

Flowers and Combats:
Observations on *Ballets Figurés*
in the Operas of Jean-Philippe Rameau

Edith Lalonger

Nowadays the relationship between music, dance, and text in Jean-Philippe Rameau's work is not always clear to the contemporary performer-choreographer, conductor, or musicologist. Moreover, in spite of its importance, dance is often omitted from modern productions, obliging the director to resort to other solutions in order to maintain audience interest and preserve the meaning of the work. Many directors find certain dance numbers illogical within the dramaturgy. This is understandable, for without the study of the dance itself and its meaning in the dramaturgy, the *ballet figuré* loses its semantic function.

The *ballets figurés*, which account for more than one quarter of the music in Rameau's operas, are crucial to understanding the logical and subtle continuity of the narrative of each work.¹

It is important to study the inseparable link between music, text, and dance that is specific to these ballets, in order to define better this particular form that is typical of Rameau's operas.

The lack of notation

The absence of any known choreographic notation for the totality of Jean-Philippe Rameau's operatic works is the greatest difficulty confronting studies of these ballets. This begs the question: Why did the ballet masters not notate their ballets? Charles Pinot Duclos provides an answer in the *Encyclopédie* when he compares the mediocrity of dance notation to that of declamation:

"The choreographic notation shows the dancer the steps he must do and the path he must follow on the ground, but this is the least part of the dancer's work: this notation will never show him how to execute the steps with grace, determine the movements of the body, the arms, the head, in a word, all the postures suited to his size, his countenance, and to the character of his dance."²

If dance notation seemed so mediocre to Duclos, this was perhaps because it no longer corresponded to practice at the beginning of the 18th century which tended increasingly towards expression and pantomime, both difficult to notate.³ As Edmond Edmund Fairfax mentioned, thus dancers created their own choreography, invented steps, or improvised in their solos⁴. C. Marsh and R. Harris-Warrick add that professional dancers used certain steps that either had no name or for which the terminology was nascent.⁵ Even if two dances in Feuillet notation to music by Rameau are to be found in the manuscript score of Auguste Ferrère's *Le Peintre amoureux de son modèle* (1782), these cannot be linked to the creation of any of Rameau's operas.⁶ Notation had never been indispensable to performances at the Opéra in the first half of the 18th century, a fact Noverre emphasizes when he writes: 'I learned the choreography and I forgot it'⁷. Consequently, owing to the lack of notation for these ballets, our research will necessarily focus on retracing the typical form of the *ballet figuré* to better understand its context within the lyric work, rather than attempting reconstitution from a precise source.

A Definition

What is a *ballet figuré*? The expression was used already in 1729 by the brothers Parfaict⁸ for a ballet (led by Roger) at the Saint-Laurent Fair. In 1731, Parfaict mentioned also "An entertainment composed of Silent Scenes figured in Ballet [figurées en ballet] entitled La Guinguette Anglaise [...]; it was executed by Roger, Rinton & Haugthon, three excellent Pantomime Dancers, newly arrived from London, who were generally applauded."⁹ Another mention of the expression *ballet figuré* can be found in the *Mercure de France* (June 1746), concerning the composition of the "maître de ballets", François Antoine Malter who "had performed for the first time on the Théâtre de l'Opera at the end of the Love of the Gods [de Mouret] a dance piece, entitled "Love and Graces, Ballet figuré; [...]"¹⁰. The subject of this ballet was treated in the play *L'Oracle* by M. Ste-Foy, and used in the second act of *Zaïs* in 1748 where Malter held the post of assistant to the ballet master A. Laval.¹¹ The expression *ballet figuré* also appears in periodicals of the end of the 18th century mentioning works by Rameau or having a link with his works as is the case for *La Tour enchantée*¹² / *ballet figuré* mixed with songs and dances, on a libretto by Mme de Villeroi and Pierre Joliveau, whose music contains an extract from Rameau's *Fêtes d'Hébé*. However, the expression is found mainly in Rameau's works and has no connection to his librettist Cahusac, contrary to what might be believed (although we shall see that these ballets correspond well to the aesthetic and structure as explained in Cahusac's treatise *La Danse Ancienne et Moderne, and the definitions in the Encyclopédie*). Indeed, a few expressions similar to *Ballet figuré* can be observed in Rameau's work, for example: *entrée et combat figurés d'Athlètes & Gladiateurs* in Act II of *Castor et Pollux* (1737), or *l'Oracle figuré en pas de cinq* in *Les Fêtes d'Hébé* (1739), long before the first collaboration between Rameau and Cahusac on *Les Festes de Polymnie* (1745).

Moreover, Cahusac does not use the term *ballet figuré* in his treatise or in his articles for the *Encyclopédie*. Curiously, it is Voltaire who gives a definition of *ballet figuré* in the *Encyclopédie*, not where we expect to find it (in the articles for ballet, opera or tragédie lyrique) but as a literary sub-category, in the article "Figuré": "(litt.) exprimé en figure, On dit un ballet figuré, qui représente ou qu'on croit représenter une action, une passion, une saison, ou qui simplement forme des figures par l'arrangement des danseurs deux à deux, quatre à quatre: [...]"¹³ (It is said a figurative ballet, which represents or is thought to represent an action, a passion, a season, or which simply forms figures by the arrangement of the dancers two by two, four by four). This definition is unsatisfactory in its lack of detail on the form and pushes us to look further.

To understand more about the *Ballet figuré*, let us study Cahusac's definition of the single word « ballet » in the *Encyclopédie*:

Ballet; a *danse figurée*, performed by several persons who by their steps and their gestures depict a natural or marvellous action, to the sound of instruments and voice.

Every ballet involves dance and the participation of two or more persons to perform it. A single person who would depict an action by dancing would not constitute strictly speaking a ballet; this would only be a form of pantomime. And several persons who would depict whatever action without dance would constitute a play, never a ballet. [...]

[...] Without dance there cannot be a ballet: but without ballet there can be dances.

Ballet ; danse figurée, exécutée par plusieurs personnes qui représentent par leurs pas & leurs gestes une action naturelle ou merveilleuse, au son des instruments & de la voix.

Tout ballet suppose la danse, & le concours de deux ou de plusieurs personnes pour l'exécuter. Une personne seule, qui, en dansant, représenterait une action, ne formerait pas proprement un ballet ; ce ne serait alors qu'une forme de pantomime. Et plusieurs personnes qui représenteraient quelque action sans danse, formeraient une comédie & jamais un ballet. [...]

