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When dances circulated on paper: European dancing masters and the art of dancing ‘by characters and demonstrative figures’

Marie Glon

‘*Chorégraphie, ou l’art de décrire la dance par caracteres, figures et signes démonstratifs*’: under this title, Parisian dancing master Raoul Auger Feuillet presented, in 1700, what would nowadays be called a dance notation manual.¹ Thanks to this scriptural art, hundreds of ‘dances engraven in characters and figures’ (the use of which is meant to be similar to that of musical scores), edited by dancing masters, were published during the 18th century – at least 330 dances can thus be identified, published in 157 printed books or leaflets, pertaining both to writing and to drawing. One of the aims of these objects was to introduce dances into new social and geographical areas, and the study of their circulations reveals a whole network of exchanges in Europe – exchanges of dances, but also of groundbreaking ideas and techniques. These circulations force us to reconsider widely accepted notions about writing. They also shed light on a variety of environments for the practice of dance at that time, and on the porosity between those distinct venues and environments. They lead us to review historiographical theories about French culture and its relations to other countries, under the reign of Louis XIV and afterwards. Finally, they reveal how dancing masters collectively re-invented their activities and assignments, on a European level, throughout the 18th century.

Chorégraphie: a conservation or a diffusion tool?

A common way of considering writing is to see it as a means of conservation – as if preserving knowledge was the sole or main use of its inscription². Thus, dance notation is often presented as a memory, and its intended patrimonial dimension does not seem to make any doubt³. On the contrary, a careful study of the ‘dances in characters’ and of the texts related to them reveals that this objective was not mentioned as such when they first appeared. The aim of preserving dance works for the future is flagrantly absent from Raoul-Auger Feuillet’s texts about the many advantages of *Chorégraphie*, for instance: his goal is merely to make them accessible to his contemporaries. The circulation of dances is made possible, according to him, by a specific way of

¹ Raoul Auger Feuillet, *Chorégraphie ou l’art de décrire la dance, par caracteres, figures et signes démonstratifs* (Paris, chez l’auteur et Michel Brunet, 1700).

² As Carlo Severi states, even Ignace Gelb, the author of the reputed *Study of writing*, is positive that either you are content with oral memory, and the resulting legacy is fragile and uncertain; or you invent new transcription techniques that open up to actual written transmission. Carlo Severi, ‘L’univers des arts de la mémoire. Anthropologie d’un artefact mental’, *Annales. Histories, Sciences Sociales* vol. 64, n.2 (2009), p.463-497 (p.466).

³ See for instance this eloquent title: Compagnie Fêtes Galantes, *La Notation chorégraphique, outil de mémoire et de transmission* (Alfortville, 2007).

reading, allowing every reader to decipher dances on paper easily.⁴ It is thus necessary to consider that this scriptural art does not pertain to the recording conception of writing, but to another use: leading the reader to embody the text.

In his 1700 manual, Raoul Auger Feuillet presents the main references of this writing system, first of all the representation of space, based on a close relationship between the page and the stage or dancing-room (the page of the book represents the actual room where the dancing is to take place, the upper side of the page symbolizing the upper end of the room, which is supposed to be oblong). Then he introduces the ‘presence’ figure, indicating the place and orientation of the dancer at the beginning of the dance; the figures of positions and steps, etc. Eventually he states very clearly that ‘deciphering’ a dance, through the careful analysis of these elements, actually means... dancing it, as one of the subheads indicates: ‘De la maniere qu'on doit se prendre pour marcher par l'écriture.’⁵ He shows there that the dance in characters is to be read by a reader standing on his feet, and ready to move while holding the book. Finding the ‘presence’ figure, i.e. the first intellectual operation mentioned by Feuillet as he describes the process of deciphering a written dance, actually means positioning oneself at the right spot in the room; identifying the track and the movements it involves means moving around the place:

Premierement il faut chercher le commencement du chemin, afin de connoître devant quelle partie de la Salle le corps doit être avant de dancer [...]; ensuite voir s'il y a une Position [...] et sy placer, puis voir quel pas se trouve le plus proche de ladite Position [...] & l'ayant marché, voir encore lequel est le plus proche de celui que l'on a marché.⁶

Reading a dance, therefore, means dancing it step by step. No wonder *Chorégraphie* manuals fail to mention the moment when the reader lets go of the book, since there is, according to them, no boundary between deciphering and really dancing. Conversely, the way the reader is to handle the book (in front of him, holding it with both hands) is explained in considerable detail; so are the meticulous operations involved in reading the manual around the place, especially when a rotation of the reader-dancer's body is required – which is likely to make him lose sight of the superposition of the page of the book with the dancing place:

