sûdraka entitled *Le Charriot d'enfant* (The Toy Cart) at the Théâtre de l'Odeon in Paris. Though Méry had never travelled in India, a few years earlier he had written novels on Indian subjects which Gautier appreciated. Gérard de Nerval, on the other hand, had visited Egypt and the Near East and he published his travel accounts in magazines.⁴⁰ The adaptation of Sûdraka's drama was the first Sanskrit text ever staged in France. Gautier attended the performance and loved it.

Later on, a friend suggested that he should read Kâlidâsa's drama *Shakuntalâ* translated into French by Antoine-Léonard de Chezy in 1830, the same year *Le Dieu et la bayadère* was first staged in Paris. The beauty of the drama which had already charmed Goethe some decades earlier, impressed Gautier so much that he decided to compose the libretto for a ballet based on it. In 1851, Gautier returned to London and visited the Indian pavilion at the Universal Colonial Exhibition. There he saw Indian miniatures and water-colours by Western artists of Indian palaces and landscapes, suggesting new ideas to him for the scenery of his ballet. Back in Paris he started to work on this new creation, but the task was not an easy one due to the length of Kâlidâsa's drama: Gautier had to reduce the original number of acts, and add new

characters in order to employ all the members of the *corps de ballet*.

His basic idea was to represent the costumes, props and scenery as much as possible to the original Indian ones. This is also why he carefully selected his collaborators. For the stage design of the first act he chose the painter Hugues Martin, who had lived in India for some years, and reproduced the luxurious vegetation of an Indian forest in a remarkable way. For the second act, taking place in the palace of the king, two painters were selected, François-Joseph Nolau and Auguste-Alfred Rubé, who decorated the stage and painted the interiors and gardens of the royal residence gorgeously. The costumes and ornaments were designed by Alfred Albert, who tried his best to reproduce Amany and the other *devadâsî* dresses and jewels. The music was composed by the young Ernest Reyer, who had lived in Algeria for nine years, and according to Gautier could add some “oriental flavour” to the music.⁴¹ The choreography was composed by Lucien Petipa, who had earlier danced the main male role in Gautier’s ballet *Giselle*. The character of Shakuntalâ was entirely modelled on Amany, and the role was assigned to the Italian dancer Amalia Ferraris (1827-1904). Just as Marie Taglioni became famous worldwide for her interpretation of Zoloé in *Le Dieu et la bayadère*, Amalia Ferraris too became internationally known by impersonating the Indian heroine. The ballet was first performed at the Opéra in Paris in 1858, exactly twenty years after the tour of the Indian artists in Europe. The memory of the pretty and skilled Amany and the other *devadâsî* was still so vivid in Gautier’s mind that all of them appeared in the distribution of feminine roles in the ballet as *bayadères*, “priestesses”, “goddesses” and *apsaras*.⁴²

Though Gautier’s *Sacountalâ* was very successful, after this it was no longer staged. The same fate befell the role of Zulmé, the Wili *bayadère* in his previous ballet *Giselle*, which soon fell into disuse.⁴³ The memory of Amany and the other *devadâsî*, on the other hand, never faded in Gautier’s mind. In 1866,

a few years before his demise, he could not avoid comparing them once again to their “counterpart” Maria Taglioni in one of his reviews for the Paris revival of *Le Dieu et la bayadère* at the Opéra, with the Italian ballerina Guglielmina Salvioni in the role of Zoloé:

Opéra: Revival of Le Dieu et la bayadère

Mme Taglioni, a slender, diaphanous figure in white, was nothing like the real *bibiaderis* who dance before the doors of the choultries and temples, as we learnt when we saw Amany, Saoundiroun and Ramgoun. With complete disregard for local colour, she scorned the sandalwood covering that confines and perfumes the bosom, the pink brocade pantaloons, the metal bracelets tinkling on the ankles like the bells of Vasantasena,⁴⁴ the cap incrustated with gems and reflecting glass, the ring in her nose set with diamonds that add sparkle to a pearly smile, the long tresses hanging down at the back and exuding the scent of lotus blossom, and the length of cashmere that serves as a scarf, its ends tucked into a golden waist band. No, it was enough for her to be the Sylphide and dance in her accustomed style, adorable, chaste and modest.

