SCENE IV—A GARDEN

A Prelude of Trumpets, Hautbois, Violins and Flutes alternate; to which Mars with his Followers enter on one Side; and Venus, with Graces, etc., on the other. Mars and Venus meet and embrace; Gallantry, Respect; Ardent Love; and Adoration; appear in the Actions of Mars: An affected Bashfulness; reciprocal Love; and wishing Looks, in Venus; they sit on a Couch, while the four Followers of Mars begin the Entry; to whom the Graces join; and Afterwards Mars and Venus: At which time Cupid steals away the Arms of Mars and his Followers.

This Performance is alternate, as representing Love and War: It is somewhat in imitation of a Dancing among the Ancients, in which the Lacedemonian Youth delighted much, as being equally inclin’d to Love, and Arms; one singular Beauty in this sort of Dance, is, that Strength, and Softness, reciprocally, and alternately are seen in their full Power: when in the same Representation; and at the same time; the Fire; Robustness; and Strength of the Warrior is seen, mixt with the Softness, and Delicacy of Love; Boldness, and Vigour, in one, and a coy, and complying Reluctance, in the other.

As to the Gestures made use of in this Scene; they are so obvious, relating only to Gallantry, and Love; that they need no Explanation.

The Dance concludes, with every Man carrying off his Woman.

SCENE V

Vulcan is discover’d leaning in a thoughtful Posture on his Anvil; the Cyclops appear working the Net; they Joyn it together; Vulcan dances. The Cyclops having finish’d, bring it forward, and shew it Vulcan, he approves of it, and they carry it off, etc.

Pleas’d at some Contrivance. To rub the Palms of the Hands together, after the manner as those who take Pains to heat their Hands; is an Expression of being pleas’d at some Thought of Deceit.

SCENE VI

A soft Symphony of Flutes, to which the Scene draws and discovers Mars and Venus sitting on a Couch; Gallus sleeping; and Cupid playing; etc. Mars and Venus express by their Gestickulations, equal Love, and Satisfaction; and a pleas’d Tenderness which supposes past Embraces. Vulcan and Cyclops enter; the Net falls over Mars, and Venus, who seem slumbering, and being catch’d, appear in the utmost Confusion. An insulting Performance by Vulcan and the Cyclops. After which enter Jupiter, Apollo, Neptune, Juno, Diana and Thetis. Vulcan shows them his Prisoners. Shame; Confusion; Grief; and Sub-

mission, are discover’d in the Actions of Venus; Audacity, Vexation; Restlessness; and a kind of unwilling Resignation; in those of Mars. The Actions of Vulcan are of Rejoicing; Insulting; and Derision. Neptune intercedes with Vulcan for them. Vulcan at length condescends; and forgives them; and they are releas’d. Mars, with the rest of the Gods, and Goddesses, dance a Grand Dance, which concludes the Entertainment.

Triumphing. To shake the Hand open, rais’d above our Head, is an exulting Expression of Triumph, Etc.

Entreaty. The stretching out the Hands downward toward the Knees, is an Action of Entreaty, and singing for Mercy.

Grief. Grief is express’d by hanging down the Head; wringing the Hands; and striking the Breast.

Resignation. To hold out both the Hands joyn’d together, is a natural Expression of Submission and Resignation.

Forgiveness. To extend and offer out the Right Hand, is a Gesture of Pity, and Intention of Forgiveness.

Shame. The covering the Face with the Hand, is a Sign of Shame.

Reconciliation. To shake the given Hand, or embrace the Body, is an Expression of Friendship, Reconciliation, and the like.

FINIS

Jean Georges Noverre (1727-1810)

TWO LETTERS ON DANCING

Translated by Cyril W. Beaumont

Twined at the Paris Opéra, Noverre longed to be ballet master there, a goal he achieved in 1776 only to leave a few years later, embittered by jealousies and intrigues. Previously he had served the courts of Stuttgart and Vienna, where he taught the young Marie Antoinette. Noverre’s visit to London was nearly disastrous due to the outbreak of hostilities between England and France, but his later engagements there met with great success. Acclaimed by many of his contemporaries as a genius whose works were unsurpassed for taste and imagination, Noverre excited less enthusiasm for his backstage behavior, being
recalled as "a passionate little fellow" who "swore and tore behind the scenes."