Tous les Pas qui se font sans tourner ou qui tournent un tour entier on tiendra le Livre avec les deux mains par les deux côtez, mais quand il faudra tourner un quart de tour, un demy tour, ou trois quarts de tour, il sera necessaire de prendre plus de précaution, attendu qu'il est difficile de tourner sans que le Livre tourne aussi, ce qu'il faut absolument éviter, car si le Livre sort de sa scituation, il sera impossible de connoître les pas qui seront écrits; c'est à quoi j'ay tâché de remedier, en donnant les Regles suivantes. Après avoir remarqué le tournant & de quel côté il tourne, comme par exemple, un quart de tour à droit, on portera la main gauche au Livre à la partie la plus opposite de soy, & la droite s'en éloignera, en sorte qu'elles se trouvent toutes deux devant soy également avancées tenant toujours le Livre par les mêmes endroits, & on trouvera qu'on aura tourné ledit quart de tour, sans que le Livre ait changé sa scituation.⁷

In this sense, *Chorégraphie* is not only the art of describing, but the art of dancing (‘Art of dancing, by characters and demonstrative figures’ is actually Weaver's translation of Feuillet's title

⁴ ‘Les uns & les autres par le secours des Signes, Caracteres & Figures que je donne, pourront déchiffrer aisément les Dances’. Feuillet, *Chorégraphie*, n. p.

⁵ Feuillet, *Chorégraphie*, p.35.

⁶ Feuillet, *Chorégraphie*, p.35.

⁷ Feuillet, *Chorégraphie*, p.34.

for his *Chorégraphie* manual, making it more explicit than the French version as to the use intended for it). The materiality of the dances in characters obviously takes into account this specific way of reading: all those objects are particularly easy to handle, i.e. not too heavy and not too big, but not too small either, so that the characters remain easy to read (the comments of the authors of these objects reveal how conscious they were of the importance of readability). This reading-dancing contrasts with the silent reading which had already become the rule by then, and which, as Michel de Certeau points out, brought about a significant decline of the bodily engagement in the act of reading:

La lecture est devenue depuis trois siècles une geste de l'œil. Elle n'est plus accompagnée, comme auparavant, par la rumeur d'une articulation vocale ni par le mouvement d'une manducation musculaire. [...] Autrefois, le lecteur intériorisait le texte; il faisait de sa voix le corps de l'autre; il en était l'acteur. [...] Parce que le corps se retire du texte pour n'y plus engager qu'une mobilité de l'œil, la configuration géographique du texte organise de moins en moins l'activité du lecteur.⁸

The involvement of the body demanded by the task of deciphering a dance in characters amounts to an unexpected bonding between body and text.⁹ This very specific way of reading, according to dancing masters, allows dances to travel. More precisely, figures on paper can travel, and readers in distant places can read, i.e. dance, those figures. Feuillet, after emphasizing the utility of his book, underlines that he will have dances engraved for public utility ('pour l'utilité publique') and that it will be possible to send them by mail ('on pourra [les] envoyer dans une Lettre ainsi qu'on envoie un Air de Musique¹⁰'). This idea of dance travelling in letters becomes a very popular one, repeated in many of the numerous texts presenting or commenting on the art of writing dances.

Social circulation: from the stage to the ball or the dancing lesson

It can therefore be considered that the main aim of dancing masters resorting to *Chorégraphie* was obviously not a transmission through time – but through space, at various levels: 'on ne peut nier qu'il [ce livre] ne soit tres utiles & tres avantageux aux Maîtres à Dancer, tant à ceux de Paris, qu'à ceux des Provinces, & même des autres Royaumes, & enfin aux Ecoliers', Feuillet explains. One of the main aspects of this capacity for dances to circulate appears to be their ability to penetrate new social areas, i.e. venues for dance practice, on the one hand, and social groups, on the other hand, different from those they were designed in.

First of all, one can notice that although most dances in characters are labelled either as 'ball dance' or 'ballet dance', the distinction between those two categories is frequently blurred. Thus, *L'Allemande*, a dance published by Feuillet in 1702, comes from a ballet by Lully (*Le Ballet des Fragments*) and was first performed by two professional dancers, Ballon and Subligny (Feuillet states its origin in the foreword of the brochure¹¹) – but in the catalogue Feuillet inserts in the collections of his dances in characters, he puts *L'Allemande* in the 'dances de bals' section, just as if this dance, originally designed for the stage, once put on paper, could find its way into new

⁸ Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien. 1, Arts de faire* (Paris, 1990), p.253-254.

⁹ Michel de Certeau evokes the 'complicités du corps avec le texte'. De Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien. 1*, p.254.

¹⁰ Feuillet, *Chorégraphie*, n. p.

¹¹ 'Comme l'Allemande que danse [sic] Monsieur Ballon et Mademoiselle de Subligny dans le ballet des fragment [sic] de Mr de Lully a fait tant de plaisir a tout le monde je n'ay pu me dispenser a la sollicitation [sic] d'un chacun de la faire graver.' Raoul Auger Feuillet, *L'Allemande, dance nouvelle de la composition de M. Pécour* (Paris, l'auteur, 1702), n. p.

environments for dance – especially balls, where the same kind of dances could indeed be performed at that time.¹² Feuillet's forewords actually reveal that many evolutions of this kind were already occurring: about the *Seconde Nouvelle Mariée*, which he publishes in 1700, he mentions the fact that this dance, after being performed on stage, lent itself to many appropriations: 'Tant de personnes de qualité se sont adonnée a [sic] la dançer et tant de Maîtres de dances me l'ont demandée que j'ay cru ne pouvoir me dispenser de la donner au Public.'¹³ The publication is thus presented as the final and most efficient step of this way of spreading it, targeting not only a small group of privileged people, but 'the public': any reader having acquired the ability of deciphering a dance.

