

## **Picturing Horror: Costumes for Furies on the French stage from 1650 to 1766**

*Petra Dotlačilová*

Scenes of Hell or the Underworld were common occasions for dancers to appear on the seventeenth and eighteenth century stage. From the *ballet de cour*, *Les Noces de Pélée et de Thétis* (1654) to Noverre's *ballets d'action* such as *Medée et Jason* (1763), infernal characters appeared in most of the tragic stories inspired by mythology. Such scenes demanded exaggerated expressiveness in movement and design alike. Furies and demons were supposed to scare the heroes but also the audiences - their costumes were of unusual shapes and terrifying decoration, their dances were fast and wild.

This article focuses on the depiction of such infernal characters, often represented by dancers - Furies, *Erinyes*, demons and horrific allegories and on the use of the costume design as mean to produce real fear, horror and disgust in the audience. In order to understand the original symbolism of their costumes, it is necessary to turn to antiquity, when they were first imagined and described, as well as to the sixteenth century *Iconologia*, since they became a point of reference for the later representations. The core of the paper presents costume designs for these characters starting from the middle of the seventeenth century, a period in which a number of iconographic sources increased together with the importance of ballet at the French court, and at the same time the designer started to step out from anonymity. The work of at least three artists/designers will be presented: Henri de Gissey (ca 1621-1673); Jean Berain I (1640-1711) and Louis-René Boquet (1717-1814). All of them were active in the service of French Royal entertainments (*Chambre et cabinet du Roi*, later *les Menus Plaisirs*)<sup>1</sup> occupying more or less at the same position,

one after another, the older ones being masters or models to the younger ones. I discuss the development of the convention for the costumes of these characters and their expressive potential as it was handed down for more than one hundred years. The emotion represented by the character was expressed by costume design and certain symbols were later even transferred to the costume design of some other related allegories. In conclusion, I will point out the close link between the grotesque dance style and costume of these characters.

### **The Chthonic deities of Antiquity**

In the ancient mythology, *Erinyes* (in Greece) or Furies (in Rome) were female chthonic deities or "infernal goddesses" of vengeance who avenged crimes against the natural order.<sup>2</sup> Roman mythology also established names for three of them – Tisiphone, Megaera and Alecto. They were particularly concerned with homicide, unfilial conduct, crimes against the gods and perjury. A victim seeking justice could call down the curse of the *Erinyes* upon the criminal. The most powerful of these was the curse of the parent upon the child, for the *Erinyes* were born of just such a crime, being sprung from the blood of Uranus, when he was castrated by his son Kronos. They appear in numerous poems and plays, from Homer's *Iliad* to classical tragedy.<sup>3</sup>

The *Oresteia*, a trilogy of plays by the Greek tragedian, Aeschylus (525/524 BC – 456/455 BC) provides some information about them and their activity, and it is considered to be one of the first written sources where their appearance is described.

Their image is depicted in the last verses of the second drama of the trilogy, *The Libation Bearers (The Choephoroi)*. When Orestes kills his mother Clytemnestra, he is pursued and tormented by the terrible Erinyes, who demand yet further blood vengeance.

ORESTES

Look, look, alas!  
Handmaidens, see-what Gorgon shapes throng up  
*Dusky their robes and all their hair enwound-*  
*Snakes coiled with snakes-off, off,-I must away!*

LEADER

Most loyal of all sons unto thy sire,  
What visions thus distract thee? Hold, abide;  
Great was thy victory, and shalt thou fear?

ORESTES

These are no dreams, void shapes of haunting ill,  
But clear to sight another's hell-hounds come!

(...)

ORESTES

O king Apollo-see, they swarm and throng-  
*Black blood of hatred dripping from their eyes!*

(...)

ORESTES

Ye can behold them not, but I behold them.  
Up and away! I dare abide no more.<sup>4</sup>

[Italics added]

Such a description of Furies had probably existed previously in oral tradition: Furies were typically referred to as ugly women with hair, arms and waists entwined with poisonous serpents. They wielded whips and were clothed either in the long black robes of mourners, or the short skirts and boots of maiden-huntresses. Sometimes they were also depicted with wings and carrying torches that produce smoke but no fire.<sup>5</sup> Rare examples of paintings on vases from antiquity prove the use of these symbols already in the fourth century B.C. (see Fig. 1). Contrasting the ancient ideal of beauty and goodness (*kalos*), they were supposed to produce disgust and their snakes, torches and bloody eyes caused fear and horror.



**Figure 1** Orestes, Erinyes and Nestoris, Lucanian Red Figure, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, Naples, 380BC

### Ripa's *Iconologia* as inspiration for costume designers

It has been pointed out by several researchers in theatrical costume<sup>6</sup> that many painters and costume designers were inspired for their creations by the seminal work, *Iconologia*,<sup>7</sup> by Cesare Ripa (1555-1622). This publication indeed aimed to offer “description of universal images taken from the antiquity and elsewhere” and – as its subtitle states – was supposed to be “not just useful, but necessary to poets, painters and sculptors, to represent the virtues, vices, affections and human passions”. Although its first edition from 1593 contained merely verbal description (which were alone quite visual already) numerous later publications were enriched by illustrations.<sup>8</sup>

The allegory of the Furies is not missing in this detailed account of the universal images, however his description (not dissimilar from the antique texts) is derived primarily from Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1320):

