A Comparison of Selected Critical Writings of Jean-Georges Noverre and Theophile Gautier and their Continuing Influence on Dance

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A COMPARISON OF SELECTED CRITICAL WRITINGS
OF JEAN-GEORGES NOVERRE AND THÉOPHILE GAUTIER
AND THEIR CONTINUING INFLUENCE ON DANCE

By

Kathleen Carol Tenniswood

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A COMPARISON OF SELECTED CRITICAL WRITINGS
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Kathleen Carol Tenniswood, M.A.
Western Michigan University, 1982

This thesis compares selected critical writings of Jean-Georges Noverre and Theophile Gautier and the impact these writings have had on dance and dancers. It also illustrates that the influence of these writings helped to shape the attitudes of the public concerning dance.

Research included primary sources, Noverre's Letters on Dancing and the Ballets and Gautier's The Romantic Ballet, and secondary sources which related to the specific area of dance. This study has contributed to the literature concerning Noverre and Gautier and has examined their influence from their lives to the present time.
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Kathleen Carol Tenniswood
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WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY M.A. 1982

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Both Jean-Georges Noverre (1727-1810) and Théophile Gautier (1811-1872) have had a tremendous and continuing effect on the development of dance through their critical writings. Many concepts and attitudes accepted as "gospel" today had their roots in Noverre's innovations and Gautier's biases. Although often diametrically opposed in their viewpoints, the influence each man has had has been evidenced in dance today.

The primary purpose of this study is to show the influence extended by selected critical writings of Jean-Georges Noverre and Théophile Gautier. Through their writings, both men have captured the essence of dance as it was performed during their lives. Until Noverre's time, dance was used only as an adjunct to the opera but had no real relationship to it. Noverre's life was devoted to the development of a unity among the arts through dance and to the expression of qualities through dance which were appropriate to specific characters and moods.\(^1\) Although his precepts

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today are considered standard, Noverre, through his *Letters on Dancing and the Ballets* which was published in 1760, caused a revolution in the presentation of ballet performances. Over one hundred years had passed, however, before all of his reforms were integrated into one unit. During his lifetime, he was ridiculed and envied by his colleagues while his innovations were acclaimed and welcomed by a public bored with the current presentation of ballet.

Gautier's impact on the ballet occurred a century later through his critiques and feuilletons written for *La Presse* and the *Moniteur* as well as through his contributions to other newspapers and journals. He lived to perpetuate the concept of beauty in dance through his writings and to educate the "narcissistic bourgeois." On the one hand, his writings were emulated and applauded; on the other, they were attacked and discredited.

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The romantic ideal he expounded, however, has frequently been considered the stereotype of ballet and the ballerina.\textsuperscript{8}

Through the critical writings of Noverre and Gautier, a picture of dance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has emerged. Among other things, Noverre attacked the lack of expression, the use of ballet as a divertissement in the opera, and the absence of any unity among the art forms. Gautier praised the ballerina and wrote sensuously and lovingly of her performances. Although Noverre and Gautier used very different approaches in their writings, they preserved for posterity a view of dancing and dancers in their eras which has helped to shape dance up to the present time.

Limitations of the Study

Although Noverre wrote critiques concerning ballets and dancers of his time and Gautier wrote sufficient critiques and feuilletons on all seven accepted forms of fine arts to fill several volumes, much of that information is not available.\textsuperscript{9} Only those critical writings directly related to dance will be considered. Therefore, this study is limited to the primary sources, Noverre's Letters on Dancing and the Ballets translated by Cyril Beaumont and Gautier's critiques which were compiled into the book The Romantic Ballet as Seen by Théophile Gautier and translated by

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{8}Sorell, The Dancer's Image, pp. 424-425.

\textsuperscript{9}Richardson, op. cit., p. 11.
\end{flushright}
Cyril Beaumont, and to secondary sources which deal with subject matter pertinent to this thesis.

Need for the Study

Both Jean-Georges Noverre and Theophile Gautier have been instrumental in helping to shape attitudes and opinions concerning dance in Western civilization. Through his Letters, Noverre not only criticized all aspects of ballet but offered suggestions for reforms, many of which continue to remain in use today.\(^\text{10}\) Gautier's critiques were responsible for the elevation of the ballerina to star status and nearly caused the demise of the male dancer.\(^\text{11}\) Although their basic tenets were often incompatible, both Noverre and Gautier had a tremendous impact on dance, specifically ballet. This influence continues to be felt currently through the teacher-student and performer-audience relationships.

In a search of abstracts of dissertations and theses published throughout the last century, no study could be found which dealt with either Noverre's or Gautier's critical writings. This study may present a better understanding of an area of dance history in relation to Noverre and Gautier and their impact on the development of the art of dance and the shaping of opinion relative to its image.