[...]Sans danse il ne peut point exister de *ballet* : mais sans *ballet* il peut y avoir des danses.¹⁴

Three clues may be obtained from this definition:

- 1 -a ballet, according to Cahusac, involves several persons,
- 2 -a single dancer, dancing an action, is called “pantomime” (and not ballet),
- 3 -all of it must be danced [and so can be understood as the opposite of pure mime].

However, two terms in Cahusac's definition are confusing if their meanings are not understood: *danse figurée* and *pantomime*. Let us first examine *danse figurée*.

In 1682, Menestrier already gave a revealing comment in his treatises *Des Ballets anciens et modernes selon les règles de théâtre*¹⁵ : “on se dégoûte de ses danses figurées qui n'expriment que de beaux pas sans rien représenter;” (one is disgusted by his *danses figurées* which express only beautiful steps without representing anything). This comment reminds us of the ideas Noverre developed almost eighty years later. Indeed, in his letters (1760), Noverre contrasts the *ballet d'action* with *danse figurée* giving, like Menestrier, a meaning of *danse figurée* as a pure dance, executing steps and floor patterns:

[after discussing the ballet without action] It would be inexact to say that there is no ballet at the Opéra. The act of *Les Fleurs*; the act of *Eglée* in *les Talens Lyriques*; the prologue of *Les Fêtes Grecques & Romaines*; the Turkish act of *Europe galante*; one act among others of *Castor & Pollux*, and many more, where dance is or can be acted easily and without ingenuity on the composer's part, are to me truly pleasant and very interesting ballets; but *danse figuré* devoid of meaning are for me, as I have already said, mere dance exhibitions deploying the affected movements of the art's mechanical difficulties.

Dire qu'il n'y a point de Ballet à l'Opéra [après avoir parlé du ballet sans action], serait une fausseté. L'Acte des Fleurs ; l'Acte d'Eglée dans les Talens Lyrique ; le Prologue des Fêtes Grecques & Romaines ; l'Acte Turc de l'Europe galante ; un Acte entr'autres de Castor & Pollux, & quantité d'autres, où la danse est, ou peut être mise en action avec facilité & sans effort de génie de la part du compositeur, m'offrent véritablement des Ballets agréables & très-intéressants ; mais les Danses figurées qui ne disent rien [...] ne font à mon sens, comme je l'ai déjà dit, que de simples divertissements de Danse, & qui ne me déploient que les mouvements compassés des difficultés mécaniques de l'Art.¹⁶

In the *Encyclopédie*, Cahusac uses *la danse figurée* as a synonym of *danse simple*, as can be seen from the following: *La danse figurée, ou la danse simple reprisent en France la place qu'elles avoient occupée sur les théâtres des Grecs & des Romains ; on ne les y fit plus servir*

que pour les intermedes ; comme dans *Psiché*, *le Mariage forcé*, *les Fâcheux*, *les Pygmées*, *le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, &c.¹⁷

Again, in his treatise *La danse ancienne et moderne: ou Traité historique de la danse*, Cahusac uses the expression about the main purpose of the different Grand Ballet Entrances that provide: “dancers with opportunities to develop the graces of Simple Dance; but the Dance composées, that which expresses the passions, is consequently the only kind worthy of the Theatre”¹⁸. It is also important to note that Cahusac also uses the expression *danse en action* in the same sense as *danse composée*:

*La Danse en action a sur la danse simple, la supériorité qu’a un beau tableau d’histoire sur des découpures de fleurs. [...] Or, le talent suppose dans le Danseur, la Danse en action lui fournit autant de moyens d’expression qu’il y a de passion dans l’homme. Dance in action, compared with simple dance, is like the superiority that a beautiful picture of history has compared with cut-outs of flowers. Presupposing that the dancer has talent, Dance in action provides him with as many means of expression as there are passions in man.*¹⁹

From these last quotes, one can understand the difference between *ballet figuré* and *danse figurée*. It is notable that, contrary to *ballet figuré*, *danse figurée* is pure dance wherein the steps and the figures are set independently of an action, a particular expression or a pantomime.

As regards *pantomime*, Voltaire, in a letter (letter nr 183, april) to Damilaville in 1762, says: «What he calls pantomime I have always called action. I do not at all like the term "pantomime" for tragedy [...]».²⁰

It must be noted that Rameau never uses the expression "*pantomime*" in his *tragedies lyriques* but in lighter works such as the *opéra bouffon* *Platée*, in the one-act ballets *Pygmalion* (“*pantomime niaise*”, “*pantomime très vive*”), in *Daphnis et Eglée*, and in the *comédie-ballet* *Les Paladins* (“*ballet pantomime*”). It can also be observed that the word *pantomime* is used only in Rameau's later works. The word *pantomime* is often confusing because in many cases it refers to Italian pantomime. In her recent publication, *La Querelle des Pantomimes*, Arianna B. Fabbri demonstrates the fungibility of this expression.²¹

In spite of the difficulty in defining the expressions *ballet figuré*, *danse figurée* and *pantomime*, certain consistencies may be noticed in Rameau's works. The *ballets figurés* generally comprise an action for one or two solo dancers preceded and followed by a *corps d’entrée* (nowadays called *corps de ballet*). This last always participates in the general action. Cahusac's definition of “*entrée*” seems to confirm the structure that the *ballets figurés* exhibit, namely the alternation *corps d’entrée* – soloist(s) – *corps d’entrée*:

Entrée, (Dance.) Violin tune which accompanies the entry of the *divertissements* of an opera act on stage. This name is also given to the dance itself that is performed. Ordinarily the group of dancers makes its appearance on this tune, which is why it is called *corps d’entrée*. They dance a beginning; a single dancer dances a beginning and an ending, and the group takes up the last ending. Each dance that a dancer performs is also called *entrée*. It may also be called *pas*.²²

In addition, Cahusac describes the structure of a ballet as follows: “... it must be divided into scenes and acts; each scene in particular must have, like the act, a beginning, a middle, and an

end; in other words, its exposition, its climax, and its resolution”.²³ And further on: “A good ballet *entrée* requires 1) an action; 2) the equal participation of singing and dancing in forming, developing, and resolving it; 3) that all its amenities originate from the same subject”.