The temperment is simply evident in the famous Lettres sur la danse et les ballets, which was first published in Stuttgart in 1760 and went through several editions in the author's lifetime. Here he inveighs against prevailing customs of costume design; the use of masks that hide the potentially expressive features of the dancers; the composition of dances to suit the personality and skills of the performer rather than the dramatic needs of the role. Unlike Watteau, Noverre attracted disciples, who carried on his concepts of the ballet d'action in spite of the cool indifference of the Paris Opéra.

**Letter II**

I cannot refrain, Sir, from expressing my disapproval of those maîtres de ballet who have the ridiculous obstinacy to insist that the members of the corps de ballet shall take them as a model and regulate their movements, gestures and attitudes accordingly. May not such a singular claim prevent the development of the executants' natural graces and stifle their innate powers of expression?

This principle appears to me the more dangerous in that it is rare to meet with maîtres de ballet capable of real feeling; so few of them are excellent actors competent to depict in gesture the thoughts they wish to express. It is so difficult, I say, to meet with a modern Bathyllus or Pylades, that I cannot avoid condemning all those who, from self-conceit, have the pretension to imitate them. If their powers of emotion be weak, their powers of expression will be likewise; their gestures will be feeble, their features characterless, and their attitudes devoid of passion. Surely, to induce the figurants to copy so mediocre a model is to lead them astra? Is not a production marred when it is awkwardly executed? Moreover, is it possible to lay down fixed rules for pantomimic action? Are not gestures the offspring of feeling and the faithful interpreters of every mood?

In these circumstances, a careful maître de ballet should act like the majority of poets who, having neither the talent nor the natural gifts necessary to declamation, have their works recited and rely entirely on the intelligence of the actors for their interpretation. They are present, you will say, at the rehearsals. I agree, but less to lay down precepts than to offer advice. "This scene appears to me feeble; in another, your delivery is weak; this incident is not actuated with sufficient fire, and the picture which results from that situation leaves something to be desired": that is how the poet speaks. The maître de ballet, for his part, must continually rehearse a mimed scene until the performers have arrived at that moment of expression innate in mankind, a precious moment which is revealed with both strength and truth when it is the outcome of feeling.

A well-composed ballet is a living picture of the passions, manners, customs, ceremonies and customs of all nations of the globe, consequently, it must be expressive in all its details and speak to the soul through the eyes; if it be devoid of expression, of striking pictures, of strong situations, it becomes a cold and dreary spectacle. This form of art will not admit of mediocrity; like the art of painting, it exacts a perfection the more difficult to acquire in that it is dependent on the faithful imitation of nature, and it is by no means easy, if not almost impossible, to seize on that kind of seductive truth which, masking illusion from the spectator, transports him in a moment to the spot
where the action has taken place and fills him with the same thoughts that he would experience were he to witness in reality the incident which art has presented to him in counterfeited. What accuracy is required to avoid passing above, or falling below, the model: it is desired to copy! To over-refine a model is as dangerous as to disfigure it: these two faults are equally opposed to truth; the one transcends nature, the other degrades it.

Ballets, being representations, should unite the various parts of the drama. Themes expressed in dancing are, for the most part, devoid of sense, and offer a confused medley of scenes as ill-connected as they are ill-ordered; however, in general, it is imperative to submit to certain principles. The subject of every ballet must have its introduction, plot and climax. The success of this type of entertainment depends partly on the careful choice of subjects and their arrangement.

Diana and Acteon, Diana and Endymion, Apollo and Daphne, Tito and Aurora, Acis and Galatea, as well as all other themes of this nature, cannot provide the plot for a ballet d'action without the inspiration of truly poetic genius. Telemachus, in the Isle of Calypso, offers a wider field and would provide the theme for a very fine ballet, always presuming the composer had the skill to omit everything of no value to a painter, to introduce Mentor at the right moment, and to remove him the instant his presence became superfluous.