CHAPTER II

INFLUENCE OF NOVERRE'S LETTERS ON DANCING AND THE BALLETS DURING HIS LIFETIME

During the eighteenth century, Jean-Georges Noverre, dancer and choreographer, rebelled against outmoded traditions of the ballet. Frustrated with current practices in dance, he sought to change them through a series of letters published in book form and proposed the following reforms: ballet should carry the story line through mime and expressive movement; costuming should be more practical and reflective of the mood of the ballet; masks should be discarded; ballet should be a separate entity from the opera; and virtuosity should not be the ultimate goal of a dancer. Published in Stuttgart in 1760, his Letters on Dancing and the Ballets not only criticized current practices but offered suggestions for reforms, thus incurring the anger and censorship of some of his colleagues while earning praise for his efforts from others. Although during his lifetime Noverre's influence on ballet and dancers affected the adoption of some of his reforms, it was not until one hundred and fifty years had passed that complete integration of his principles was evidenced through the productions of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.¹

As maître de ballets (ballet master) for a large company of dancers in Lyons, where he choreographed ten ballets each season, Noverre gained great insight into the responsibilities of a choreographer. During his life, he was maître de ballets in Stuttgart, Vienna, London, and at the Paris Opera, as well as in other places. Aware of the limitations of ballet as it was being taught and performed in his time, his eagerness to expand and develop this art form was frustrated by those teachers and choreographers already bogged down in tradition.

Later critics, however, have suggested that in order to explore new principles and develop new concepts as opposed to simply rearranging old ones, it has been necessary for rebels to exist. "Dance has largely flourished because of the efforts of such rebels." Noverre's quest for expressiveness in ballet was an attempt to erase the dichotomy evidenced between technical virtuosity and dramatic power. Obstacles to the revisions he proposed lay in the reluctance of dancers and maîtres de ballets to break with tradition. This attitude was paradoxically persistent despite the public's demand for new things and its enthusiastic acceptance of

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2Sorell, Dance in Its Time, p. 184.

3Highwater, op. cit., p. 70.

Noverre's choreographic creations.\textsuperscript{5}

Because of his concern with the improvement of dance, Noverre complained that no one who was knowledgeable about the craft had been asked to write on dance. Hurt pride stemming from lack of success in attaining the post of maitre de ballets of the Paris Opéra in 1757 and vanity in knowing that he had much to offer which was not being accepted may have been incentives in preparing his famous Letters on Dancing and the Ballets. Deeply concerned about the shallowness of the art, Noverre was convinced that new aesthetic tenets had to be postulated.\textsuperscript{6}

During Noverre's time, ballets were merely divertissements and had no relation to the opera in which they were inserted. Dances were choreographed for the purpose of displaying the virtuosity of the dancers. Costuming was cumbersome and employed heeled slippers and heavy court clothing chosen by each individual dancer with no concern for the character to be represented. Masks were used to depict characters. The performers entered in reverse order of their rank in the company, i.e., the "star" was always last, which was a carry-over from the court dances of the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{5}Kinney and Kinney, op. cit., p. 103.

\textsuperscript{6}Sorell, The Dancer's Image, p. 115.

According to John Martin, "Noverre wanted to make ballet an imitation of life." In Dance in Its Time, Sorell explained Noverre's use of the word "imitation":

Of course, "imitation" in the idiomatic and learned sense of the word contained a creative, formative, in fact dynamic, potential. Imitation was considered the artistic means of stirring the soul of the onlooker.

In order to "stir the soul of the onlooker," Noverre felt pantomime must be an integral part of the ballet for through this medium passions and experience could be expressed. His study of the methods of the actor, David Garrick, reinforced Noverre's belief and enriched his vocabulary of gesture and movement which provided better communication with his audience. He maintained that an artist had the prerogative to embellish and improve upon nature in order to correct defects and arrive at a more noble and beautiful presentation. Studying nature was the choreographer's responsibility, according to Noverre, so that he could learn about various methods of expression. Noverre suggested that people be observed in a variety of situations so that emotional responses

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9 Sorell, Dance in Its Time, p. 191
11 Patricia Murphy, "Ballet Reform in Mid-18th Century France: The Philosophes and Noverre," Symposium, XXX, No. 1 (Spring, 1976), 34.
and their physical manifestations could be studied.\(^{12}\)