The *ballets figurés* that are characteristic of Rameau's operas follow this form and notion. Some of Rameau's ballets not explicitly titled *ballets figurés* still correspond to these in their form. To simplify this analysis, we shall consider as *ballets figurés* any danced parts with stage directions (*didascalie*). By this means, or by the knowledge of the distribution of dancers from the libretto (number of dancers, names and talents of individual dancers), may be related an alternation of *corps d'entrée* and an action by one or two dancers. The exposition of a subject, a climax, and a resolution are not always in evidence but we shall maintain the idea that every ballet must contain these three essential parts. Later on, we shall see some other differences that contribute to defining these ballets.

Rameau and the French Dance Tradition

Rameau was not the only composer of the 17th and 18th centuries to experiment with ballet related to dramaturgy including underworld ballets, ceremonies, sacrificial dances, combats, and fantastic characters. R. Harris-Warrick, in her latest publication *Dance and Drama in French Baroque Opera, A History*,²⁴ champions one of his rivals, Jean-Féry Rebel, who composed at least five such “symphonies” for the Opéra between 1711 and 1737.²⁵ She continues saying: “*Les Caractères de la danse*, however, not only had the widest distribution, it generated a new type of *divertissement* within operas, one organized around a star female performer — Prévost in the first instance, later her students Sallé and Camargo”. Sallé in particular is mentioned in different 18th-century sources for her contribution to theatrical dance. Bricaire de la Dixmerie wrote about her: “[...] but it was the noble and gracious Sallé who deserved, and obtained, all the acclaim. She established the ideal for this type of dance”²⁶.

Rameau availed himself of the French tradition in dance and all the audacious experiments made by Marie Sallé, who gives a real impulse for the *ballet figuré* in his lyric works.²⁷ In fact, Rameau's first *ballet figuré* (without being termed as such) is without doubt the *ballet des Fleurs*, the 3rd *entrée* of *Les Indes Galantes* (libretto from Fuzelier). This ballet, composed by Sallé and involving the *corps d'entrée* in the action, is a fine example of the *corps d'entrée* – solo – *corps d'entrée* alternation.

The libretto of the *Entrée des Fleurs* gives a description of the ballet:

*This ballet is the picturesque depiction of the fate of flowers in a garden. These, in addition to Boreus and Zephyr, are personified to give soul to this gallant painting, and performed by several kind slaves of both sexes. First the select flowers that can shine brightest on the stage dance together and form a perpetually changing flower bed. Their queen, the Rose, dances alone. The celebration is interrupted by a storm brought on by Boreus; the flowers endure his wrath, the Rose resisting for the longest the enemy who persecutes her; Boreus's steps express his impetuosity and wrath; the Rose's attitudes paint her gentleness and her fears; Zephyr arrives with his restorative clarity; he revives and restores the flowers that the storm has struck down, and brings their triumph and his own to a close with the tributes his tenderness pays to the Rose.*²⁸

To understand further the structure of the *ballet figuré* and how Marie Sallé could have

“established the ideal for this type of dance”, let us compare *l’Entrée des Fleurs*, *Les Indes galantes* (Ballet Héroïque) and *l’Entrée des Lutteurs* taken from *Nais* (Pastoral Héroïque):

Air/ dance	Text	Caractéristi c of the dance	Music	Group (corps d’entrée)/solo alternation
“Premier air des Fleurs“	<i>First the select flowers that can shine brightest on the stage dance together and form a perpetually changing flower bed (les Fleurs choisies [...], dansent ensemble, & forment un Parterre qui varie à chaque instant)</i>	<i>Simple dance</i>	“ 1 ^{er} Air des Fleurs Rondeau “, D major 3/8	Corps d’entrée
“Air tendre pour la Rose“	<i>La Rose dances alone (Mlle Sallé)</i>	Pantomime (according to Cahusac's definition)	“ Air tendre pour la Rose Rondeau “, B minor, 3/8	The Rose, danced by Sallé
“Gavotte I pour les Fleurs”	[festivities, judging from the text that follows]	Fête (Festive)/ <i>danse simple</i>	“ Gavotte pour les Fleurs Rondeau “, D major	Corps d’entrée
“Air pour Borée et la Rose“	<i>Interruption by storm (Borée: Javillier); Flowers are angry La Rose resistes enemy who persecutes her ; Borée expresses impetuosity and fury ; la Rose paints sweetness and fear</i>	Climax (Nœud de l’action) <i>Danse composée or ballet en action</i>	Semiquavers, very mobile bass line, in 2, with tempo change in D major alternations of <i>lent</i> (slow) and <i>vite</i> (quick) (sometimes abbreviated <i>L.</i> and <i>V.</i>) can be observed, giving the impression of an exchange between the two characters.	Alternation of solos between Boreus (Javillier-L.) and the Rose (dialogue), and the <i>corps d’entrée</i>
“Air pour Zéphire“	<i>Zéphire arrives with its resurgent light; he animates and raises the flowers cut down by the storm</i>	Resolution/ dénouement <i>Ballet en action</i>	In the score: “ Air pour Zéphire “ Marked in 2 (6/8), D minor Rather short Air, fugal entries	Zephyr (by M. Dumoulin), and corps d’entrée

“ <i>Air vif pour Zéphire et la Rose</i> “		Continuation of the resolution	Lively D major	Zéphire and the Rose
“ <i>Gavotte 2 pour les Fleurs</i> “	<i>and finishes their Triumph and his by the homage that his tenderness gives to the Roses</i>	<i>Danse simple Fête (Festive)</i>	In 2, typical entrée de fleurs with articulation of two slurred quavers, D major	Corps d’entrée and solists

Table 1: *Les Indes Galantes*, 3^e entrée : *Les Fleurs* (called in libretto from Fuzelier, 1735: “La Feste des Fleurs”)

This invention by the dancer Marie Sallé corresponds to Cahusac's rules, namely: 1) the exposition of the subject, 2) the climax, 3) the resolution. The ballet begins in a peaceful mood with the entry of the flowers (exposition by the *corps d’entrée*), followed by a central section (the climax) where the storm provokes feelings of anger, resistance, fury, or a contrast with the Rose's gentleness and apprehension. This short ballet ends in a triumphal mood with the arrival of Zephyr who frees the flowers (resolution). The music follows this model, emphasizing each change of character.