Besides, Feuillet and other dancing masters publishing dances in characters also mention – with even more insistence – another possible environment for dance practice: the dancing lesson. Dancing masters and their students seem to be the main target of dances in characters, whose authors often stress that their books were designed as teaching material: 'Toutes les dances qui sont contenuës dans ce recueil sont rangées d'une maniere à pouvoir s'en servir comme autant de leçons. J'ai mis celles des femmes les premieres comme étant les plus aisées, et celles des hommes les dernières comme étant les plus difficiles'¹⁴, underlines Feuillet in the foreword of a collection of ballet dances. In the same fashion, Gaudrau states: 'Ce sont des dances de la composition de Monsieur Pecour [...] c'est à dire des Leçons Excellentes capables de former les personnes qui s'attachent à la dance et de les rendre parfaits.'¹⁵

The extent to which dances in characters effectively gave readers the opportunity to perform those dances in balls or in dance lessons is a matter of speculation. It may well be that, however much the authors of dances in characters indulged in this fanciful project, it never came true. Nevertheless, some elements indicate that this kind of circulation was possible. One of them is the very rich archive collection of Jean-Baptiste Medor, a dancing master active in the 1740's-1760's in the area of Caen. These archives include several engraven and manuscript dances in characters, as well as texts promoting the use of Chorégraphie. These documents reveal that, at that period (during which very few engraven dances were published, especially in France, compared to the beginning of the century), such objects may have remained any dancing master's staple tools. Medor provides one of the clues to how Chorégraphie was introduced into the French provinces. The activity of a dancing master like him was much more modest – albeit probably much more typical of the daily routine of dancing masters at that time – than that of Feuillet, who lived in Paris and mixed with members of the royal academy of music. Moreover, his correspondence, also present in these archives, informs us that like many other dancing masters at that time, he used to go and teach dance in rural areas during summer, at aristocrats' summer resorts. Of course, we do not know what he actually did with the dances in characters he owned, and if he did teach them, in what environment he did so, etc. However, it is very obvious that he *did* resort to Chorégraphie: one can find in his archives a singular object, revealing a specific use of Chorégraphie. It is a big cardboard sheet, cov-

¹² See Edmund Fairfax, *The Styles of eighteenth century ballet* (Lanham, Oxford, 2003) and Monika Fink, *Der Ball: eine Kulturgeschichte des Gesellschaftsanzen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Innsbruck, Wien, 1996).

¹³ Raoul Auger Feuillet, *La Seconde nouvelle mariée* (Paris, l'auteur, 1700), n. p.

¹⁴ Raoul Auger Feuillet, *Recueil de dances contenant un très grand nombres [sic] des meilleures entrées de ballet de M. Pécour* (Paris, l'auteur, 1704), n. p.

¹⁵ Michel Gaudrau, *Novueau [sic] Recueil de Dance de Bal et celle de Ballet* (Paris, l'auteur et Ribou, c.1712), n. p.

ered by a table of Chorégraphie signs, representing a variety of ways of performing entrechats. It may have been meant to be held by the reader (a cardboard sheet was easier to hold than a book) or to be hung on a wall, maybe for students to refer to in dancing lessons: its size allows a relatively distant use, possibly by several people at the same time.

One might think that Chorégraphie was a very limited phenomenon involving only a small group of Paris and London dancing masters close to those in power, a short-lived fad (lasting thirty years or so) considered perhaps more as an interesting oddity than as an effective and widespread tool. Medor's case, however, is evidence that Chorégraphie and dances in characters eventually broke into the provinces, and even their remotest areas. Moreover, as Sylvie Granger points out¹⁶, the balls organized in the mansions in which Medor taught during the summer, and which he was probably supposed to lead and prepare with dance compositions of his own (or maybe compositions taken from collections of dances in characters), were necessarily watched by the aristocratic families' staff – and it may well be that, through the selfsame servants, those dances found their way into other social areas, such as village dances.