*Dante nell'Inferno dipinge le Furie, donne di bruttissimo aspetto, con vestiti di color negro, macchiate di sangue, cinte con serpi, con capelli serpentici, con un ramo di cipresso in una mano, nell'altra con una tromba, dalla qualle esce fiamma, & fumo negro, & son finte dagli antichi poeti donne destinate a tomentare nell'inferno l'anime de malfattori.*<sup>9</sup>

Ripa hereby confirms and establishes the iconological representation of Furies as ugly women in dark clothing, stained by blood and entwined by serpents, holding – according to

him – a burning torch producing black smoke. The appearance of the Furies transfers also to other, related allegories, such as for example “Discord”: “*Donna in forma di furia infernale, vestita di vari colori, sarà scapigliata, li capelli saranno di più colori, & vi saranno mescolati di molti serpi, haverà cinta la fronte d’alcune bende insanguinate, nella destra mano terrà un fucile d’accendere il fuoco, & una pietra focaia (...)*.”<sup>10</sup> Since Discord is, according to Ripa, caused by various ambitions and actions of people who have thirst for possession and differ in faith, nationality, profession or status, the multi-coloured scheme of the dress and hair reflects their varying opinions. Moreover, this emotion is compared to a fire that burns every good intention, hence the objects of the torch and striking stone in Discord’s hands. We will be able to observe similar transfer of symbolism in the allegories of Noverre’s ballets later on.

Ripa’s *Iconologia* summarises also the symbolism and understanding of colours in connection to the emotions and allegories, mostly adopted by the painters and costume designers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For instance, overall red costuming is described in the entry for “Cruelty”: “*Il vestimento rosso dimostra, che i suoi pensieri sono tutti sanguigni.*” – “The red dress shows that her thoughts are all about blood.”<sup>11</sup> This allegory is in fact impersonated by a woman “red in the face, clothing and with a horrifying look (*spaventosa guardatura*)”. The black colour, on the other hand, dominates in the depiction of “Hostility”: “*Inimicitia. Donna vestita di nero, piena di fiamme di fuoco (...)*.”<sup>12</sup> – “Woman dressed in black, full of flames.” The black dress and flames symbolise the fury mixed with melancholy that together create an enduring hostility: the flames stand for fury, which deep inside burns for revenge, and the blackness of melancholy represents the memories of old affronts and offences. The green colour or, more precisely “verdigris”, could also acquire a negative meaning: such is

the dress of “Defamation”, whose main feature is malign behaviour, to harm others without any personal profit – Ripa derives this definition from Aristotle’s *Physiognomonics*.<sup>13</sup> Verdigris is also the colour of “Perfidy”, which is accompanied by a serpent, “marking out, according to Aristotle, extreme treachery.”<sup>14</sup>

Obviously not all the colours and symbols would maintain the meaning expressed in *Iconologia*, however certain similarities and the ideological context could be observed in the costume designs for the ballet performances.

#### **Furies at the court of Louis XIV.**

Visual images of the Furies have been adopted for Baroque performances and their numerous representations of mythological stories. The infernal goddesses appeared on the theatrical stage together with demons, with followers of Pluto and also with allegories such as Vengeance, Rage or Jealousy. They were commanded by gods like Pluto or Juno, but powerful sorceresses such as Medea or Armida could evoke them as well. The Furies no longer appeared only as goddesses of vengeance, more likely they were used on every occasion where it was necessary to threaten the main characters.

One of the first pictorial testimonies of these characters in seventeenth century France comes from a large-scale spectacle presented at the court of Louis XIV at Versailles – *Les Noces de Pélée et Thétis*, created in 1654 with music by Carlo Caproli and text by Butti. This grandiose ballet, ordered by Cardinal Mazarin, was performed by several hundreds of performers, including the nobility and the king, who played the role of Protée [Proteus], father of the heroine, but also other characters.<sup>15</sup> The stage sets were created by Italian Jacopo Torelli and the costume designs by French Henri de Gissey. Designs of both the sets and the costumes have been preserved in the Parisian archives.<sup>16</sup>

The Furies performed already in the first Act of the ballet, as described in the text *Décoration et Machines aprestées aux Noces [sic] de Tetis*:



**Figure 2** *Les Noces de Pélée et Thétis*, Act I, furies, 1654, BnF

The scene is a cave of the centaur Chiron, an artificial grotto extended by a subterranean gallery decorated with tombs of heroes, where eight sorcerers perform a magical dance. Then the backdrop changes and reveals a marine prospect where the audience could see Thétis pursued by Neptune and consequently by Jupiter. In order to spoil the plans of this god, his jealous wife Juno sends Furies that are supposed to chase him away. Four Furies appear from the maw of a huge monster that rises from the floor and releases smoke and fire, and together with some other Furies perform an “extravagant and curious” dance, brandishing serpents to threaten him. After that the four Furies get on the carriage-machine with Juno and fly away. The Furies were performed by Louis XIV, noblemen and dancers including the young Lully. This description is accompanied by an engraving showing the moment of exit of the Furies from the maw of a monster that appears from the floor (Fig. 2).

The magnificent coloured hand-drawn costume designs by Henri de Gissey or his assistants in the workshop (the authorship is in this case unclear) reveal all the characteristic symbols by which the Furies and the Sorcerers were recognised. The Fury

(Fig. 3) is depicted with wildly standing black hair, feathers in infernal colours of red and black,<sup>17</sup> red flames all over the dress, snakes



**Figure 3** Henri de Gissey, Furie, *Les Noces de Pélée et Thétis*, 1654, Musée Carnavalet

in the hands and around the waist, a smoking torch in one hand and (probably) a mask expressing fury. The knee-length multi-layered skirt and red tights suggest that this was a male costume, despite it was representing a female deity.