Flowers are ever present in operatic works of the 18th century. We meet with them in nearly all of Rameau's operatic works²⁹, not only in the hands of nymphs or shepherds but also, as can be seen in the prologue of *Samson* (libretto by Voltaire, tragedy in 5 Acts, never performed), in the hands of “armed heroes clasping garlands of flowers”³⁰. In most cases this is an offering to a divinity, preferably of myrtle, the symbol of peace, love, and power.

If the use of flowers to express peace and power is omnipresent in the operas of Rameau we also see the use of fighting or combats to express victory. Let us continue our observations with a second example where the same dramatic schema can be found: the *Entrée des lutteurs* (entry of the wrestlers) in *Nais*, as described in the libretto/score:

Act I Scene 7

Nais seats himself on a throne on one of the two sides of the stage.

(Competition for the cestus, wrestling and running prize. This ballet opens with six athletes arriving to compete for the wrestling prize. This number is interrupted by two new athletes who compete for the cestus prize. A third arrives and challenges all the others. They refuse; he dances his *entrée* proudly. A *quadrille* of young Greeks appears and competes for the running prize. The wrestling then resumes. The first athlete presents himself again: no one dares to fight him. He dances a second *entrée*, and Nais crowns him.)^{31 32}

In this “Entrée des Lutteurs”, the relation between the libretto and the music seems less evident. One might expect the music for an entry of wrestlers to evoke their brutal gestures, blows, falls, etc., but as Sylvie Bouissou points out, this music offers a sometimes contradictory atmosphere, with many surprisingly soft and light passages: “One would expect the warlike and bellicose

ambiance, coloured by the trumpets in *C* major, to last into the second and third *Airs pour les Athlètes*. Yet Rameau adopts a light, gracious, even mischievous tone, especially in the last *air*, ill-suited to the dramatic context. Clearly the musician had something in mind that malfunctions here, at least on the dramatic level³³. This ambiguity exists because the ballet that would create the story line is missing.

To find an answer, or at least a hypothetical explanation, let us recall first the form of the *ballet figuré* in order to establish the order of the sequence of feelings or actions that the stage direction (*didascalie*) proposes. Do we have an alternation of *corps d'entrée* and solo parts? Does the ballet follow the exposition-climax-resolution structure? Consequently, to pursue our line of questioning: are the feelings that combat sports provoke always so unchanging? Did Rameau (this time in collaboration with Cahusac) perhaps wish to depict the different aspects of athletics, such as ceremonious bowing, respect for one's opponent, the art of fighting with grace, judgement, concentration, reflection, defeat, acceptance or on the contrary rejection, humility, victory, etc.? In *Les Beaux arts réduits à un même principe*, Batteux says, "the composer finds in the very unity of his subject, the means to vary it. It depicts in turn, love, hatred, fear, sadness, hope" ("le compositeur trouve dans l'unité même de son sujet, les moyens de le varier. Il fait paraître tour à tour, l'amour, la haine, la crainte, la tristesse, l'espérance"). To demonstrate these human passions, and to understand the structure of the ballet, it is necessary to identify the places in the music that correspond to each action as described in the libretto or the stage direction.

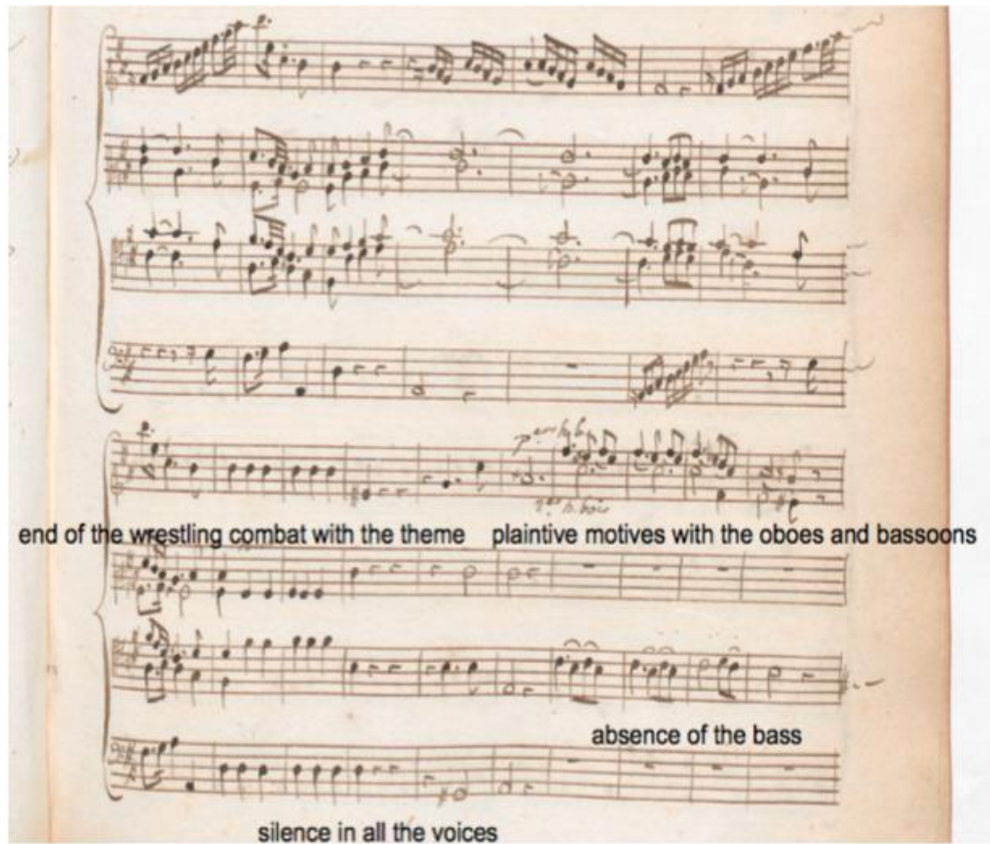
A forthcoming article from Graham Sadler and Rebecca Harris-Warrick, *La danse française et son rayonnement*³⁴, shows us an analysis of this *ballet figuré* based on the scores and libretto of the creation with the distributions of the dancers. They take as their starting point the references to "Dupré" or "Finit Dupré" written in the score. In their analysis, the first mention of "Dupré" reflects the beginning of this dancer's solo. Graham Sadler ends with a question:

We have now pinpointed the position in Rameau's score of all eleven elements in Cahusac's stage direction. There remain some anomalies, however, and I am not convinced that the stage direction tells the whole story. Take Dupré's first *entrée*. This, as noted above, begins with serene scoring for strings, in sharp contrast to the preceding parallel writing for *trio de hautbois* which seems associated with his opponents. It is thus odd that after nineteen bars of freely developing music, the key changes abruptly from major to minor and the strings give way to a woodwind trio, again featuring parallel sixths. Given the annotation "finit m^f. dupré » just after the arrival of the Greek maidens, these couplets must form part of his solo *entrée*. Yet it seems incongruous for Dupré's celebration to end with a minor-key passage and a return to the "submissive" parallel woodwind writing. Could it be, then, that the other athletes continue their humiliated gestures, in order to emphasize his supremacy?