Geographic circulation: the embodiment of dances from elsewhere... and the creation of a European repertoire

If the social circulation of dances in characters partly remains a matter of speculation, their geographic circulation is much more established. In England in particular, but also in Germany, in Italy, in Spain, in Portugal, in Austria, publications or at least manuscript documents testify to Chorégraphie being an international phenomenon. This international dimension has often been pointed out, but only understood in a very restrictive way. For instance, one passage of the Wikipedia entry about Feuillet reads:

Véritable somme du savoir chorégraphique de l'époque, [les œuvres de Feuillet] sont traduites en anglais par Siris et Weaver, et en allemand par Taubert. Le 'système Feuillet' favorisera la diffusion rapide du répertoire français à travers l'Europe entière.¹⁷

A connection is thus established between the translation of the principles of a writing system and the spreading of a specific repertoire, i.e. that of French dance composers¹⁸. What's more, the latter diffusion is very often presented as a strategical plan, designed by Louis XIV himself: he is said to have commissioned a dance description system from his dancing master Beauchamps, in order to deliberately impose France's supremacy in the dance field – and this project was reputedly successful, establishing the 'French dance' or 'French way of dancing' as a norm in Europe¹⁹. Such

¹⁶ Sylvie Granger, 'Monsieur de la Cabriolle au château (XVIII^e siècle)', in Anne-Marie Cocula et Michel Combet (ed.), *Château et divertissement: actes des 9es Rencontres d'archéologie et d'histoire en Périgord les 27, 28 et 29 septembre 2002* (Bordeaux, Paris, 2003), p.129-145.

¹⁷ 'Raoul Auger Feuillet', *Wikipedia*, http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raoul-Auger_Feuillet. Consulted July 10th, 2013.

¹⁸ The same idea can be found in the leaflet published for an exhibition on dance writing, designed by the French Centre national de la danse: 'La construction et la mise en spectacle du corps aristocratique sont au cœur de la « belle danse ». Incarnation du raffinement français, celle-ci se propage dans les cours étrangères grâce aux partitions en notation Feuillet, qui servent ainsi le rayonnement de Louis XIV.' *Les Ecritures du mouvement. Exposition 29 novembre 2006-10 février 2007* (Pantin, 2006), n. p.

¹⁹ This idea – which might be true, but whose formulation should at least be qualified – can be found in two recently published pedagogical tools. 'Le Roi Louis XIV, lui-même excellent danseur, ordonne l'invention d'un système d'écriture du mouvement qui va permettre d'enseigner, de codifier et de diffuser cet Art, tout en servant la gloire de sa personne et de son pays', states the introduction to the DVD *The Art of baroque dance* (Natalie van Parys, Dance time publications, 2006, <http://www.cavatines.com/cavdvd.htm>, consulted July 10th, 2013). See also Marie-Hélène Rebois,

allegations – whose ideological implications are far from insignificant – are, of course, substantiated by the fact that Louis XIV did ‘capture²⁰’ arts to serve his political designs, and, more generally, by the fact that arts and politics were interwoven. Nevertheless, it is mainly after Louis XIV’s death, in 1715, that the use of Chorégraphie is attested in other European states – i.e. a time during which Louis XV had already put an end to the representation practices that were one of the main features of his predecessor’s reign.²¹ Beyond the lack of sources certifying that such a carefully contrived project existed²², it should be noted that translating a book doesn’t amount to taking its foreign author’s ideas for granted; translators cannot be assumed to have wholeheartedly subscribed to Feuillet’s conception of dance. And using a ‘French’ dance writing system (one should also wonder what ‘French’ means here) does not imply embracing a specific repertoire or a specific way of dancing, either. Such an amalgam is actually highly questionable. The principles on which Chorégraphie is based do highlight, maybe even induce, a specific posture and a way of moving – but not to the extent of precluding the writing of a variety of dances with this system. Moreover, each dance in characters can be read and performed in very different ways. Mentioning only the actions of the legs (the movements of the upper part of the body depend on the ‘goût du Danceur²³’, as Feuillet states), dances in characters indicate very common movements (such as sink, rise, spring, fall, slide, turn) and give no indication as to how those actions should be performed, nor any figurative model that the reader should imitate. On the contrary, Chorégraphie, as Feuillet states, is based on the project of making the reader able to learn a dance by himself: it presents characters, figures and signs ‘avec lesquels on apprend facilement de soy-même toutes sortes de Dances’.²⁴ Every reader has to decide for himself what ‘sink’ or ‘rise’ really mean, which posture is best-adapted for these actions, and how he will perform them.

Therefore, one should not consider that dances in characters gave way to identical performances in the different venues where they were used. Furthermore, it should be noted that we actually have very few clues about dances in characters effectively travelling, either by post, through trade, or in travellers’ luggage. One can only exceptionally find the mention of a French dance collection in the catalogue of a London bookseller.²⁵ The existence of translations of Feuillet’s manual indicates, of course, that the translators had secured a copy of this manual. For all that, one cannot claim that French publications were spreading through Europe. Moreover, though in the case of the French theater performed in other countries, members of the upper social cate-

La Danse baroque vue par Béatrice Massin (Chiloé Productions, 2011).

²⁰ Daniel Roche, ‘préface’, in Liliane Pérez, *L’Invention technique au siècle des Lumières* (Paris, 2000), p.15.

²¹ Robert Mandrou, *L’Europe absolutiste: raison et raison d’État, 1649-1775* (Paris, 1977), p.199.

²² The only source evoking a link between Louis XIV and Chorégraphie (without mentioning any project of spreading French dances abroad) that we could find is in the records of a trial between Beauchamps, Feuillet and another dancing master. Beauchamps, claiming to be the author of Chorégraphie, states that he invented this system ‘pour obeir a l’ordre que luy donna sa Majesté estant a Chambord il y a trente années ou environ de trouver moyen de faire comprendre l’art de la danse sur le papier’. Arrêt du conseil privé du roi, 28 avril 1704, Archives Nationales (Paris), V⁶ 796, n^o10.