The Sorcerer's costume (Fig. 4) carries other decorative elements used for horrifying characters, often applied to costumes of demons as well - the edges of the costume are cut in the form of bat wings, alluding this scary nocturnal animal. The costume design shows also decoration with magical symbols<sup>18</sup> probably painted, and with mascarons in relief (embroidered or in papier maché) with wild grimaces on his belly and thighs. The Magician wears a headpiece with an odd animal, probably supposed to be a dragon or a mythical chimera, and holds a magic wand in one hand and some papers in the other. The frowning face with a small moustache also suggests that he was wearing a mask.



**Figure 4** Henri de Gissey, Magicien, *Les Noces de Pélée et Thétis*, 1654, Musée Carnavalet

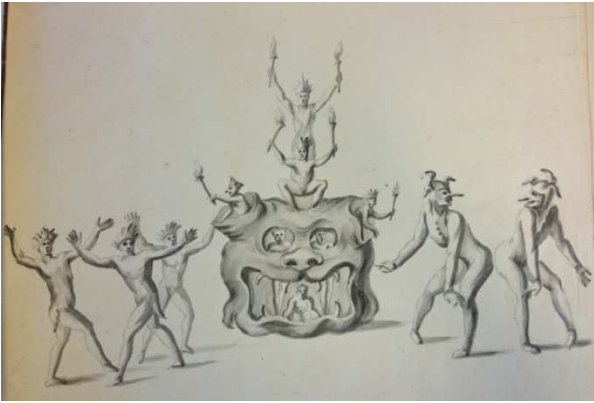


**Figure 5** Jean Berain I, Furie 'Erinnis' from the opera 'Isis' by Lully, Swedish National Museum, Tessin collection

Such a decorative tradition continued with Jean Bérain I, the successor of Henri de Gissey in the post of Royal designer (*Dessinateur du Roy*). His work was mainly connected with the *tragedie lyrique* of Jean-Baptiste Lully and Philippe Quinault and the archives in Paris and Stockholm hold numerous costume sketches by this artist and his workshop.

The National Museum of Sweden preserved, for instance, a sketch of “Erinnis” [*Erinnys/Furies*] from the tragedy *Isis* (1677). At the end of the Act III, Juno invokes a Fury in order to kidnap Io, her rival, and take her to various horrible lands where people suffer: “*Sors, barbare Erinnis, sors du fond des Enfer; Viens, prends de servir ma vengeance fatale.*”<sup>19</sup> Following these lines, Erinnis stormed on the stage in order to fulfil her duty.

Her costume design (Fig. 5) shows that she carried a snake and a smoking torch, according to tradition. On the costume, sharp edges of the skirt and sleeves are emphasised, imitating bat wings and referring to earlier costumes of sorcerers. We can also observe another detail associated with the character of a Fury – a costume with uncovered hanging breast. This element is, together with the snakes and the torch, included in almost every depiction of the Furies and was probably intended to denote a female goddess, performed on stage by men, especially when it was a dancing role. The movement of the Furies was often described as wild and agitated, full of exaggerated movements and leaps, which during the seventeenth and even into the first half of the eighteenth centuries, was played by male performers and sometimes even contained acrobatic routines.<sup>20</sup> An undated anonymous drawing from a large book of French spectacle costumes, probably created in the same period, (Figs. 6 and 7) shows many characters with torches and costumes with fringes in the shape of bat wings that might have been infernal creatures and magicians, there is even a prop in the shape of a monster’s maw.<sup>21</sup> These performers are clearly executing some acrobatic routines, for which they are dressed in a simple overall that allowed them to move



**Figure 6** acrobats, 17th century ( ), Swedish Royal Library



**Figure 7** acrobats, 17th century ( ), Swedish Royal Library

freely. We will see a similar simplification of the costume of a Fury later on, which seems to be related not only to the supernatural provenience of the character, but also to the style of their movement.

But before that, we can compare such designs to another Fury by Bérain (Fig. 8) which was created for Lully's tragedy *Proserpine* (1680), where she appears in the first scene of the fifth act, in Pluton's [Pluto's] palace in the Underworld. However, this was most probably a singing role, since the libretto contains four lines that are attributed to "Les trois furies":

*Plustost que de souffrir l' injure  
que le ciel veut faire aux enfers,  
renversons toute la nature  
perisse l' univers.*<sup>22</sup>

The very detailed sketch of this costume reveals another interesting element in the representation of the infernal character. In addition to a *mascaron* of a demon in the

central part, the entire dress is covered by round red eyes and nostrils, which might have been embroidered or made of sequins, glass or precious stones. This dress is hemmed with sharp edges, bat wings and snakes, and crowned with an elaborate headpiece with two chimeras.



**Figure 8** J. Bérain, Furie from *Proserpine*, 1680, Musée du Louvre, Rothschild Collection

The form of both Bérain's designs for Furie (and especially the second one) – ankle-length skirt and covered arms – indicates that this role might have been performed by women, which would be more likely – in this period – for a singing role than dancing. Furthermore, despite similar symbols on the costumes, the sketches are clearly of different styles and qualities, the second one being much more elaborated than the first one. According to the descriptions, both sketches were created in the workshop of Jean Bérain I, but their creator is not easily identifiable, since it is a known fact that Bérain employed many assistants in his workshop and he was often copied by lesser artists.<sup>23</sup>

The main characteristics of the costume of the frightening Fury have been firmly established by the above mentioned authors and the visual tradition persisted surprisingly until the late eighteenth century and further.