It would be interesting for a future study, to consider one question: is the first mention of "Dupré" really the beginning of his solo or simply a special note for the "bateur de mesure" with the marked gesture of Dupré as winner of the wrestling? (See the musical example 2). Also, about the minor key, Rameau regularly uses the minor mode for proud or majestic *entrées*, as in the *Entrée Grave et Fièrre* and *Air Majestueux* of the prologue of *Les Fêtes de Polymnie*. For Charpentier in 1690, G minor corresponded to the "sérieux et magnifique"³⁵. In the

Flowers and Combats

eighteenth century, each tonality was thought to have a different character, and this provided the pretext for the expression of a series of human passions. We could consider the very form of the *Ballet figuré* (exposition of the subject, climax and resolution with alteration “solo-corps d’entrée”) to compose this suite of passions typical from this *ballet figuré* to get some answers.



The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation on aged paper. It features several staves of music, including vocal lines and instrumental parts. The notation is in a historical style, likely from the 18th century. There are several annotations in black text overlaid on the score:

- “end of the wrestling combat with the theme” is written below a section of the score.
- “plaintive motives with the oboes and bassoons” is written below another section.
- “absence of the bass” is written below a section where the bass line is notably absent.
- “silence in all the voices” is written at the bottom of the page, indicating a moment of complete vocal rest.

Musical example 1

In all cases the ballet follows the structure of the *ballet figuré* (the three essential parts and the alternation of solo and the corps d’Entrée). The recapitulation of our analysis in Table 2 informs a hypothesis for the choice of musical passages relating to the actions described in the blocking. Notice the alternation of *corps d’entrée* – solo/pas de deux – *corps d’entrée* that probably returns at the end of the chaconne as tradition demanded.³⁶

Chaconne (cont'd) bar 92	He proudly dances his entrée	minor	One athlete dances alone
Chaconne (cont'd) bar 109	A quadrille of young Greeks appear and completes for the running prize (Une quadrille de jeunes Grecques paraît & dispute le prix de la Course).	“ la course “ noted in the score	Corps d'Entrée (quadrille)
Suite chaconne mesure 150	The wrestling	Return of the theme (repeated notes)	One wrestler (Dupré)
Chaconne (cont'd) Bars 150-158	The first athlete presents himself again : no one dares to fight him.	Return of the theme (repeated notes)	One wrestler
Chaconne (cont'd) Bar 159	He dances a second entrée		One wrestler Corps d'Entrée
	Naïs crowns him		

Table 2: Naïs, Act I, sc. 7, “Entrée des Athlètes”

Like the *entrée Les Fleurs* in *Les Indes Galantes*, the *ballet figuré* of the athletes in *Naïs* exploits the different characters that the *entrée* can provide. The similarities include:

Entrée des Fleurs	Entrée de Athlètes	
Calm and light beginning	Calm and light beginning	Exposition
Storm (Orage): Anger Resistance Enemy who persecutes Gentleness and fear	Combat/Strength of the combat Resistance Refusal of the peers (gauntlet /Ceste)	Climax (Nœud)

(suggested by the blocking)	Sadness and moaning (in the music) or parodie	
Zéphir : new character Revives the flowers	3 ^e Athlète : new character resigns himself (accepts the refusal) mention “Dupré”	
Return of the soloists with Zéphir and the Rose (return of the major mode)	Return of the soloist with the dance of the victor by Dupré (return of the major mode)	Resolution
Triumph	Victory	

Table 3 : Similarities between the *Entrée des Fleurs* and the *Entrée des Athlètes*

It can be seen that the *ballets figurés Les Fleurs* in *Les Indes Galantes* and the *Entrée des lutteurs* in *Nais* clearly manifest this particular function of expressing a well-defined action, as a pretext to express the different passions of the soul (passions de l’âme). The Rameau-Cahusac duo goes one better in the second act of *Zaïs*³⁷ where, in the same *ballet figuré*, four groups of statues are brought to life by the character Cindor and “depict by their different steps and figures, the story of the *tableaux* they represented before being animated”. These four stories are told simultaneously with two simple gavottes (approximately 66 seconds)!³⁸ Like a quotation (or hypotext), these *tableaux* make reference to other works: two plays from the repertoire of the Comédie-Française,³⁹ and two operas performed at the Paris Opéra⁴⁰. Consequently, to render these stories intelligible, the choreographer must bring out the main feelings in order to reconstitute a plan similar to the ballets mentioned above.

Do ballets figurés Always Seek to Tell a Story?

Certain *ballets figurés* seem intended only to create an atmosphere or a contrast at the most sublime moments, as is the case of the *entrée des Sylphes*, followed by the *ballet figuré* in the third act of *Zaïs*, where the lively and light music contrasts with the airs “Coulez mes pleurs” and “Cruel dans ce fatal séjour” (which contrast is helped by the chorus “Célébrons la victoire d’un heureux berger”). For this *ballet figuré* only a brief comment – “it depicts unfaithfulness and inconstancy” (Il peint la légèreté et l’inconstance) – qualifies the character without describing a precise action, as was the case in the *Entrée des Fleurs* or the *Entrée des Lutteurs*. Could this *ballet des Sylphes* be meant to highlight the main action without being obliged to depict a precise action? Amplification comes to mind from the fact that Zélidie, whose faithfulness is tested, does not yield to thoughtlessness and inconstancy. On the other hand, if we follow the rules that we set out earlier, the exposition, the climax and the resolution must be maintained in the danced section. F. A. Chevrier, in the *Observateur des spectacles*⁴¹, suggests taking inspiration from the sung verses leading up to the dancing, and cites the example of Quinault’s libretto *Armide*, explaining how to resolve the difficulty of expressing a metaphysical act in dance while heeding the poem — the last verses giving the stage directions⁴².