²³ Feuillet, *Chorégraphie*, p.97.

²⁴ Feuillet, *Chorégraphie*, title page.

²⁵ The only sign we have found of an international circulation achieved through trade is the catalogue of a London bookseller specializing in French books: Vailland and his successor Ribotteau used to sell French books in London, and among others, they advertised *Recueil de danses pour 1711*, published in Paris in 1710 or 1711. Michael Tilmouth, ‘A Calendar of references to Music in newspapers published in London and the Provinces, 1660-1719’, *Royal Musical Association Research chronicle* I (1961), p.1-86 (with reference to Dezais’s book, p.80), cited by Carol G. Marsh, *French Court dance in England, 1706-1740* (Ann Arbor, UMI, 1987), p.236-237.

gories did their utmost to promote French theatrical productions abroad²⁶, there is no evidence of similar actions to enhance the use of Chorégraphie.

However, dances written by Feuillet and other dancing masters in France did spread abroad – but in a way that those dancing masters had not necessarily imagined: their dances were re-published abroad, i.e. were copied, re-engraved, and edited with a new title-page. This practice begins in England, with the re-edition, particularly by dancing masters Weaver²⁷, Siris²⁸ and Pemberton²⁹, of dances composed by Pécour and Ballon, and first published in Paris by Feuillet.³⁰ To a lesser extent, this practice also appears in Germany: in 1717, Taubert's dance manual includes three dances previously edited in Paris.³¹ In Spain, as Clara Rico states, Minguet and Ferriol re-published dances first edited by Feuillet, at least twenty-five years after their original publication.³² Their titles were frequently transformed : 'le passepied' became 'Passapié', 'la Bretagne' became 'la Bretaña', 'la Fresne' became 'la Diligenta'... Indeed, copies of dances previously published in Paris rarely go without modification. Some of these modifications affect the music notation; some are obviously mistakes (forgotten signs, for instance). Other alterations clearly result from deliberate choices made by dancing masters, who not only copy, but re-compose the dance, or establish new ways of writing it – probably more efficient ones, in their opinion.³³ Therefore, those 'copies' should be considered as new interpretations or versions of the 'French' dances. From this point of view, they cannot be seen as pertaining to exportation, but rather to importation – one organized by foreign actors, and implying many changes and appropriations.

Besides, re-establishing and re-publishing dances initially designed in France was not the only use of Chorégraphie by foreign dancing masters: they also, of course, resorted to this writing system to describe their own compositions, or those of the main composers of their country. In

²⁶ As shown by Rahul Markovits, *Civiliser l'Europe. Politiques du théâtre français au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 2014), in particular p.125-144.

²⁷ Dancing master Weaver published some of Pécour's dances after translating *Chorégraphie ou l'art de décrire la danse* by Feuillet: John Weaver, *Orchesography or the art of dancing by characters and demonstrative figures* (London, Meere, Valliant, 1706).

²⁸ Siris, another London dancing master involved in the edition of dances in Chorégraphie, also published his own versions of dances first engraved in Paris. Peter Siris, *The Art of Dancing demonstrated by characters and figures* (London, the author, 1706).

²⁹ Pemberton was able to combine in the same collection an unpublished dance by Isaac, another, also unpublished, by L'Abbé (both masters working in London), and a third one by Pécour, already published in Paris: Edmund Pemberton, *An Essay for the further Improvement of Dancing; being a Collection of Figure Dances, or several Numbers, compos'd by the most Eminent Masters; describ'd in Characters after the newest Manner of Monsieur Feuillet* (London, Walsh, Hare, the author, 1711).

³⁰ Still in London, newspaper ads reveal that people by the names of Shirley and Bulkeley were selling their own transcriptions in Chorégraphie of dances, previously published in Paris, by Balon and Pécour. See Marsh, *French Court dance in England*, p.33; Moira Goff, "The art of dancing, demonstrated by characters and figures": French and English sources for court and theatre dance, 1700-1750', *Electronic British Library Journal* (1995), <http://www.bl.uk/ebj/1995articles/article14.html>, p.202-231 (see in particular p.211).

³¹ Gottfried Taubert, *Rechtschaffener Tantzmeister, oder gründliche Erklärung der Grantzösischent Tantz-Kunst* (Leipzig, F. Lanckischens Erben, 1717).

³² Clara Rico Osés, 'French Dance in Eighteenth-Century Spain', *Dance Chronicle* vol. 35, n. 2 (2012), p.133-172 (see in particular p.162-165).

³³ A very good example of this re-writing, which will not be developed here, is provided by Carol Marsh about Peter Siris' version of *La Bretagne*, composed by Louis Pécour, as Siris presents it at the end of his translation of Feuillet's manual. See Marsh, *French Court dance in England*, p.274-276.