### **Infernal dress code in the *ballet d'action***

Choreographer Jean-Georges Noverre (1727-1810) is known for revolutionary ideas (though largely inspired by other thinkers) in dance, choreography and costume which he set out in his *Lettres sur la Danse et sur les Ballets*.<sup>24</sup> However, since he was choosing classical themes for his ballets, characters like furies and evil allegories keep appearing there in rather traditional form. The final part of this article will explore how the famous artist coped with the convention and whether certain traits of innovation can be detected in the designs.

The main designer of Noverre's ballets, Louis-René Boquet (1717-1814), was at the same time employed at the *Menus Plaisirs du Roy* (designing the performances and other events at the court) and at the *Académie royale de Musique*, so we have numerous traces of his creativity.

Furies appear in several of Noverre's ballets, starting with those from the Stuttgart period (1760-1766). In February 1763, he introduced three ballets during the long and spectacular celebration of Duke Eugen's birthday: *Orphée et Eurydice*, *Renaud et Armide* and *Medée et Jason*. Besides the libretto for these ballets, the description of these events by actor and librarian, Joseph Utriot, has survived, as well as wonderful designs by Boquet, collected in the so-called Warsaw Manuscript (1766).<sup>25</sup>

In the ballet *Orphée et Eurydice*, the horrible Fury, Tysiphone, arrives at the point when

Orphée [Orpheus] looks at his wife during their journey out of the Underworld. There are also several other infernal creatures (ministers of Pluton), but only Tysiphone is sufficiently immune to the beautiful sounds of Orphée's lyre, with which he is trying to reduce their fury. According to Utriot's description, the character of Tysiphone is danced by a male dancer – Mr. Balletti:

*La Troupe infernale qui vient arracher Eurydice à son Epoux dans le moment qu'emporté par l'impatience de son Coeur, il se jette entre ses bras, forme des Groupes qui pourroient server de modeles aux plus grands Peintres: les Ministres de Pluton touches par les sons e la Lyre d'Orphée rallentissent leur fureur, & se laissent attendrir par les prières des deux Epoux qui se jettent à leurs pieds; alors Tysiphone représentée par le Sieur Balléti arrive. Le sifflement épouvantable de ses Serpents reveille leur rage dans un Pas frappe au coin du Terrible le plus effrayant.*<sup>26</sup> [Emphasis added]

Boquet's design for this character (Fig. 9) shows several attributes that persisted from representation in the previous period, including numerous serpents decorating the dress and the headpiece, uncovered breasts and *mascaron* at the front of the upper skirt. The knee-length of the dress seems to confirm that it was worn by a male performer. The shape of the dress looks much lighter than costumes for the other characters in the ballet. However, the apparently bare feet and naked arm should not be taken as exact depiction of the performer, since to show them on stage was still considered inappropriate at the time, as Noverre himself writes even in the last edition of *Lettres sur la Danse* from 1807.<sup>27</sup>



**Figure 9** L.-R. Boquet, Thysiphone from *Orphée et Euridice*, 1763-1766 University of Warsaw Library



**Figure 10** L.-R. Boquet, Fury from *Renauld et Armide*, 1763-1766 University of Warsaw Library

As we could see already in Ripa's *Iconologia*, other characters very often adopted the "dress code" of the Furies, especially allegories expressing emotions usually represented by the infernal Goddesses: Fury, Rage, Vengeance and also personifications of objects that transform these emotions into action. That was the case in the ballet *Renauld et Armide* and its final scene when Armide is definitely abandoned by her lover. The anger of the sorceress evokes all the possible evil characters - demons, furies, rage and vengeance:

*Le désespoir d'Armide commence avec son réveil qui lui laisse apercevoir la fuite de Renauld. Du désespoir, elle passe à la fureur; elle invoque les Démons & les Furies qui accourent à son ordre, armés de poignards & de serpents. La Vengeance & la Rage sont à ses coté; l'entrée qu'ils dansent fait frémir d'horreur. Armide leur ordonne de détruire son Palais & ses Jardins. Tous s'arment de torches qu'ils allument au feu des flambeaux de la Vengeance, & forment un Corps de Ballet qui par ses mouvements précipités & furieux, comme par la distribution de ses figures offer le spectacle le plus effrayant. Ils se dispersant de tous cotés & dans une confusion artistement réglée, ils mettent le Feu au Palais.*<sup>28</sup> [Emphasis added]

Boquet's costume designs for Fury, Desperation and Vengeance (Figs. 10, 11, 12) reveal familiar traits: once again they are decorated with an increasing number of the green snakes; they also hold torches or daggers; red flames cover the skirt and the bodice; seemingly naked breasts appear on the torso which is also decorated with a threatening *mascaron*. The shape and length of all three costume designs again indicate that they were probably worn by male performers. The designer does not make any significant difference between these allegories, making all of them look like Furies with threatening expressions and wide-open mouths showing teeth (which could have been masks), with bloody red covering their face and limbs. Such image, together with "furious





**Figure 11** L.-R. Boquet, Desperation from *Renauld et Armide*, 1763-1766 University of Warsaw Library

Allegorical figures appear also in the famous ballet *Medée et Jason* that became Noverre's masterpiece and was later performed in Paris, Vienna, Milan and London. In the last act of this ballet, Medea, the jilted sorceress, abandoned by Jason for the young princess Creusa, is joined in her wild fury by the allegories of Jealousy, Hatred and Vengeance. Soon she commands them to bring the tools of Vengeance: Fire, Iron and Poison, all personified by dancers.