He recognized the possibility that subjects for ballets could be drawn from daily life and from the works of ancient and modern authors. Therefore, he urged maîtres de ballets to be constantly alert to all that surrounded them and, in addition to lofty concepts and mythological plots, to utilize the familiar and the common in their libretti.\(^{13}\) Additionally, Noverre insisted upon the use of decor to further the plot line. A final aspect of his dissatisfaction with the ballet of his day was the revulsion he felt in relation to the inane melodies used. In his own work, Noverre developed a close collaboration with musicians. He sought an appropriate subject, developed a libretto, created expressive dance movements, and then explained his needs to a composer.\(^{14}\) Noverre also insisted that ballet be one integrated unit. He advised that in order to achieve sufficient competence to develop a well crafted choreographic production, the maîtres de ballets should study "painting, music, design, anatomy, and geometry . . . ."\(^{15}\)

Recognizing the value of the interrelationship of these


\(^{13}\)Murphy, op. cit., 34.


\(^{15}\)Murphy, op. cit., 36.
facets, Noverre developed the *ballet d'action* (story ballet) which was a fusion of all the listed elements. Charles Colle, impressed with Noverre's new style of presenting ballet, observed in an article written for the *Journal*:

> If there is anyone who can drag us out of the childhood in which we are still in the matter of ballet, it must be a man such as this Noverre. The Opéra should secure and pay well such talent; but for the very reason they should do so, they will do nothing of the sort. . . .

Having heard of Noverre's unorthodox innovations, Gaetano Vestris, lead dancer with the Paris Opéra, came to observe and argue with Noverre's methods but left as a convert to these principles and initiated their gradual adoption among dancers of the Opéra. Noverre's impression upon Vestris was as profound as Garrick's influence had been upon Noverre. Prompted by Noverre, Vestris revealed "an unsuspected talent for pathetic gesture and facial expression." 17

Although Vestris was an advocate of Noverre's principles, not everyone at the Paris Opéra was so enthusiastic concerning adoptions of these changes. Noverre had applied for the post of *maître de ballets* at the Opéra and had been rejected in 1757. This honor eluded him until 1776 when Marie Antoinette, who had been his pupil, became Queen of France and interceded for him. This *intercession*.

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16 Sorell, *Dance in Its Time*, p. 184.

caused intrigues and jealousies which forced him, a broken and bitter man, to step down after four years.18

The rejection of his application for the post of maître de ballets at the Paris Opéra in 1757 had hurt and humiliated Noverre. Through his teaching and choreography, he had presented new concepts in ballet but felt that the best progress could be made through attaining this coveted position. In frustration and anger at being impeded in his efforts toward reform, Noverre wrote his manifesto in the form of letters which was the popular style during the eighteenth century whenever someone had something unorthodox to say.19 His Letters was directed to a multi-faceted audience, and, through them, Noverre tried to convince all those involved with ballet of its current inadequacies and that following his suggestions would result in an improved performance.20

Noverre literally shook the foundations of the ballet d'école (school of ballet) with his proposed revisions. In an excerpt of Beaumont's translation of the Letters, he justified his rebellion: "A genius may break ordinary rules and advance by new paths when they lead to the perfection of his art . . . ."21 This, then, "the


19 Sorell, The Dancer's Image, p. 321

20 Murphy, op. cit., 32-33.

perfection of his art," was the foundation for which Noverre struggled and fought throughout his life.

His Letters has occupied a pivotal position in dance. In them "he outlined his principles in a manner that made them available far beyond his sphere of personal influence, and, indeed, beyond his own time." Among others, Noverre proposed the following reforms: ballet should carry the plot line through dramatic expression and movement; costuming should be representative of the period and character; masks should be abolished; ballet should be autonomous from the Opera; and virtuosity should not be sought as an end unto itself.

Noverre's place in the history of dance has been assured largely due to his Letters on Dancing and the Ballets which is as valid currently as when first written. In the words of Ivor Guest, Noverre's Letters constituted "one of the greatest classics in the literature of ballet." The responses to this classic, however, were rather varied. Support was extended from those who had seen evidence of his philosophies as exemplified in his choreography while angry epistles of abuse and retaliatory statements of defense were issued by those who were determined to maintain

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23 Anderson, op. cit., p. 35.

tradition. Noverre's claim that the academy had failed in its responsibility to develop dancers and to improve the art of dancing was answered by his colleague, Gaspare Angiolini, who insisted that the academy had been successful in its mission to produce good dancers and teachers.25

Conversely, when Noverre sent a copy of his Letters to Voltaire soon after the publication, he received praise from the man considered to dictate public opinion at that time:

Your work of genius, sir, lies in front of me; my gratitude equals my admiration. The title of your book speaks of dance only, but you throw light on all the arts. . . . In my opinion, you are such an excellent representative of your genre that the injuries and disappointments which you suffered, and which forced you to seek use for your gifts far from your native land, in no way surprises me. I think your merits will find the necessary understanding where one loves Nature; but will you find the actors able to realize your ideas?26