London, as early as 1706 (and probably even sooner³⁴), Weaver and Siris published dances composed in England. In Spain, Minguet used *Chorégraphie* to write and publish a famous Spanish dance, *Los presumidos y las presumidas*³⁵; in Germany, Dubreil published his own dances³⁶; in Italy, Grossatesta's compositions are transcribed in *Chorégraphie* by Gobbis.³⁷ In these publications, several titles and forewords reveal the strong appeal of journeying in those days: in Germany, Dubreil evokes journeys to Hungary and Italy³⁸; in England, Walsh publishes a dance entitled *The Royal Portuguez...*³⁹ Besides, dance collections and *Chorégraphie* manuals published in England often include a subscribers' list, revealing the interest of foreign subscribers, dancing masters in most cases. Thus, in London, L'Abbé's dances collection, published by Le Roussau around 1725, lists sixty-eight subscribers' names, together with the city where they live⁴⁰: twelve of them live on the continent. Seven are dancers and ballet composers from Paris; one lives in Madrid; another one in Dusseldorf; two in La Haye and one in Vienna. In London also, in the *Collection of Ball-Dances* published by Weaver in 1706, forty-seven subscribers' names are mentioned, the majority of which are preceded by the title 'Mr.'; but ten come with 'Monsieur' and their names seem French. As for the names with 'Mr.' in front, two of them get the precision 'of Dublin'.⁴¹ Dances in characters published in London by Siris feature in Amsterdam bookseller Etienne Roger's catalogue.⁴² Spanish dancing master Ferriol published his book in 1745, not only in Malaga but also in Italy.⁴³ Taubert's book, published in Leipzig, was copied on a manuscript (at least the part about *Chorégraphie*) in Vienna.⁴⁴ As for France, in a book published in 1748, Hardouin, a dancing master working in Caen,

³⁴ Richard Ralph underlines that Isaac's dances, as transcribed in *Chorégraphie* by Weaver, and no copy of which has been passed down to us, are listed in bookseller John Walsh's catalogues as early as 1703. Richard Ralph quotes W. C. Smith, *Bibliography of the musical works published by John Walsh during the years 1695-1720* 116 (1948), p.145. Richard Ralph, *The Life and works of John Weaver* (London, 1985), p.9.

³⁵ Clara Rico Osés, 'French Dance in Eighteenth-Century Spain', p.166.

³⁶ Dubreil, *La Hessoise Darmstat. Danse figurée à deux pour le bal et contredance sous le même nom* (Munich, no name, 1718); *La Carlstadt, danse figurée, la Vandangeuse contredanse: toutes deux composées pour le jour de la naissance de son altesse elettorale Charle Albert, duc de Bavière* (no place, no name, 1730).

³⁷ Gaetano Grossatesta and Sebastiano Gobbis, *Balletti in occasione delle felicissime Nozze di sua Eccellenza la Signora Loredana Duodo con sua Eccellenza il signor Antonio Grimani. Composti da Gaetano Grossatesta*, Museo Civico, Raccolta Correr di Venezia, Archivio Morosini Grimani n°245, MS 157, c.1726.

³⁸ Dubreil, *La Hessoise Darmstat*, n. p.

³⁹ (Anonymous), *The Royal Portuguez. Mr. Isaac's New Dance Made for Her Majesty's Birth Day* (London, Wlsh, Hare, Randall, c.1710).

⁴⁰ Anthony L'Abbé and F. Le Roussau, *A New Collection of Dances, containing a great number of the best ball and stage dances* (London, Barreau, Le Roussau, 1725).

⁴¹ John Weaver, *A Collection of ball-dances perform'd at court, viz. The Richmond, The Roundeau, The Rigadoon, The Favourite, The Spanheim, and The Britannia. All Compos'd by Mr. Isaac* (London, Weaver, Vaillant, 1706).

⁴² Peter Siris, *La Camilla. Dance nouvelle* (London, the author, 1708 and Amsterdam, Etienne Roger, 1708).

⁴³ Bartolome Ferriol y Boxeraus, *Reglas utiles para los aficionados a danzar: provechoso divertimento de los que gustan tocar instrumentos y polyticas advertencias a todo genero de personas* (Capoa, Joseph Testore, 1745 and Malaga, no name, 1745).

⁴⁴ This document is supposed to have been established in Vienna in 1752 (according to the indications it contains) and is now kept at the Newberry Library: Philip Gumpenhueber, *Choregraphie, oder die Kunst einen Tanz durch characteres, figuren, und andere Zeichen zu beschreiben: vermittels derer in jeder (so die fundament gefasset) von ihre selbst alle artenn der Tänze ohne sonderliche Nähe erlernen kan. Ein werck aufgesetzt von Mons. Feuillet, Maître de danse à Paris; in das Deutsche übersetzt M. Gottfried Taubert, Maitre de danse à Leibzig; in compendio zusam[m]engetragen durch Mons. Philip Gumpenhueber; Maître de danse de S. Ma[jes]té*, a manuscript kept at the Newberry Library (Illinois), VAULT Case MS 5308, 1752.