**Figure 13** L.-R. Boquet, Jealousy from *Medée*, 1763-1766 University of Warsaw Library



**Figure 12** L.-R. Boquet, Vengeance from *Renauld et Armide*, 1763-1766 University of Warsaw Library

The costume design for the allegory of Jealousy carries the most symbolic and powerful features for such emotion (Fig. 13). She is blindfolded with a scarf, dressed in green (Jealousy being “the green monster”) and her heart is eaten by poisonous snakes – maybe as a metaphor for the poisonous feeling that is eating her up from inside. She holds three daggers that she would use recklessly for revenge. Blindfolded eyes conventionally symbolized the blindness of the fury, which obscures clear thinking so that the person is deprived of their intellectual capacities as described already in Ripa's *Iconologia*.<sup>29</sup>

and precipitous” movement offered, according to Utriot, the most horrifying spectacle.



**Figure 14** L.-R. Boquet, Iron from *Medée*, 1763-1766 University of Warsaw Library



**Figure 15** L.-R. Boquet, Fire from *Medée*, 1763-1766 University of Warsaw Library

Each of the deadly objects is clearly characterised. Iron [Fig. 14] has its chest pierced with three daggers, holds another two

in both hands and wears a spiky headpiece. Its supernatural provenience is underlined by green fish-like skin, colour marking out – as suggested above – an extreme treachery and materially created most probably by a painted fabric. Fire [Fig. 15] burns all in red and yellow, with flame-like fringing on the costume and smoking torches in both hands. It's costume is also enriched by a burning *mascaron* on the chest and a red flamed headpiece. Numerous poisonous snakes and herbs entwine the third allegory of Poison [Fig. 16], which most resembles its leader, *Furie*.



**Figure 16** L.-R. Boquet, Poison from *Medée*, 1763-1766 University of Warsaw Library

All of these pictures by Boquet are obviously much more than a costume design, despite their claim to be just that. They accompanied Noverre's librettos and music for the ballets and they were supposed to illustrate them in the best artistic quality. They represent an ideal visual form of the ballet and an attractive one, since they were designed (together with the entire manuscript) to catch the attention of the King and gain new employment for Noverre.

Unfortunately, they do not offer any notes about the material and decoration that would accompany the designs themselves, which was otherwise a common practice, and many of Boquet's designs are annotated with handwritten comments. However, at the end of the last (eleventh) volume of the manuscript, we can find sixteen costume designs with quite detailed description of the construction and materials, including one for the character of Furie (which is in fact the exact same design as La Fureur from Renault et Armide, discussed above see Fig. 10):

*Corp et mamelles chair brulée, mascaron brodé de reliefs flames brodées sur des morceaux découpés en ponceau, l'armure qui traverse le corps et qui termine le tonnelet en satin verd broderie argent; les flames peintes ou brodées comme y dessus, des franges ponceau terminent le tonnelet la ceinture les mancherons ainsy que la coiffure en serpent de relief, les bas, les souliers, les gands, les plumes ponceau, la coiffure et l'épaules en ailes de chauve souris garnis de serpents, le poignard ensanglanté.<sup>30</sup>*



**Figure 17** L.-R. Boquet, Furie, *Armide*, 1777, Bibliothèque nationale de France

The main colours of the Furie's costume are again red (*chair brulée* and *ponceau*) and green. It is evident that the body of the performer was completely covered: He wore a bodice, tights, sleeves, shoes and gloves and they were all of the same "burned flesh" colour, which suggests that the designer aimed for a "naked" effect of a coverall (indeed looking naked in the picture), decorated with the mammals, snakes, bat wings, frightening *mascaron*, *armure*, painted flames and which was completed with the indispensable *tonnelet* in green satin with silver embroidery. Despite Noverre in his writings protested against the use of the *tonnelet* and the mask on the stage,<sup>31</sup> we can see that in practice he would still adopt it, even if in somewhat reduced size compared to costume designs from earlier periods.

Even more detailed information about the construction of costumes for *Medée et Jason* comes from the first French performance of the ballet, executed by Gaetan Vestris (main dancer in the original production) for the King at the Chateau de Choisy on 13 June 1763, only a few months after its Stuttgart premiere. The programme books of the Royal entertainments show first of all, interesting cast choices for certain roles: Jealousy and Vengeance were performed by Mlle Allard and Mlle Peslin this time, despite the fact that in the original performance all the Furies and allegories were danced by men. This shows that there was not a strict rule for these characters to be performed exclusively by men. The female dancer started to appear in the role of furie more often on the stage in Paris Opera and at the court, and several of Boquet's sketches survived as evidence of this practice. For instance the quick ink drawing of Furie for Armida in 1777 [Fig.17] shows a long skirt (with furie's irregular sharp edges) as well as of the upper drapery, typical for female costume. Besides the obligatory serpents and other props, the interesting wrap up construction of the female bodice grabs attention, reminding of an oriental *dolmen*.