	Stage directions	characteristics	structure
Acte IV, sc.4	Abramane, preceded and followed by singing Priests, goes to the altar and immolates the victims. During the sacrifice, the dancing Priests form a ballet of expiation front stage.	Sacrifice /Ballet of expiation	Exposition
Sc.5	Ballet figuré. It consists of Hate, Despair and their followers. Hate gives Revenge a handful of snakes, Despair gives him a bloodstained dagger.	Violent pantomime	
sc.5	Ballet figuré. Led by Hate and Despair, the Infernal Spirits come running at the sound of Revenge’s voice. She takes her place at the foot of the altar; the Demons armed with snakes and daggers perform the most dreadful conjurations against the stature of Zoroastre. They approach, raising their arms to strike, when a whirlwind of flames erupts from the altar, and the statue vanishes. Hate, Despair, and their retinue remain frozen. Abramane sees this as a sign of the power of hell. The Ballet of the Infernal Spirits resumes, but is interrupted by a frightening symphony.	Infernal spirits	Climax
	The Infernal Spirits dance an extremely joyous ballet that is interrupted by a noise from underground.	Infernal spirits/ extreme joy	Interruption
	At this moment several bundles of weapons appear from beneath the stage. Érinice and Revenge distribute them to Abramane and the Priests while the following is sung.	Utilisation of weapons	Resolution

Table 4, Zoroastre, structure of the 4th Act

Rameau exploits the underworld ballet in many works such as *Castor et Pollux*, the prologue to *Le Temple de la Gloire*, and *Zoroastre*. But the most impressive is beyond all doubt *Zoroastre*. Notice, in the next table the succession of *ballets figurés* in the 4th act which, as Raphaëlle Legrand mentions, “out of a concern for overlapping singing and dancing in vaster and more dramatic scenes, results in the collectively sung and danced *divertissement* (hitherto generally well-separated from the scenes reserved for the singing protagonists) occupying the majority of the act, to the point that it becomes the very vehicle of the action, in the form of extended *tableaux vivants*”.⁴³

This set of ballets, involving Revenge, Erinice, and Abramane, constitutes a well-defined action with an exposition consisting of the ballet of expiation and the first *ballet figuré*; the climax in the central *ballet figuré*; and the resolution in the ballet of the Infernal Spirits. This last includes two interruptions provoked by sound effects that are typical of *ballets figurés*, namely the “frightening symphony” or “underground noise” (reminding us of the interruption caused by the storm in the *Entrée des Fleurs* and the intervention of the third athlete who interrupts the combat in the *entrée des Lutteurs*).

In their fifth collaboration, the Cahusac-Rameau duo provides the perfect model of the *ballet figuré*.

We mentioned previously that Rameau was not the first to experiment with introducing ballet into the action. The groundwork for this new genre was already laid, but Rameau's treatment of it is unique, as Bricaire de la Dixmerie describes: "Dance owes part of its progress to the illustrious Rameau. He fomented the same revolution in dance itself as in our music. By invigorating the one, he invigorated the other. This opened new career prospects to even the most capable dancers".⁴⁴

In her article, "*Le ballet d'action avant Noverre: Rameau et l'écriture sonore du geste*" (The Action Ballet Before Noverre: Rameau and the Sonic Writing of Gesture), Raphaëlle Legrand sums up Rameau's contribution to dance in operatic works in France:

In the operatic production of Rameau and librettists as diverse as Fuzelier, Bernard, Cahusac, two tendencies, ripe for future potential, may be glimpsed in the pride of place that dance occupies: as complete an integration as possible in the sung action – the lesson that Gluck learned – or on the contrary, an autonomy that will favour its emancipation — as advocated by Noverre.⁴⁵

By fully involving himself in this new practice of *ballet figuré*, Rameau in his music reacts to a dramatic logic based on human feelings. A knowledge of the basic structure of the *ballet figuré* will help us to recognize the dramaturgical framework and could be a guide for the choreographer to explore the suite of "passions de l'âme". The art of interpreting human feelings, so dear to the Rameau-Cahusac duo, proves to be a purely theatrical exercise necessary for reconstituting or re-creating the ballets in Rameau's works. The abandonment of the expression *ballet figuré* in the mid-18th century would pave the way for the more familiar *ballet en action* or *ballet-pantomime*.

End Notes

¹ see in: Edith Lalonger, Jonathan Williams, « Music, Dance and Narrative in Rameau's Zaïs : Bringing the Immortal back to life », *Dance Research*, the Journal of the Society for Dance Research, November 2015, Vol. 33, Issue 2, pp. 212-226.

² *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des Arts et des Métiers*, dir. Par Diderot & d'Alembert (1751-1765) Vol. 4, p. 690.

³ Sylvie Bouissou "Le 'livret' d'opéra : une source d'information pour le geste, la danse et la composition des ballets", in *Musique et geste en France de Lully à la Révolution: études sur la musique, le théâtre et la danse*, edited by Jacqueline Waeber, 2009, pp. 95-114.

⁴ Edmund Fairfax, *The Styles of Eighteenth-Century Ballet* (Lanham, MD and London: Scarecrow, 2003), p. 333.

⁵ Carol G. Marsh, Rebecca Harris-Warrick, "The French Connection and Putting Together a Pantomime Ballet" in Rebecca Harris-Warrick & Bruce Alan Brown (ed.), *The Grotesque Dancer on the Eighteenth-century Stage: Gennaro Magri and His World* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), p. 248. Also : Gennaro Magri, *Theoretical and Practical Treatise on Dancing*, trans. Mary Skeaping (London: Dance Books, 1988), p. 131.

⁶ Rebecca Harris-Warrick, Bruce Alan Brown, *The Grotesque Dancer on the Eighteenth-century Stage: Gennaro Magri and His World* (The University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 173f, 183 fn 25, and 231f.

⁷ Charles Joseph Panckoucke, « Chorégraphie », *Encyclopédie méthodique, Arts académiques* (Paris, 1786), p. 392. Note: In the 18th century the word choreography meant the art of writing dance.

⁸ Briasson, 1743), pp. 53-54.