This letter which ended with the oft-quoted phrase, "You are a Prometheus, you must mold men and move them," was cherished by Noverre to the end of his days.27

Noverre did, indeed, "mold men and move them." In addition to being a gifted choreographer, he was also an inspired teacher whose influence extended to several young dancers such as Charles Didenot, Jean Dauberval, Salvatore Vigano and others for whose

25Sorell, Dance in Its Time, p. 149.
27Ibid.
training he had been primarily responsible.28

Noverre's aesthetic principles and choreographic suggestions have created a solid foundation for ballet as a continuing art form. Later writers and choreographers such as Carlo Blasis, Enrico Cecchetti, and Michel Fokine have only modified his precepts. All three have reiterated Noverre's concern with the integration of the various art forms and the necessity of studying all the arts in relation to dance. Blasis' and Cecchetti's books have expanded his concepts only through a description of steps.29

Noverre's disciples applied many of his ideas to the development of ballet plots and to the use of expressive gesture.30 Most of the ballets of this era have vanished, but Dauberval's creation, La Fille mal Gardée which utilized Noverre's concepts, has remained extant, "proof enough that Noverre's principles are timeless."31 In The New Borzoi Book of Ballet, Krokovover called La Fille mal Gardée "a little masterpiece" and stated that "it remains astonishingly vital and up to date."32

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30Kraus and Chapman, op. cit., p. 77.
Kathrine Sorley Walker wrote concerning Noverre:

[Noverre is] a good example of how a lively mind can influence an art tremendously. He had all kinds of sensible ideas -- some of them so completely adopted now that it seems strange to us that he had to suggest them.  

Although during his lifetime Noverre was to see the ballet begin to become autonomous from the Opera, costume reform adopted, masks discarded, ballet d'action developed, and expressiveness used as as a means of communication, his real effect was posthumous. Like many artists, his life was a desperate struggle against stagnated ideas and outmoded practices.

Noverre's concepts have been carried forth through the efforts of his students and their students. His ideas have triumphed through his influence on Vestris, Dauberval, Diderot, Vigano, and many others. Noverre's works affected a world-wide revolution in ballet and his productions have perpetually served as models for those who persecuted and denied him. Although he felt that his life had been a failure, his Letters has continued to be considered a major work of dance criticism. According to Lincoln Kirstein:

His monument is not his dancing but his writing, the brilliant, angry Lettres sur la Danse, which are still the best introduction to a critical conception of theatrical dance. The more one reads them, the more


34Kirstein, op. cit., p. 224.
one feels that perhaps they are the only criticism of theatrical dancing.\textsuperscript{35}

Noverre's programmatic principles affected the trend of theater dance profoundly. Published more than two hundred years ago, his \textit{Letters} has remained vital and timely, as applicable to today's dance and dancers as they were in 1760.\textsuperscript{36} Quoted in an article by modern dancer, Gertrude Lippincott, Cyril Beaumont indicated that Noverre's \textit{Letters}

\begin{quote}
  have no equal in the whole of literature devoted to the art, and no book has exerted so incalculable an influence for good on the manner of production of ballets and dances.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{35}Kirstein, op. cit., p. 214.


\textsuperscript{37}Gertrude Lippincott, "Noverre and Modern Dance," \textit{Dance Observer}, August-September, 1947, 76.
CHAPTER III

CONTINUED INFLUENCE THROUGH NOVERRE'S
PUPILS AND DISCIPLES

Noverre's *Letters* continued to have an impact on dance due to their availability. His treatise was translated into several languages, widely read, quoted, and served as a standard for training and choreography. His students and disciples travelled throughout Europe perpetuating his concepts through their teaching and choreography. Discussed in this chapter will be some of the most influential teachers and choreographers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who were either directly or indirectly affected by Noverre and his principles.

In commenting on a performance by visiting Italian dancers in 1771, Danish critic P. Rosenstrand-Goiske criticized the performers for their excesses and concern with virtuosity and suggested that ballet conform to "the rules of Noverre and of Nature."\(^1\) Twentieth-century dance critic, Edwin Denby, has echoed this point: "Noverre's *Letters on Dancing* discussed the ethics of ballet so clearly that ever since ballet has been judged by the general standards of art or has not been judged at all."\(^2\)

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\(^1\)Winter, op. cit., p. 138.

Noverre's influence on dance, during his lifetime, was almost universal. His principles were spread throughout Europe not only by the distribution of his *Letters* but by his students and those teachers who were proponents of his ideas. These men influenced others through their teaching and choreography and were responsible for the perpetuation of Noverre's traditions.