Le Moniteur Universel, 29 January 1866.⁴⁵

Considering such a passion for Indian performing arts, we cannot but agree with C. Binney when he says about the French author:

Gautier contributed a lot to make Indian theatre known in France. Twenty-four performances of his ballet [*Sacountalâ*], with a collection of more than 125,000 French francs, which translated into figures means that a large crowd went to attend the ballet version of the Indian drama. Certainly the number of spectators who attended the Gautier ballet was higher than all those who went to see any other Indian play in the 19th century. Instead of treating the ballet scornfully, considering it as a meaningless artistic form, like many scholars do, it would be better to keep in mind that the evenings at the Opéra when the ballet was performed spread the knowledge of Indian culture amongst the

people as much, if not even more than all the works and translations done by the Indologists.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Maria Taglioni's creation of the *bayadère* character Zoloé in 1830 in Paris truly immortalized the Indian temple dancer on the Western stage. Since then the "*bayadère*" became one of the first accomplished Romantic heroines. Inspired by Goethe's ballad she somehow "cast" the dramatic features of future elaborations of tragic Indian female roles, like the *bayadère* Nikiya in Marius Petipa's ballet *La Bayadère*. First staged in St. Petersburg in 1877, this is the only 19th century ballet totally dedicated to an Indian subject still performed today and having a temple dancer in the main role.

The Paris performances of Amany and the other South Indian *devadâsî*, left some traces not only in the artistic production of Théophile Gautier and in the setting of "Indian" plays staged later on in France, but also had a tremendous impact on female fashion, as well as on colloquial language. Colorful and striped "*bayadère* dress materials" and "*bayadère* jewels" started to be manufactured and displayed in the shops. They were bought and "shown off" by aristocratic and bourgeois ladies during parties and ceremonies. Curiously, even the Opéra's *ballerinas* started to be called "*bayadères*", and the term was also employed in Europe, until the beginning of the twentieth century, to define any "charming and seductive" woman. From now onwards the *bayadère* character became a "must" in all the Western theatre productions dealing with an Indian theme.

Notes

¹ Quoted in Deleury 1991: 753-755.

² *Devadâsî*: from the Sanskrit words *deva*, "deity", and *dâsî*, "female attendant, servant", "the deity attendant". Generic term denoting a community of temple women and courtesans with various ritualistic and artistic tasks both in the Indian shrines and royal courts. In the south their dance and music masters were called *nattuvanâr*. *Râjadâsî* (the king's attendants) were generally called court dancers. Each region of India had its own specific way of naming them. See Marglin 1985; Bor 1986/7, 2003, 2007; Kersenboom-Story 1987; Leucci 2000, 2005a, 2008, forthcoming; Soneji 2010.

³ In an article I suggest that the ivory Indian statuette found at Pompeii (first century A.D.) portrays a young dancer (Leucci, 2005b). If my hypothesis is correct this artefact can be considered the first iconographic image of an Indian dancer so far found in Europe. Also see Cimino 1994.

⁴ See: Meer, van der & Bor 1982; Leucci 2005a and forthcoming; Bor 2007 and forthcoming.

⁵ See Leucci 2005a, 2008a, 2008c, 2010 and forthcoming.

⁶ Together with Prof. Joep Bor we are now writing a book in English about the European tour of the Indian troupe in 1838 and 1839.

⁷ See Savarese, 1992 : 145-238; Thapar 2000.

⁸ See Leucci 2005a, 2008a; and Bor 2007.

⁹ "Es freut sich die Gottheit der reuigen Sunder;/Unsterbliche heben verlorene Kinder/Mit feurigen Armen zum Himmel empor"; J.W. von Goethe, 1975 : 106.

¹⁰ Croce 1959 : 207-10.

¹¹ See Sternbach 1953.

¹² *Dizionario enciclopedico universale della musica e dei musicisti. (I titoli e i personaggi)*, 1999, vol. I, p. 62.

¹³ *Les Bayaderes* 1821 : 12.

¹⁴ *Les Bayaderes* 1821 : 5-12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 1821 : 5. This historical introduction about the *bayadères* appears in all the editions of the libretto consulted by me, corresponding to the various performances of the opera in Paris from 1810 to 1828.