⁹ “*Un divertissement composé de Scènes muettes figurées en Ballet intitulé La Guinguette Angloise terminait ce Spectacle; il étoit exécuté par Roger, Rinton & Haughton, trois excellens Danseurs Pantomimes, nouvellement arrivés de Londres, qui furent généralement applaudis. La figure de Roger, qui avoit déjà paru deux ans auparavant, étoit toujours trouvée nouvelle, on ne se pouvoit lasser de la voir*” (Parfaict, *Mémoires [...] 1743*, Vol. 2, p. 69-70, see also *Espaces Imaginaires*, 1734, p. 95).

¹⁰ *Mercur de France*, « a fait exécuter pour la première fois sur le Théâtre de l’Opéra à la fin des Amours des Dieux [de Mouret] un morceau de danse, intitulé, “L’Amour et les Grâces, Ballet figuré. [...]”¹⁰ », (Paris : G. Cavelier, la veuve Pissot, J. de Nully, juin 1746), p. 131.

¹¹ E. Lalonger, J. Williams, “Music, Dance and Narrative in Rameau’s *Zaïs* [...]”, *Dance Research, the Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, Nov. 2015, Vol. 33, Issue 2, pp. 212-226.

¹² Mme de Villeroi, Pierre Joliveau, *Recueil des fêtes et spectacles données [sic] devant Sa Majesté*, à [...] / *La tour Enchantée, ballet-figuré mêlé de chant et de danse* (Paris : Ballard, juin 1770), Vol. 1, p. 66.

¹³ *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences [...]*, Vol. 6, (Paris: Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durant, 1756), p. 783.

¹⁴ *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris: Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durant, 1756), Vol. 2, p. 42.

¹⁵ Claude-François Menestrier, *Des Ballets anciens et modernes selon les règles de theatre*, Paris: Guignard, 1682, (reprint Geneva: Minkoff, 1984), p. 301.

¹⁶ Noverre, Jean Georges, *Lettres sur la danse, et sur les ballets*, (Lyon: Aimé Delaroche: 1760), p.126-127, see also *Compan, Dictionnaire de la danse* (Paris : Cailleau, 1787), p. 4 : “*La Mothe n’a connu que la Danse simple; il l’a variée dans ses Opéra, en lui donnant quelques caractères nationaux; mais elle y est amenée sans aucune Action nécessaire. Ce ne sont partout que des divertissements dans lesquels on ne danse que pour danser; les habits sont différents, l’intention est toujours la même.*”

¹⁷ *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une Société de Gens de lettres*, article “Ballet”, was published under the direction of Diderot and d’Alembert, 1751 and 1772., Vol. 2, p. 45.

¹⁸ Louis de Cahusac, *La danse ancienne et moderne: ou Traité historique de la danse, [à propos de l'objet principal des différentes Entrées du grand Ballet qui procurent] aux Danseurs des occasions d'y développer les graces de la Danse simple ; mais la Danse compose, celle qui exprime les passions & par consequent la seule digne du Théâtre [...]* (La Haye: Jean Neaulme, 1754), Vol. 3, p. 48, Gallica: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k108133v.image>.

¹⁹ Cahusac, *La danse ancienne et moderne* [...], Vol. 3, pp. 139-140.

²⁰ *Œuvres complètes* de Voltaire. Vol. 57, (Paris: l'imprimerie de la société littéraire typographique, 1784), p. 372, "[...] *que ce qu'il appelle pantomime, je l'ai toujours appelé action. Je n'aime point le terme de pantomime pour la tragédie.*"

²¹ Arianna Beatrice Fabbricatore, *La Querelle des Pantomimes / Danse, culture et société dans l'Europe des Lumières* (Rennes: Presse universitaires de Rennes, 2017).

²² *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences*, "Entrée, (Danse.) air de violon sur lequel les divertissements d'un acte d'opéra entrent sur le théâtre. On donne aussi ce nom à la danse même qu'on exécute. Ce sont ordinairement les chœurs de danse qui paraissent sur cet air; c'est pour cette raison qu'on les nomme corps d'entrée. Ils en dansent un commencement; un danseur ou une danseuse danse un commencement et une fin, et les chœurs reprennent la dernière fin. Chaque danse qu'un danseur ou une danseuse exécute, s'appelle aussi entrée. On lui donne encore le nom de pas", Vol. 5, p. 730.

²³ *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences*, Vol. 5, p. 730.

²⁴ Rebecca Harris-Warrick, *Dance and Drama in French Baroque Opera, A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 391.

²⁵ See Catherine Cessac, *Jean-Féry Rebel*, "Science de la musique" (Paris: CNRS, 2007), pp. 79-122.

²⁶ Bricaire de la Dixmerie, *Les Deux Âges du goût et du génie français* (Paris, La Haye: Lacombe, 1769), p. 524.

²⁷ See Sarah McCleave, "Marie Sallé and the Development of the *Ballet en action* », *Journal of the Society for Musicology*, Ireland, 2007.

²⁸ *Ce Ballet représente pittoresquement le sort des Fleurs dans un Jardin. On les a personnifiées ainsi que Borée et Zéphire, pour donner de l'âme à cette Peinture galante, exécutée par d'aimables Esclaves de l'un et l'autre sexe. D'abord les Fleurs choisies qui peuvent briller davantage au Théâtre, dansent ensemble, & forment un Parterre qui varie à chaque instant. La Rose leur Reine, danse seule. La Fête est interrompue par un orage qu'amène Borée; les Fleurs en éprouvent la colère, La Rose résiste plus longtemps à l'ennemi qui la persécute; les Pas de Borée expriment son impétuosité et sa fureur; les attitudes de la Rose, peignent sa douceur et ses craintes; Zéphire arrive avec sa clarté renaissante; il anime et relève les fleurs abattues par la tempête, et termine leur Triomphe et le sien par les hommages que sa tendresse rend à la Rose.* Louis Fuzelier, *Les Indes Galantes*, ballet héroïque représenté par l'Académie royale de Musique; pour la première fois, le mardi 23. août 1735. Remis avec la nouvelle entrée des Sauvages, le samedi dixième mars 1736, Paris: Ballard, 1736, (see Gallica: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k108558p/f54.image>, p.46.)

²⁹ For examples, see : *Castor et Pollux*, Act III, sc.4, *Les Fêtes d'Hébé*, 2nd Entrée “Eglée danse, sa Guirlande à la main”, *Les Fêtes de Polymnie*, Prologue, Act III, *Platée*, Acte II sc. 3, *Les Fêtes de l'Hymen et de l'Amour*, Prologue, 1st and 2nd Entrées, *Zaïs*, Act I, sc. 4, *Naïs*, Prologue “Sous leurs pas [les nymphes] on voit naître les fleurs et la verdure”, Act II, sc.6, *Zoroastre*, Act V, sc. 6.