One of Noverre's most influential students was Gaetano Vestris, lead dancer with the Paris Opéra in the mid-eighteenth century. Vestris had heard of Noverre's innovations and had travelled to Lyons to argue with Noverre concerning them. Impressed by what he observed, Vestris became a convert to Noverre's principles and was instrumental in influencing the Paris Opéra's assimilation of these changes. His enthusiasm was so great that he was responsible for the production of some of Noverre's ballets at the Paris Opéra. These ballets were well received by the audiences of the Opéra who were eager for something new. For every year that Noverre held the post of *maître de ballets* in Stuttgart, Vestris took a three months' leave of absence from the Paris Opéra to study with Noverre and to perform in his ballets. He and, later, his son, Auguste, who was also a student of Noverre, were considered the finest male dancers of their time. Gaetano Vestris was the first male dancer to discard the mask worn to depict characters and, coached by Noverre, evidenced an outstanding mimetic talent.³

³Winter, op. cit., p. 115.
A product of Noverre's teaching, Jean Dauberval became a ballet master who taught Antoine Bournonville, Charles Didelot, and Salvatore Vigano. He travelled a great deal, performing and teaching throughout Europe. According to Lincoln Kirstein, Dauberval was one of the few ballet masters who attempted and succeeded in utilizing Noverre's principles of integrating movement and expression. In his work, _La Fille mal Gardée_, Dauberval introduced the genre of the comedy ballet which was a synthesis of Noverre's reforms.

Another of Noverre's students, Charles LePicq, became a choreographer for the Paris Opéra. He utilized Noverre's ideas on integration of the art forms and developed a production that was so well received that the king granted him an award of two thousand francs. Jealous of his successes, the maître de ballets at the Paris Opéra, Pierre Gardel, caused great difficulties for LePicq at every available opportunity. One example was that Gardel refused to allow the Paris Opéra to pay for the sets ordered by LePicq for the performance of the ballet for which he was contracted. Noverre aided LePicq through these tribulations and received his undying gratitude. Although LePicq had held the prestigious position of choreographer at the Paris Opéra, it was in Russia where his major

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4Kirstein, op. cit., p. 229.
5Sorell, _Dance in Its Time_, p. 194.
6Winter, op. cit., p. 122.
influence was felt. In October, 1785, Catherine the Great of Russia hired LePicq to be ballet master of the Imperial Ballet. As the "official exponent" of Noverre's principles, LePicq was instrumental in establishing the groundwork for the development of Russian ballet. 7

Also extremely influential in the development of Russian ballet was Dide lot. Studying under Noverre, Dauberval, and Auguste Vestris, he was schooled in the French tradition but it was in St. Petersburg that he spent most of his working years. 8 So great was Dide lot's influence in Russia that the history of Russian ballet has been divided into two periods: before and after Dide lot. 9 He followed Noverre's teachings and, in his choreography, subordinated "dance technique to dramatic truth and continuity." 10

Meanwhile in Denmark, Antoine Bournonville had begun to develop the Royal Danish Ballet. He was a student of Dauberval and Noverre and worked directly in the style of Noverre. 11 He trained his son, August, and sent him to Paris to study with Auguste Vestris, thus ensuring the purity of the Noverre tradition for his company. 12

7 Winter, op. cit., p. 138.
8 Guest, op. cit., p. 40.
9 Kirstein, op. cit., p. 252
10 Walker, op. cit., p. 150
12 Cohen, op. cit., p. 77.
Noverre's students and disciples carried forth his principles into the nineteenth century. One of his proponents who worked influentially in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was Salvatore Vigano. Impressed by Vigano's talents, Dauberval taught him "the whole inheritance of French theatrical dancing which he knew as tempered by the critical and creative attitude of Noverre." Vigano evidenced a genius for developing story ballets which presented a synthesis of Noverre's teachings.

Considered by his contemporaries to be a genius and a towering figure in dance, Vigano divided his time between Vienna and Milan during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Early in the 1800s, Milan had become a mecca for choreographers. There, Vigano's talent as a choreographer flourished and he conceived the type of plastic, sculptural groupings that Noverre had suggested. He worked for a continuous integration of movement and music, where every action "down to the last flickering eyelash" corresponded with the music. Vigano insisted on absolute accuracy in costuming so that the mood of the ballet was carried through all the elements. Thus, one hundred years before the Ballets Russes, Vigano was putting into practice concepts which Noverre espoused but had not been able