Table 1

Pas seul	La Jalousie	Mlle Allard	Flambeau de Cire jaune; Serpens qui entourent un Coeur enflamé sur la poitrine et autour du bras; ceinture de serpens. Gands, Bas et Souliers Chair Brulée	Haut du corps amadis Chair brûlée; draperie decalé de Satin pourpre doublée de Satin oranger brodée En foudre de paillettes d'argent Juppe noire en Satin avec des Chimeres.
Pas seul	La Vengeance	Mlle Beslin	Coeffure de Serpent meslée de feuillages d'herbes venimeuses: Ceinture de Serpens des poignards qui seront enfoncés dans le Coeur et qui pourront se retirer: une poignée de serpens avec des herbes venimeuses: un flambeau de cire Jaune. Gands, bas et Soulier bleu	Haut du corps et manches de Satin gorge de pigeon Culotte pareille; draperie de Satin noir doublée de Satin feu et bordée de flames; un coeur brodé sur l'Estomac
Pas seul	Le Desespoir	M. Laval	Perruque herissée de crin noir: un poignard enfoncé dans la poitrine, ceinture de Serpens. Il faut qu'il paroisse un bandeau rouge Sur les yeux, masque du caractere. Gands, Bas, Souliers Chair Verdatre	Haut du Corps Manches et Culotte de Satin Couleur de Chair Verdatre, draperie de Satin orange doublée de ponceau

Unfortunately, there are no costume sketches of Vestris' production, however, the description in the programme and expense book are very helpful for re-imagining it [Table 1].<sup>32</sup> There we can read, for instance, that Jealousy wore a bodice and sleeves in the colour of burning flesh, drapery of red and orange satin with a lightning flash embroidered in sequins, a black satin skirt with (probably painted) chimeras. Additionally, her costume was supplemented with a belt of snakes and a decoration of a

burning heart entwined with snakes was placed at the belly of the dancer. She also wore gloves, tights and shoes in the colour of burning flesh and held a wax torch. Comparing the inventory to Boquet's costume design from the Warsaw Manuscript, we can see interesting similarities but also differences. Of course the immediate change is one of colour: the costume from the French performance had the top part, sleeves, gloves, tights and shoes in a red/brown "burning flesh" colour and not green, as the costume

design suggests. Such choice of colours, including the red and orange drapery, corresponds more with the allegory of Fire from Boquet's original design or directly with the design of the Furie.

Regarding the costumes for the other two allegories in this ballet, we can see a similar fusion of a costume for an emotion and its executive object. The costume description for Revenge corresponds more to the design of the Poison, since the main attribute of this allegory was the decoration with serpents and poisonous herbs. Finally, Desperation (in the original libretto Hatred) is characterised by a dagger penetrating the chest, which is also the case of the original designs for Iron. Since the performance at Choisy was slightly reduced, the characters of Iron, Fire and Poison were excluded. Vestris therefore cleverly put the original couples of Jealousy-Fire, Revenge-Poison and Desperation-Iron together, making each of the allegory wear the object of the execution of its emotion: Fire, hidden in a box, is destined to Creon, father of Creusa, who arranged the marriage between his daughter and Jason – Medea's jealousy leads her to kill him; Poison infused the jewels destined for Creusa as a tool of Medea's revenge, and finally, Iron – or, in other words, the dagger – as an object to complete the act of desperation, is destined for Jason, who eventually stabs himself after he sees his children, his fiancée and her father murdered by Medea.

Interesting details on the decoration of the costumes from the Choisy performance are recorded in the list of paintings, gildings and cartonnage<sup>33</sup>. There we can read what a great number of props was created for this performance: Among others there were painted and gilded chimera, a dragon and a snake for the costume of Jealousy, and seven dozens of paper heads of snakes, which is indeed impressive, given that these eighty-four snakes were worn only by three allegories. It almost seems as if the number of the snakes was directly proportional to the horrifying effect of the costume as a whole.

Moreover, we should not forget the actual physical activity performed by the interprets in these costumes. As mentioned earlier, the

movement of furies and demons was characterized by fast and exaggerated steps and positions, which probably belonged to the *grotesque style* of dancing. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the grotesque style was distinguished by higher and wider jumps, numerous *battus*, skillfulness and almost acrobatic quality of the movement<sup>34</sup>. We could argue that such dance, performed by furies and demons, would justify greater lightness and flexibility of their costume (just like the costume of acrobats almost a century earlier), as opposed to the other, less wicked characters who performed in the style of *demi-caractère* or *danse noble (sérieuse)*. Indeed, unlike the more "serious" characters, the grotesque costume consists of basic garments such as *haut-de-corps* (bodice), *manches* (sleeves), *culottes* (breeches) and *tonnelet* for men, without additional outer garment such as *vêtement*, and the decoration and drapery was added directly on the top of this base. Interesting detail is that all these items are listed separately, suggesting that they were detachable parts. Therefore, they might have been combined in various ways and most importantly, put on separately and only attached together at the body of the dancer by some temporary manner, instead of sewn together. This looser attachment would actually contribute to greater flexibility and freedom of movement, without limitation of stiff stitching which would have much more restrictive effect. Detachable parts would not cause such trouble.<sup>35</sup> Also, the materials such as satin and silk were rather light and even the various decoration – since made mainly of papier maché – should not limit the movement too much.

Despite the *grotesque* style of dancing was at the time loudly denigrated for being indecent and vulgar, especially by the French theorists<sup>36</sup>, the characters of furies and similar characters performing in this style greatly enabled the liberation of imagination and experiments in the costumes on the French stage.

## Conclusion

The costume together with movement were the main creators of an effect in the mute performance of dance, where the visual appearance was crucial in order to awake strong emotions in the audience. The furies, together with demons and other allegories of negative emotions, appeared in the tragic and horrifying moments of the story and their costume had great importance in both signaling the character and scaring the audience.