clearly states that dances composed in France and abroad are equally interesting and necessary for a dancing master:

Le bon Maître doit sçavoir parfaitement la Chorégraphie, ou l'art d'écrire la Danse, parce qu'il est obligé d'avoir toutes les Danses, & tous les Ballets anciens & modernes, d'en composer, d'en faire venir des meilleurs Maîtres de tous les Païs, de leur en envoyer, tant pour la Chambre, que pour le Théâtre.⁴⁵

Therefore, dances in characters cannot be considered as a device for planned acculturation, from the hub (i.e. Paris) outwards: dances are more frequently imported by foreign people, especially dancing masters, from various countries – including France. Although we have no precise elements about print runs⁴⁶, those objects published in different countries end up mapping a singular choreographic space, quite different from the territory delimited by the dissemination of French drama in Europe. Rahul Markovits showed that the French theater was under-represented in Spain and England⁴⁷, two countries which, conversely, made extensive use of Chorégraphie (London is the European city where the most books and leaflets in Chorégraphie were published, which might derive from the absence of royal privileges regulating the printed use of Chorégraphie⁴⁸). In Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Austria, this system was used too. There is clear evidence that people did know about Chorégraphie, although we have none of it being used, in Switzerland, in the Austrian Netherlands, Holland, Belgium and Ireland.

In the process of this dissemination, dances lent themselves to many reinventions – by their new publishers and hence by their new readers. These circulations eventually led to the kind of shared repertoire Hardouin called for: French dances published in Spain under a Spanish title, English country-dances republished in France and then published again in England⁴⁹, or French dances republished in England without any mention of their authors or of their origin⁵⁰... Such examples underline that, though writing makes it possible to trace the texts to specific authors, it also provides the opportunity to establish many versions of the same text and to spread them. So that it is only too easy to lose sight of their origin, and be left with a relatively undistinguished collection of dances – which actually belongs to all those who happened to be able to decipher and

⁴⁵ PAH [Hardouin, P.A], *Phénomène imprévu, ou la danse en déroute* (Caen, no name, 1748), p. 10.

⁴⁶ The book prices are however often mentioned, in France as well as in England. In France, a single dance published by Feuillet until 1710 sell for 10 or 15 sols; a small paperback collection of two to four dances sells for 30 sols, for 40 sols if leatherbound. Larger collections, complete with the principles of Chorégraphie on top of several dances, sell for 10 French pounds. It should be noted that at the outset of the 18th century, a city worker gets 1 livre tournois, i.e. 20 sols per working day, that is a third of what a worker in typography earns, as pointed out by Philippe Minard, *Typographes des Lumières* (Seyssel, 1989), p.67.

⁴⁷ Markovits, *Civiliser l'Europe*, p.30.

⁴⁸ In France, until his death in 1710, Raoul Auger Feuillet was the only person authorized to publish dances in Chorégraphie, in accordance with his royal privilege.

⁴⁹ Many of the country dances published by Feuillet actually come from Playford's dancing master, published in London. See Marsh, *French Court Dance in England*, p.73. In 1710, John Essex's translation of Feuillet's manual for the notation of country dances includes, as he states, five country dances coming from France, and one of them is one of those Feuillet had probably taken from Playford: John Essex, *For the Further Improvement of Dancing. A Treatise of Chorography or y^e Art of Dancing Country Dances after a New Character. Translated from the French* (London, Walsh, Randall, Hare, 1710).

⁵⁰ Weaver's book includes *The Louvre* and *The Bretagne*, two dances composed by Pécour, though they are not attributed to him by Weaver. John Weaver, *Orchesography or the art of dancing by characters and demonstrative figures* (London, Walsh, c.1722).

teach it.

Towards a professional network

When Hardouin demanded that dancing masters receive and send dances across national frontiers, he also pointed out the fact that professional exchanges are part of their work. Those exchanges incorporated them in an international network, such as the ones that, at the same time, characterized other professions, disseminating skills and knowledge throughout Europe⁵¹: Taubert, for instance, stated that Chorégraphie, as an international language, allowed dancing masters to ‘communicate dances in writing to good friends abroad’.⁵² This mention of friendship also reflects the notion of cross-border kinship, illustrated by the circulations of freemasons at that time, which led to a whole network of fluid relations.⁵³ Sharing a common professional status was indeed developing for dancing masters at the European level, a status characterized, among other elements, by expertise in writing dance, and by the new activities it led to for dancing masters – i.e. writing and publishing dances⁵⁴.