³⁰ François-Marie Arouet de Voltaire, *Samson*, tragédie en cinq actes, see on line: <http://jp.rameau.free.fr/samson.htm>, see also “portant dans une main une massue & de l'autre une branche d'Olivier” (Gabriel-Henri Gaillard, *Parallele des quatre Electres* de Sophocle, *d'Euripide*, de M. de Crébillon & de M. de Voltaire, La Haye, J. Néaulme, 1750), p. 119. The parts *Samson*, music from Rameau, is lost.

³¹ Act I sc. 7, *Naïs se place sur un trône, qui est à un des deux côtés du Théâtre*.

(*Dispute du Prix du Ceste, de la Lutte, & de la Course. Ce ballet commence par six Athlètes qui viennent disputer le prix de la Lutte. Ce pas est coupé par deux nouveaux Athlètes, qui disputent le prix du Ceste. Il en survient un troisième qui défie au combat tous les autres. Ceux-ci le refusent: il danse fièrement son entrée. Une quadrille de jeunes Grecques paraît & dispute le prix de la Course. La Lutte reprend ensuite. Le premier Athlète se présente une seconde: personne n'ose le combattre: il danse une seconde Entrée, & Naïs le couronne*).

Louis Cahusac, *Naïs*, opéra pour la paix, représenté par l'Académie royale de musique pour la première fois le mardi 22 avril 1749 [Music by Rameau], (Paris: aux dépens de l'Académie, impr. de Vve Delormel et fils, 1749), p. 28.

³² Cestus a hand covering of leather bands often loaded with lead or iron and used by boxers in ancient Rome (Merriam-Webster).

³³ Sylvie Bouissou, *Jean-Philippe Rameau*, (Millau: Fayard, 2014), p. 429: “ *L'ambiance guerrière et belliqueuse colorée de trompettes en do majeur est censée perdurer dans les deuxième et troisième Airs pour les Athlètes. Pourtant, Rameau adopte un ton léger, gracieux et même presque espiègle, surtout dans le dernier air, peu adapté dans le contexte dramatique. À l'évidence, le musicien avait quelque chose en tête qui fonctionne mal ici, du moins sur le plan dramatique.*”

³⁴ *La danse française et son rayonnement*, ed. Jean-Noël Laurenti, Rebecca Harris Warrick and Marie-Thérèse Mourey, Paris, Garnier, forthcoming.

³⁵ Marc-Antoine Charpentier: *Règles de composition* [Ms. Paris, Bibl. Nat. nouv.acq. fr.6355-6356].

³⁶ See the description of a chaconne in Louis Bonin, *Die Neueste Art Zur Galanten und Theatralischen Tantz-Kunst*, reissue, Hentrich, 1996 (Leipzig : Joh. Christoff Lochner, 1711), Chapter XXXII, pp. 185-88.

³⁷ See *Zaïs*, ballet héroïque en quatre actes : RCT 60, ed. Graham Sadler, and also Edith Lalonger, Jonathan Williams, *Dance Research*, “Music, Dance and Narrative in Rameau's *Zaïs*: Bringing the Immortal back to Life” (see also footnote, Graham Sadler), p. 223.

³⁸ *Zaïs, ballet héroïque en quatre actes*, p. 223.

³⁹ Saint-Foix, *L'Oracle* (1740), in which Alcindor pretends to be inanimate to win Lucinde; Cahusac, *Zénéide* (1743), in which Zénéide must hide her beauty until Olinde declares his love.

⁴⁰ Rebel and Francoeur, *Zélindor*, King of the Sylphes (1745), in which Zirphé falls in love with Zélindor without seeing him in the flesh; Brassac, *L'Empire de l'Amour* (1733), in which Zélindor hides his true identity from Ismène.

⁴¹ François-Antoine Chevrier, *L'Observateur des spectacles ou Anecdotes théâtrale* (Amsterdam: Constapel, 18 janvier, 1763), pp. 40-41.

⁴² The full text: François-Antoine Chevrier, *L'Observateur des spectacles ou Anecdotes théâtrale* (Amsterdam : H. Constapel libraire, 18 janvier 1763), pp. 40-41, “*Pour prouver que dans les occasions les moins favorables en apparence, on peut trouver en étudiant bien un poëme, des ressources fort riches, & souvent un travail tout tracé, lisons seulement, écoutons ce que chante la Haine dans son invention. ‘Plus on connaît l’Amour & plus on la déteste./Détruisons son pouvoir funeste; /Déchirons son bandeau, etc’.* Nous trouverons, pour les danseurs, suivant de la Haine, plusieurs actions à faire sous les yeux d’Armide, telles que de déchirer avec fureur entre eux un bandeau, de renverser un carquois, de s’en distribuer les flèches, & de les briser en diverses manières: l’extinction du flambeau de l’Amour, pourrait produire seul un Ballet figuré en mille manières différentes, le jeu de ce flambeau avec ceux des Furies, après l’avoir présenté à Armide, tout enfin produirait la plus féconde matière d’un Poëme entier en danse [...]”.

⁴³ Raphaëlle Legrand, “*Le ballet d’action avant Noverre : Rameau et l’écriture sonore du geste*”, *Georges Noverre (1727-1810) / un artiste européen au siècle des Lumières*, (Tour: Université François-Rabelais de Tours, Musicorum No. 10, 2011), p. 249, “*Dans ce souci d’imbriquer le chant et la danse dans des scènes de plus en plus vaste et dramatiques, le ‘divertissement’ collectif chanté et dansé (jusqu’alors généralement bien séparé des scènes réservées aux protagonistes chantants) finit par occuper la plus grande partie de l’acte et se révéler le véhicule même de l’action, sous la forme d’amples tableaux animés*”.

⁴⁴ Bricaire de la Dixmerie, *Les Deux Âges du goût et du génie français* (La Haye, Paris: Lacombe, 1769), pp. 522-523.

⁴⁵ Raphaëlle Legrand, “*Le ballet d’action avant Noverre : Rameau et l’écriture sonore du geste, Georges Noverre (1727-1810) / un artiste européen au siècle des Lumières*” (Tours: Université François-Rabelais de Tours, Musicorum, No. 10, 2011).