**Figure 18** Demone, Macbeth, La Scala, 1874, Archivio Ricordi

The ancient provenience of the infernal goddesses determined their main features, as it was described in the ancient tragedy and poems. Renaissance and Baroque artists adopted this convention and from there developed a symbolism of allegories which appeared on stage until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The colours such as red, brown, yellow – reminding blood and fire – green and black with their wicked connotations, would dominate in their costumes, together with

omnipresent snakes, bats, chimeras and scary masks, in order to underline on one hand their provenance from the underworld, on the other hand to mark the negative effects and motivations they symbolized. The wild and exaggerated looks and movement, with their sharp edges, stood in direct contrast to the composed, simple, elegant and nicely curved appearance of the noble heroic and gallant characters, with whom the audience sympathized. The presented examples of costume designs showed remarkable consistence of the visual tradition, however we can also perceive the tendency towards lighter and freer costume, which would enable the increasingly demanding dance technique, executed by these “grotesque” characters. Curiously, the use of “horrific” visual elements stretched well over the baroque and rococo period, as shows the costume design for Demone in Verdi’s *Macbeth*, created by Luigi Bartezago in 1874 (Fig. 18).

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Carlos Fischer, *Les costumes de l'Opéra* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1931).

<sup>2</sup> See for example, entry on “Furies” in *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, Ed M. C. Howatson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman biography and mythology*, By various writers. Ed. William Smith. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Library, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Aeschylus, *The Choephoroi/ The Libation Bearers* (450 B.C.), Trans. E. D. A. Morshead Available online: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aeschylus/choephoroi.html> [accessed 11 August, 2016].

<sup>5</sup> A summary of ancient depictions of Furies is offered for instance, in the entry on “Furies” in *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des*

*sciences, des arts et des métiers*, par une Société de gens de lettres ; mis en ordre et publié par M. Diderot et, quant à la partie mathématique, M. D'Alembert [...] dir. Diderot Denis, Alembert Jean le Rond de, 35 vol., Paris, Briasson et d'autres, 1751-1780. Available on-line at [http://portail.atilf.fr/cgi-bin/getobject\\_?a.51:1./var/artfla/encyclopedie/text data/IMAGE/](http://portail.atilf.fr/cgi-bin/getobject_?a.51:1./var/artfla/encyclopedie/text data/IMAGE/) [accessed 12 August, 2016].

<sup>6</sup> See for example: Diana de Marly, *Costume on the stage 1600-1940* (London: Batsford, 1982), p. 14; Phyllis Dearborn Massar, "Costume Drawings by Stefano Della Bella for the Florentine Theater," *Master Drawings* 8, no. 3 (1970), 243-317.

<sup>7</sup> Full title: *Iconologia overo Descrittione dell'Imagini universali cavate dall'antichità et da altri luoghi, da Cesare Ripa Perugino. Opera non meno utile, che necessaria a Poeti, Pittori, & Scultori, per rappresentare le virtù, vitij, affetti, & passioni humane* (Roma: Heredi di Gio Gigliotti, 1593). Citation in this article refer to the second edition from 1603 which includes illustrations.

<sup>8</sup> For more information about the publication and its use as iconological source for theatre see Thomas F. Heck, *Picturing Performance: The Iconography of the Performing Arts in Concept and Practice* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1999), pp. 8-13.

<sup>9</sup> *Iconologia*, op.cit, pp. 175-176.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104-106.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>13</sup> A treatise that describes the connection between the bodily features and character. The authorship is in fact dubious, lately attributed to an anonymous writer from around 300 BC. See: Pseudo Aristotele: *Fisiognomica*; Anonimo Latino, *Il trattato di fisiognomica*, translated and commended by Giampiera Raina. 2nd ed., (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1994.)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 392.

<sup>15</sup> For more about this performance see for example, Marie-Françoise Christout, *Les Noces de Pélée et Thétis, comédie italienne en*

*musique entremêlée d'un ballet dansé par le Roi (1654)*, Baroque [on-line], 5/1972, <http://baroque.revues.org/375> [accessed 2 June, 2016].

<sup>16</sup> Engravings by Silvestre being part of printed text *Décorations et machines aprestées aux Noces de Tetis, Ballet Royal 1654*. Available on [gallica.bnf.fr/](http://gallica.bnf.fr/) Bibliothèque nationale de France [accessed 2 June, 2016]; Costume designs by the workshop of Henri de Gissey is part of collections of Musée de Carnavalet.

<sup>17</sup> The size and amount of feathers might indicate that this costume has been worn by a nobleman, possibly even by Louis XIV himself, who (according to the *Décorations et machines*) performed in the entry of Furies.

<sup>18</sup> Later costume descriptions from *Les Menus plaisirs* refer to such decoration as "caractères de magie", sometimes even as cabbalah symbols.

<sup>19</sup> *Isis, tragedie en musique, ornée d'entrées de ballet, demachines, de changements de theatre (...)*, Paris: 1677, Available on [gallica.bnf.fr /](http://gallica.bnf.fr/) Bibliothèque nationale de France.

<sup>20</sup> Edmund Fairfax, *The Styles of Eighteenth-Century Ballet* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Costume books from Paris, ca 1660s (?), purchased in Paris in 1742 by Swedish ambassador Carl Gustav Tessin at an auction of the property of the Prince Victor-Amedé de Carignan (1690-1741), it was part of Drottningholms library and in 1867 moved to the Swedish Royal Library, sig.: S 95a:1-3.

<sup>22</sup> *Proserpine, tragédie en musique ornée d'entrées de ballet, de machines et de changements de theatre (...)* A Paris 1680, p.72. Available on [gallica.bnf.fr /](http://gallica.bnf.fr/) Bibliothèque nationale de France.