The careful study of these exchanges reveals that Chorégraphie gave way to a good deal of dialogue, about the best way of using the signs, the improvements that could be imagined, the best material aspects for dances in characters. ‘Note the Sinks which are in divers [sic] places in this Dance mark'd before the Bars, which indeed is uncommon yet if consider'd are in a truer & more necessary place than if put other wise, being that all Rises Bounds or Hopps, are certainly to mark, that which we call Time after y^e said Bars and not the Sinks’, states, for instance, *The Royall Portuguez*, published in London in 1709⁵⁵: La Garde, the dancing master writing this dance, had indeed chosen a way of writing that differed a little from Feuillet’s principles, translated by Weaver and Siris. The same remark about the right way of indicating sinks would be made a few years later by a French dancing master, Rameau (one ignores if Rameau took this idea from his London peer). Various examples in the same line could be mentioned, revealing that the establishment of Chorégraphie and its use was actually a progressive and collective phenomenon. No text can show this better than Pemberton’s discourse at the beginning of his *Essay for the further improvement of dancing*, published in London in 1711 (and resorting to a simplified Chorégraphie, designed by Feuillet in another manual⁵⁶, for the description of country dances). Pemberton states that the characters he uses come from Feuillet, but he is more specific than that:

That I might not be guilty of any Innovation, I waited a considerable Time for the Original of Mr. Feuillet's Treatise of Country Dances, translated by Mr. Essex, which Method I have for the

⁵¹ Vincent Denis has shown how important book circulation proved in the diffusion of police intelligence in 18th century Europe. As is the case for dance, the circulation of people and of texts were interacting to help create new exchanges between the typical proceedings in use in different countries. Vincent Denis, ‘La circulation des savoirs policiers en Europe dans la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle’, in P.-Y. Beaurepaire and P. Pourchasse (ed.), *Les Circulations internationales en Europe, années 1680-années 1780* (Rennes, 2010), p.213-221.

⁵² « Sie auch guten Freunden in der Fremde schriftlich communiciren ». Gottfried Taubert, *Rechtschaffener Tantzmeister*, p.737.

⁵³ Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, ‘Les circulations maçonniques internationales en Europe’, in Beaurepaire and Pourchasse (ed.), *Les Circulations internationales en Europe*, p.297-308.

⁵⁴ The majority of dances in characters were published by dancing masters, taking on the editing work and even book-selling. This aspect of the Chorégraphie phenomenon will not be studied here.

⁵⁵ (Anonymous), *The Royal Portuguez*, title page.

⁵⁶ Raoul Auger Feuillet, *Recüeil de contredances mises en chorégraphie* (Paris, l’auteur, 1706).

most part follow'd, being explain'd by the Characteristick Letter V. by which you are to understand, that the upper Part of it represents the fore Part of the Body, and serves also for the Bars of the Dance; where there is Occasion for particular Steps I have follow'd Mr. Weaver's Method, and have likewise desir'd the Favour of Mr. Isaac and Mr. L'Abbe, who have each of them oblig'd me with a single Dance, to which I have added one for Mr. Pécour's, transcrib'd by Mr. Feuillet, as Mr. L'Abbe's was by Mr. Legard, but Mr. L'Abbe altering some Steps in it, I was oblig'd to vary a little from Mr. Legard's Method, by which his curious Way of Writing has suffer'd.⁵⁷

With seven names, the complex account of compositions, transcriptions, translations, modifications, Pemberton presents his book as coming from many sources, none of them primary or more important than the others: it is the intertwining of all those creations and collaborations which allows his own editorial undertaking. This professional culture, highlighting collaborations and dialogues, will become a kind of ethical code for the typical Enlightenment dancing master, as Hardouin stated in his above-mentioned words: a dancing master, he said, *had to* master Chorégraphie, *was under the obligation* to participate in this collective building of a repertoire of dances. This network of contacts, introducing dances, but also innovative ideas and techniques into various environments, eventually reveals the re-invention of the dancing masters' profession: taking hold of the world of print, and firmly setting the conditions for the exercise of critical and collaborative thinking, they were redefining their own assignments and activities. Thus, Chorégraphie can be seen as a motor project, creating circulations and being created by them at the same time: the project of getting the body to move, but also of getting boundaries to move, whether they were geographical, institutional or social, and of getting thoughts to move.

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Summary

During the 18th century, hundreds of 'dances engraven in characters and figures' were published thanks to '*Chorégraphie, ou l'art de décrire la dance par caracteres, figures et signes démonstratifs*', a scriptural art whose principles were presented in 1700 by Parisian dancing master Raoul Auger Feuillet. One of the aims of these objects, meant to set the user's body in motion, was to introduce dances into new social and geographical areas. The study of their circulations reveals a whole network of exchanges in Europe – exchanges of dances, but also of groundbreaking ideas and techniques. These circulations force us to reconsider widely accepted notions about writing. They also shed light on a variety of environments for the practice of dance at that time, and on the porosity between those distinct venues and environments. Finally, they lead us to review historiographical theories about French culture and its relations to other countries, under the reign of Louis XIV and afterwards. Indeed, for the dance masters resorting to it, Chorégraphie was

⁵⁷ Pemberton, *An Essay for the further Improvement of Dancing*, n. p.

becoming a kind of written lingua franca that enabled them to communicate with their foreign peers. Taking hold of the world of print, and establishing the conditions for the exercise of critical and collaborative thinking, they were reassessing their own assignments, and collectively getting boundaries to move – whether they were geographical, institutional or social.

Keywords

Dance notation, dancing masters, writing, publishing, reading, written communication

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