If the licence that is taken daily in theatrical productions cannot be stretched so far as to make Mentor dance in the ballet of Telemachus, then it is more than sufficient reason that the composer should not employ this character save with the greatest caution. If he do not dance he is foreign to the ballet, besides, his powers of expression, being deprived of the graces which dancing affords to gestures and attitudes, would make him appear less animated, less passionate, and consequently of less interest. A genius may break ordinary rules and advance by new paths when they lead to the perfection of his art.

Mentor, in a ballet, can and ought to dance. This will offend against neither truth nor probability, provided that the composer has the skill to devise for him a manner of dancing and expression consonant with his character, age and employment. I believe, Sir, that I would hazard the adventure, and that I should avoid the greater of two evils, that sense of tedium which should never be experienced by the spectator.

Undoubtedly, one of the essential points in a ballet is variety: the incidents and pictures which result from it should succeed each other with rapidity; if the action do not move quickly, if the scenes drag, if enthusiasm be not communicated everywhere equally; indeed, if the ballet do not constantly increase in interest and attraction in proportion to the development of the theme: the plan is ill-conceived, ill-ordered; it sins against the laws of the theatre, and the representation has no other effect on the spectator than that of the boredom induced by it.

Every complicated and long-drawn-out ballet which does not explain to me, simply and clearly, the action which it represents, the plot of which I cannot follow without constant reference to the programme—every ballet of which I do not understand the plan, which does not afford me an introduction, plot and climax—will be no more, in my opinion, than a simple entertainment based on dancing, more or less well executed. It will move me but little, since it will be expressionless and devoid of action and interest.

But the dancing of our time is beautiful, it will be said, able to captivate and please, even when it does not possess the feeling and wit with which you wish it to be embellished. I will admit that the mechanical execution of that art has been brought to a degree of perfection which leaves nothing to be desired; I will even add that it often has grace and nobility; but these represent only a portion of the qualities which it should possess.

Steps, the ease and brilliancy of their combination, equilibrium, stability, speed, lightness, precision, the opposition of the arms with the legs—these form what I term the mechanism of the dance. When all these movements are not directed by genius, and when feeling and expression do not contribute their powers sufficiently to affect and interest me, I admire the skill of the human machine, I render justice to its strength and ease of movement, but it leaves me unmoved, it does not affect me or cause me any more sensation than this arrangement of the following words: Fait ... pas ... la ... honte ... non ... crime ... et ... l'échafaud. But when these words are ordered by a poet they compose this beautiful line spoken by the Comte d'Essex:

Le crime fait la honte, et non pas l'échafaud.

It may be concluded from this comparison that dancing is possessed of all the advantages of a beautiful language, yet it is not sufficient to know the alphabet alone. But when a man of genius arranges the letters to form words and connects the words to form sentences, it will cease to be dumb; it will speak with both strength and energy; and then ballets will share with the best plays the merit of affecting and moving, and of making tears flow, and, in their less serious styles, of being able to amuse, captivate and please. And dancing, embellished

1 The crime causes the shame and not the scaffold. A celebrated passage from Act 4, Scene 3 of the Comte d'Essex (1678) by the playwright Thomas Corneille (1622-1709). The phrase is imitated from Terence—martyrum facit causa, non peonia.
with feeling and guided by talent, will at last receive that praise and
applause which all Europe accords to poetry and painting, and the glori-
ous rewards with which they are honoured.

Letter IV

... Painting and dancing have this advantage over the other arts, that
they are of every country, of all nations; that their language is universally
understood, and that they achieve the same impression everywhere.

If our art, imperfect as it is, seduce and captivate the spectator; if
dancing stripped of the charm of expression sometimes occasion us
trouble and emotion, and throw our thoughts into a pleasing disorder;
what power and domination might it not achieve over us if its movements
were directed by brains and its pictures painted with feeling? There
is no doubt that ballets will rival painting in attraction when the execu-
tants display less of the automaton and the composers are better trained.