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14Kirstein, op. cit., p. 230.
15Royce, op. cit., p. 184.
16Winter, op. cit., p. 189.
to realize. Use of movement and music in the Vigano-Noverre tradition did not completely emerge again until the works of Vaslav Nijinsky and Michel Fokine were recognized in the next century.\footnote{Kirstein, op. cit., pp. 231-234.}

As Salvatore Vigano was ending his career in Milan, young Carlo Blasis was just beginning. According to Lincoln Kirstein, "the history of European stage-dancing is French, and remains so, until Salvatore Vigano and Carlo Blasis recapture it for thirty years, before the ultimate Russian supremacy."\footnote{Kirstein, op. cit., p. 140.} Blasis had studied under Dauberval and worked with Vigano, thereby inheriting the tradition of Noverre. Like Noverre, his principal fame lies in his publication and in his teaching. Blasis received the best possible education for a ballet master. "He followed the precepts of Noverre and Vigano, learned the classics, frequented studios of the best painters and sculptors and studied music."\footnote{Kirstein, op. cit., pp. 236-237.} In 1820, at the age of twenty-four, Blasis wrote \textit{An Elementary Treatise on the Theory and Practice of the Art of Dance} which was the first major technical dance work written during the 1800s.\footnote{Winter, op. cit., p. 191.} It was translated into all European languages and became the standard for ballet instruction.\footnote{Sorell, \textit{Dance in Its Time}, p. 235.} In this \textit{Treatise}, Blasis echoed and expanded upon
Noverre's *Letters*. He used the same criteria for integration of elements and expression through movement. His concepts concerning accuracy of costuming and relationship between dance and music were also similar. Blasis, however, delineated the various positions and *pas* (steps) in ballet through drawings and explanations and wrote concerning qualities of the various *pas* toward which dancers were to strive.

Blasis' students spread his principles throughout Europe. Kirstein contends that it was due to Blasis' influence that ballet continued to be respected even though its image was declining in Paris, which was still considered to be the final proving ground of a dancer's acceptance as a performer. The discipline Blasis demanded through a balanced method of training and the development of the dancers through character work, pantomime, and *adage* (slow, controlled movements) produced some of the finest dancers of the day, including Marie Taglioni and Carlotta Grisi.22

While Blasis was busy establishing the Italian school, based on Noverre's principles, August Bournonville had assumed the directorship of the Royal Danish Ballet which was developed by his father and also based on Noverre's principles.23 Through the younger

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22Kirstein, op. cit., p. 242.

Bournonville, the ideas of Noverre came to full fruition. DeMille wrote in *The Book of the Dance*:

His works constitute the backbone of the Danish repertory. It was through him that the ideas of his father's teacher, Noverre, first found full development. He introduced, and made popular, unity of mime and style, fine pantomime, virile dancing for men, and the flowing, lyric composition of all pieces.24

Several of Bournonville's ballets have been preserved and have remained popular. In them is illustrated a clear view of the tradition passed from Noverre and the charm of Bournonville's choreography. Among those ballets still performed are *Napoli*, *Konservatorium*, Bournonville's "affectionate recreation of a Vestris class," and the divertissement from *Flower Festival*.25

Although Noverre's principles were being extended in other countries, his influence in France was dwindling, largely due to the efforts of Pierre Gardel, *maître de ballet* at the Paris Opéra. Integration of all the aspects of a ballet had almost been abandoned and dance for dance's sake or for the enjoyment of female beauty was the vogue.26 Earlier, Noverre had warned Gardel that if he refused to accept students, particularly males from the provinces, ballet would suffer through stagnation and lack of the male-female balance.

24DeMille, op. cit., p. 114.


Just as he had prophesied, male dancing was gradually being phased out.

During this time, the brilliant dancing of Auguste Vestris, Jules Perrot, and Artur Saint-Léon were among the few exceptions. Their best work, however, was achieved not in France but in Russia. The heirs of Noverre's legacy from all the countries of Europe now "converged on Russia to produce the greatest school, the greatest technicians and the greatest choreographers of traditional theatrical dancing." 27

In 1849, Jules Perrot went to St. Petersburg where he stayed for ten years. He was not only a great actor-dancer but a master choreographer who developed a generation of ballerinas and staged ballets for such dancers as Fanny Elssler, Carlotta Grisi, and Lucile Grahn. Influenced by Didelot and Dauberval, "Noverre's tradition . . . became an organic element in the creative power of Perrot." 28 Leaving Russia, he was succeeded as ballet master by Artur Saint-Léon, another Frenchman. 29

Saint-Léon was convinced that the responsibility for all aspects of a ballet should be coordinated by one person. 30