¹⁶ The plot of *Les Bayadères* was plagiarized some decades later by the Italian choreographer B. Vestris. His ballet, entitled *Il Raja e le bajadere*, was performed in 1843 at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, with the music composed by Mussi and Schira.

¹⁷ See Leucci 2005a and Joep Bor's translation into English for the first time of Haafner's entire chapter on Indian dancing girls, forthcoming.

¹⁸ Beaumont 1951 : 92.

¹⁹ Castil-Blaze 1832 : 312.

²⁰ Guest 1966 : 103-4.

²¹ Earlier, another Indian dancer, most probably from the northern regions, arrived in Paris in 1768 and performed in front of the French royal family. The French spelling of her name is reported as "Bebaiourn". According to the chronicles of that time her dances: "impressed the entire city and the court for their novelty, as well for the peculiar costume, hand gestures and for the lightness of her gazelle-like movements. She became friends with Queen Louise, settled in France and entered a convent by becoming a nun. In 1789, during the French Revolution, when all monasteries were dismantled and the residents dismissed, she came out and finally became a teacher." See Larousse 1867, vol. II : 407.

²² See Assayag 1999 :125-33; Leucci 2005a : 137-51; Bor 2007 and forthcoming.

²³ Guest 1986 : 1-2.

²⁴ *Ibid.* : 8.

²⁵ The novel was firstly published under the title *L'Eldorado* in 1837 by instalments in a magazine, and only in 1838, just before the Indian artists arrived in Paris, did it come out

as a book. See Gautier 1996; Leucci 2005a : 144, note 74.

²⁶ Guest 1986 : 29.

²⁷ We find the same "creative" etymology in the introduction of the opera *Les Bayadères* (1810) by Etienne de Jouy.

²⁸ Famous ballet dancers at that time.

²⁹ Guest 1986 : 39-46.

³⁰ *Ibid.* : 48-49.

³¹ T. Gautier, *La Presse*, 10th June 1844.

³² See Guest 1986.

³³ Gautier 1872 : 351-52.

³⁴ *Bibiaderi*: most probably the term derives from the Hindi word *bibi*, usually referring to the concubines of European officers in India.

³⁵ The young pupils of the Opéra's dance school in Paris are today still called *petits rats* ("little mice").

³⁶ Gautier 1872 : 366-67.

³⁷ Guest 1986 :134-37.

³⁸ Some years later *Lalla-Rookh* was revived as an opera, performed in Paris at the Opéra-Comique in 1862, with the music composed by Félicien David and the libretto by M. Carré and J. Lucas.

³⁹ Regarding the dances, which were reminiscent of those performed by Marie Taglioni in *Le Dieu et la bayadère*, a critic of *The Times* wrote on 12 June 1846: "The *Pas Symbolique* of Hindoo girls [...] may be pronounced one of the most elegant scarf dances ever yet contrived, and show what new combinations are possible in a style apparently so hackneyed. The last figure in this *pas* in which Cerrito stands as a statue on a pedestal, and the girls with pink scarfs form a series of steps, is entirely novel in its effect, and admirably conceived"; Beaumont 1951 : 323.

⁴⁰ "Il y a dix ans, le Caire avait des *Bayadères* publiques comme l'Inde, et des courtisanes comme l'antiquité"; Gérard de Nerval, quoted in Larousse 1867, vol. II : 407.

⁴¹ At that time the vague categories of “Orient” and “oriental” were quite heterogenous and could cover and include the musical and cultural universe extending from North Africa through Egypt, the near and middle East, up to Turkey, Persia and India.

⁴² In Indian mythology the *apsaras* are the seductive celestial female dancers attached to the in heavenly court of the gods’ king Indra.

⁴³ In 1843, two years after the first performance in Paris, Zulmé no more appears among the characters listed in the libretto for the revival of *Giselle*, held in Milan at the Teatro alla Scala.

⁴⁴ The name of an Indian courtesan, the heroine of Sûdraka’s drama *Mrchchhakati* (The Toy Cart) staged in Paris in 1850, by Gérard de Nerval and Joseph Méry.

⁴⁵ Guest 1986 : 315-16.

⁴⁶ Binney 1965 : 333-34.

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