A fine picture is but the image of nature; a finished ballet is nature
herself, embellished with every ornament of the art. If a painted canvas
convey to me a sense of illusion, if I am carried away by the skill of the
delineator, if I am moved by the sight of a picture, if my captivated
thoughts are affected in a lively manner by this enchantment, if the
colours and brush of the skilful artist react on my senses so as to reveal
to me nature, to endow her with speech so that I fancy I hear and
answer her, how shall my feelings be wrought upon, what shall I become,
and what will be my sensations, at the sight of a representation still
more veracious and rendered by the histrionic abilities of my fellow-
creatures? What dominion will not living and varied pictures possess
over my imagination? Nothing interests man so much as humanity itself.
Yes, Sir, it is shameful that dancing should renounce the empire it
might assert over the mind and only endeavour to please the sight.
A beautiful ballet is, up to the present, a thing seen only in the
imagination; like the Phoenix it is never found.

It is a vain hope to re-model the dance, so long as we continue to
be slaves to the old methods and ancient traditions of the Opéra. At
our theatres we see only feeble copies of the copies that have preceded
them; let us not practise steps only, let us study the passions. In training
ourselves to feel them, the difficulty of expressing them will vanish,
then the features will receive their impressions from the sentiments
within, they will give force to exterior movements and paint in lines
of fire the disorder of the senses and the tumult which reigns in the
breast.

Dancing needs only a fine model, a man of genius, and ballets will
change their character. Let this restorer of the true dance appear, this
reformer of bad taste and of the vicious customs that have impoverished
the art; but he must appear in the capital. If he would persuade, let
him open the eyes of our young dancers and say to them:—"Children
of Terpsichore, renounce cabrioles, entrechats and over-complicated steps;
abandon grimaces to study sentiments, ariteless grace and expression;
study how to make your gestures noble, never forget that it is the life-
blood of dancing; put judgment and sense into your pas de deux; let
will-power order their course and good taste preside over all situations;
away with those lifeless masks but feeble copies of nature; they hide
your features, they stifle, so to speak, your emotions and thus deprive
you of your most important means of expression; take off those enormous
wigs and those gigantic head-dresses which destroy the true proportions
of the head with the body; discard the use of those stiff and cumbersome
hoops which detract from the beauties of execution, which disfigure
the elegance of your attitudes and mar the beauties of contour which
the bust should exhibit in its different positions.

"Renounce that slavish routine which keeps your art in its infancy;
examine everything relative to the development of your talents; be
original; form a style for yourselves based on your private studies; if
you must copy, imitate nature, it is a noble model and never misleads
those who follow it.

"As for you young men who aspire to be maîtres de ballet and think
that to achieve success it is sufficient to have danced a couple of years
under a man of talent, you must begin by acquiring some of this quality
yourselves. Devoid of enthusiasm, wit, imagination, taste and know-
ledge, would you dare set up as painters? You wish for an historical
theme and know nothing of history! You fly to poets and are unac-
quainted with their works! Apply yourselves to the study of them so
that your ballets will be complete poems. Learn the difficult art of selec-
tion. Never undertake great enterprises without first making a careful
plan; commit your thoughts to paper; read them a hundred times over;
divide your drama into scenes; let each one be interesting and lead
in proper sequence, without hindrance or superfluities, to a well-planned
climax; carefully eschew all tedious incidents, they hold up the action
and spoil its effect. Remember that tableaux and groups provide the
most delightful moments in a ballet.

"Make your corps de ballet dance, but, when it does so, let each member
of it express an emotion or contribute to form a picture; let them mime
while dancing so that the sentiments with which they are imbued may
cause their appearance to be changed at every moment. If their gestures
and features be constantly in harmony with their feelings, they will
be expressive accordingly and give life to the representation. Never
go to a rehearsal with a head stuffed with new figures and devoid
of sense. Acquire all the knowledge you can of the matter you have in hand. Your imagination, filled with the picture you wish to represent, will provide you with the proper figures, steps and gestures. Then your compositions will glow with fire and strength, they cannot but be true to nature if you are full of your subject. Bring love as well as enthusiasm to your art. To be successful in theatrical representations, the heart must be touched, the soul moved and the imagination inflamed.