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27 Kirstein, op. cit., p. 256.
28 DeMille, op. cit., p. 113.
29 Clarke and Crisp, Understanding Ballet, p. 52.
30 Winter, op. cit., p. 262.
between Paris and Russia from 1860-1869, he was painfully aware of the changing climate of the ballet in Paris. He produced a considerable number of ballets which utilized the concepts espoused by Noverre. His final creation, in the integrated, comedy-style of Dauberval, *Coppélia*, has remained in the repertoire of most ballet companies today.\(^\text{31}\)

Another Frenchman, Marius Petipa, succeeded Saint-Léon as ballet master in St. Petersburg. He retained the position for more than forty years and, under his rule, a truly Russian style was developed.\(^\text{32}\) Petipa followed Noverre's choreographic suggestions in matching dance style and character type and was as concerned as Vigano with accurate costuming for each period or character represented. Although in the above areas Petipa remained true to Noverre's basic revisions, he also established his own principles. He developed a sequence for his ballets, from which he never varied.\(^\text{33}\) In true Romantic tradition, he gave to the ballerina a stellar position and used the male dancer in supporting roles. His prejudice against the male in dance was great which may have been due to the fact that he was never able to choreograph adequately for the male dancer.\(^\text{34}\)

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\(^{31}\) Clarke and Crisp, *Understanding Ballet*, p. 32.

\(^{32}\) Clarke and Crisp, op. cit., p. 53

\(^{33}\) Royce, op. cit., p. 184

\(^{34}\) Sorell, *Dance in Its Time*, p. 286.
Trained in the tradition of Noverre, Christian Johanssen and Enrico Cecchetti helped Petipa to raise the standard of technique and choreography in Russian ballet. Together they changed the focus of the Romantic ballet from France to Russia.35

The Romantic tradition had been initiated in France in the early nineteenth century. Through the reluctance to integrate needed reforms, the stage was being set at the Paris Opéra for the eventual adaptation of a Romantic philosophy.

During the mid-nineteenth century, ballet was returning to pre-Noverre days with virtuosity and divertissements and dance for the sake of dancing as major issues. The one man held responsible for this development was not a dancer or choreographer but the critic, Théophile Gautier.

35Ibid.
CHAPTER IV

INFLUENCE OF GAUTIER’S WRITINGS ON THE DANCE

Throughout the literature concerning ballet, there have been innumerable allusions to Théophile Gautier's influence on the development of ballet during the Romantic period. Gautier was a poet, novelist and journalist who wrote critiques on all the arts for major newspapers in Paris. His influence was formidable and he was largely responsible for the direction that ballet was to take during the Romantic period.

His literary style was expressed in his ability to immediately and voluptuously describe his sensations as he observed a performance. Through his aesthetic credo of dance for the sake of dancing, Gautier exerted a great deal of influence in the return to meaningless virtuosity in dance. In glorifying the ballerina, he denigrated the male dancer to the role of a support to display her brilliance and then totally ignored the corps de ballet.¹ Gautier should have recognized the corps as the source of future ballerinas.

Gautier has been described throughout available literature as one of ballet's earliest and greatest critics. According

¹Sorell, The Dancer's Image, p. 424.
to Sorell:

Dance criticism, in the true sense of the word, begins with the Romantic ballet, which coincides with the commercial development of the press and the first flowering of journalism. The man who symbolizes the beginning of dance criticism is Théophile Gautier.²

As a highly respected critic, Gautier conceived his function as mainly educational. To "inform, instruct, and delight" rather than to evaluate comprised his critical credo.³ He made an effort to present good qualities because he viewed the responsibility of pointing out beauty as his main aim.⁴

Seeing the ballet through the eyes of an artist, his deep sense of line, color and harmony was an asset in his descriptions. His command of the language was extraordinary and his vocabulary was rich.⁵ The flair and literary style used in his critiques and feuilletons gave a comfortable flow to his writing. The ability to describe his immediate response to whatever he observed could make the reader feel that he was running his hands over the dancer's body "as if his hands could see and his eyes could speak."⁶ According to

²Sorell, Dance in Its Time, p. 265.


⁴Spencer, op. cit., p. 94.


⁶Sorell, The Dancer's Image, pp. 414-416
Denby, "Gautier...gives the reader the most immediate sense of sensuous fluidity and physical presence in ballet."^7

Because his critiques were eminently readable, Gautier's reputation as a critic was established early and his influence could not be overestimated. Artists were grateful to Gautier for good press since his comments could make or break a performer or artist. 8 In political positions, Gautier felt obliged to temper his critiques to suit the prejudices of government officials, thereby ensuring his continued employment. 9 He frequently contradicted himself in his critiques and seemed unsure of any opinion other than the perpetuation of beauty and the ballerina.