<sup>23</sup> See Jérôme De La Gorce, *Berain: dessinateur du Roi Soleil* (Paris: Herscher, 1986).

<sup>24</sup> First edition: *Lettres sur la danse, et sur les ballets*, Lyon, chez Aymé Delaroché, 1760. Last edition: *Lettres sur les arts imitateurs en général, et sur la danse en particulier. Tome I et II. A Paris, chez Léopold 1807*. In this work he was vastly inspired by authors and artists such as C.-F. Ménestrière, J.-B. Dubos, Louis de Cahusac,

Denis Diderot, David Garrick etc. See f.e.: Chazin-Bennahum, Judith: "Cahusac, Diderot, and Noverre: Three Revolutionary French Writers on the Eighteenth Century Dance." *Theatre Journal* 35:2 (1983): 169-78.

<sup>25</sup> Warsaw, Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, Gabinet Rycin: Zb. Krol, Nm. 795-805, volume 1: *Théorie et pratique de la Danse simple & composée; De l'Art des Ballets ; de la Musique, du Costume et des Décorations, par. M. Noverre, Directeur de la Danse & M. des Ballets de S.A.S. Le Duc Régnaant de Würtemberg, Tome I. volume 2 : Programmes De grands ballets historiques, poétiques nationaux, allegoriques et moraux de la composition de M. Noverre. Tome II volumes 3 à 6 : partitions de musique de ballets ; volumes 7 à 10 : Desseins des habits de costumes pour les ballets de Mr. Noverre ; volume 11: Avertissement, Etat et prix des marchandises, gravures de costumes, partition de l'Enlèvement de Proserpine.*

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Utriot, *Description des fetes donnés pendant quatorze jours a l'occasion du jour de naissance de Son Altesse Serenissime Mr. Le Duc Regnant de Wurtemberg et Teck*, 1763, pp. 49-50.

<sup>27</sup> *Lettres sur les arts imitateurs en général, et sur la danse en particulier*, 1807, op.cit., pp. 384-385.

<sup>28</sup> Utriot, *Description des fetes*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>29</sup> This image derives from Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, entry "Furore": "*La fascia legata à gli occhi mostra, che privo resta l'intelletto quando il Furore prende il dominio nell'anima, non essendo altro il furore, che cecità di mente del tutto priva del lume intellettuale, che porra l'huomo à fare ogni cosa fuor di ragione.*" op.cit., pp. 176-177. However, Boquet's Jealousy does not correspond at all with Ripa's "Gelosia", depicted in blue dress which alluded a similarity between this emotion and the sea (which never varies so calmly to not raise a suspicion), and is decorated with eyes and ears. See *Iconologia*, op.cit., pp.181-182.

<sup>30</sup> *Volume 11: Avertissement, Etat de prix des marchandises, gravures de costumes, partition de l'Enlèvement de Proserpine*, p. 38. Warsaw, Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, Gabinet Rycin: Zb. Krol, Nm. 805.

<sup>31</sup> *Lettres sur la danse, et sur les ballets*, 1760, pp. 183-186.

<sup>32</sup> *Programme des Opéra représentées devant leurs Majestés, année 1763 : L'acte Philas et Zélis opéra représenté à Versailles le 12 janvier ; Vertume et Pomone, opéra, 4e entrée du ballet des Elemens représenté à Versailles le 9 février ; L'acte de la Vüe du Ballet des sens, opéra représenté à Versailles le 2 mars ; L'acte du Devin de village, opera représenté à Versailles le 9 mars ; Ismène et Isménias opéra représenté à Choisy le 13 juin ; Dardanus opéra représenté à Fontainebleau le 8 octobre ; Scanderberg, opéra représenté à Fontainebleau le 22 octobre ; Castor et Pollux, opéra représenté à Fontainebleau le 5 novembre ; L'acte du feu et celui de la Guirlande opera représenté à Versailles le 29 décembre.* Archives Nationales, O1 3266.

<sup>33</sup> *Mémoire de Peintures et dorures faittes sur les habits pour les menus plaisirs du Roy pour les spectacles donnés a la cour pendant l'année 1763. Les dits ouvrages faitts par ordre de Monsieur de la ferté Intendant et controlleur des menus plaisirs et affaires de la chambre du Roy et sous la conduite de Boquet peintre et dessinateur des menus plaisirs du Roy.* Archives Nationales, O1 3008, pièce 66. Cit. in.: Albane Piot: *Recherches sur Louis-Rene Boquet (1717-1814).* Art et histoire de l'art. 2014. *Memoire de recherche <dumas-01221519>*.

<sup>34</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the dance styles in this period see: FAIRFAX, Edmund: *The Styles of Eighteenth Century Ballet.* (Maryland : Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2003).

<sup>35</sup> These observations were acquired during a practical workshop at Swedish baroque theatre Confidencen in Stockholm, 19-20 September 2017 (organized by research project Performing Premodernity), during which costume designer specialized in 18th century sartorial practices Anna Kjellsdotter created a costume of Furie based on presented sketches and descriptions. Dancer Noah Hellwig, member of Nordic Baroque Dancers, then performed in the costume dance of furies from Gluck's *Orfeo*.

<sup>36</sup> For the analysis of this critique see article by Arianna Fabbricatore "Semiotic Elements of the "Italian" Grotesque practice. In: *Tanz in Italien. Italienischer Tanz in Europa 1400-1900. Für Barbara Sparti. Tagungsband zum 4. Symposium für Historischen Tanz.* Freiburg 2016, pp. 57-74.