To Gautier, beauty was the cult to which he adhered and from which he did not deviate. It was a deity which demanded his total loyalty. He subscribed to the theory of dance for the sake of dancing and his primary criterion in the evaluation of all he perceived was beauty which he spelled with capital letters. 10 He felt that dancing was the art of displaying elegant poses and beautiful lines.

For him the Platonic idea of absolute beauty occurs when he is at his most lyrical...and it may be explained by taking into account his conception of beauty as something to be striven after, not so much an aesthetic as a spiritual value. 11

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^7 Denby, op. cit., pp. 414-415.
^8 Tennant, op. cit., p. 77.
^9 Sorell, The Dancer's Image, p. 92.
^10 Sorell, op. cit., p. 415.
^11 Spencer, op. cit., p. 92.
Although he exalted beauty and the Romantic conception of art for art's sake, which translated into dance for the sake of dancing, there are instances in his critiques where he indicated that there should be a unity of purpose among all the various persons responsible for the production of a ballet so that an integrated whole might be presented. Sorell explained:

He wrote on all the manifestations of the arts believing that all artists strive towards the same end which is the exaltation of beauty in life, the ultimate ecstasy. He felt that there should be no barriers between the various artistic disciplines and wished for all artists to command the same tools with the same goal in mind. The musician, painter, sculptor, poet, novelist, dramatist, actor, and dancer should join forces in order to picture beauty in its most unified, integrated, completed form.\(^\text{12}\)

In other critiques, his sensual nature claimed that expression of the passions through mime was of more value than the story of a ballet.

Gautier is not very interested in the action of a ballet but, as a sensualist, enjoys the expression of the passions in mime. He feels that ballet is 'mimed poetry' and preferred Elssler to Taglioni because of her ability in the mimetic gesture.\(^\text{13}\)

In still others, however, he wrote that dancing was "an unsuitable medium for dramatic action" and that "the true, the unique, the eternal subject of a ballet is dancing."\(^\text{14}\)


\(^\text{14}\)Pridden, op. cit., p. 34.
During the Romantic period, choreography was of secondary importance with its function being to support the plot and the music.\textsuperscript{15} The virtuosity of the dancer, however, became paramount.\textsuperscript{16} Although the era of the Romantic ballet "stressed and finally overdid the virtuosity of dancing," it is considered the era of fairy tales as represented through ballet.\textsuperscript{17} During this time, Romantic ballets such as \textit{La Sylphide} and \textit{Giselle} were created. Gautier frequently denied the need for a ballet d'action and wrote in a review in \textit{La Presse}, "The dance expresses everything plastic and the rhythm of movements and -- why not say it -- physical voluptuousness and feminine beauty."\textsuperscript{18} Then, as the author of the libretto for \textit{Giselle}, Gautier also wrote:

"For a ballet to have some probability, everything in it must be impossible . . . Legends, fairy stories, hashish - and opium - inspired dreams, all the fantasy beyond the realm of possibility are the true spheres of ballet."\textsuperscript{19}

Ives felt that Gautier's excesses in description were due to his desire to make the public realize the urgency of beauty in the dance.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{15}Grant, op. cit., p. 102.
\textsuperscript{17}Sorell, \textit{Dance in Its Time}, p. 217.
\textsuperscript{18}Sorell, op. cit., p. 272.
\textsuperscript{19}Sorell, op. cit., p. 217.
\textsuperscript{20}Gautier, op. cit., pp. xvi-xvii.
Even with all his Romantic views and sensual tendencies, Gautier occasionally showed a practical side to his nature when he insisted on accuracy in costuming and declared:

A *peri* [fairy] with castanets dancing the cachucha was something our imagination had not foreseen. Even in a ballet one must have a little probability, if not for the mind at least for the eyes.  

His personal aesthetic principles and subjectivity, however, marred his judgment as a critic. He allowed erotic tendencies and personal preferences to influence his critical evaluations. Under these influences, he often described the various physical attractions of the dancers while ignoring their artistic merits. To Gautier, a thin dancer was at variance with the sensuous quality of dance and he appreciated a dancer with a more shapely body. He declared that "The dance is essentially pagan, materialist and sensual" and, in this vein, he wrote his critiques. The exuberant sensuality of his writing was heightened by the fact of his youth and his preference in a ballerina was more likely to be due to her physical attributes than to her artistic abilities.  

The causes and effects of the decline in the public's taste are inextricably interwoven. Although he would declare that his critiques only reflected popular opinion, Gautier must bear at least some responsibility for the public's concept of ballet. His sensuous critiques

\[\text{\begin{footnotesize}21\end{footnotesize}}\text{Pridden, op. cit., p. 35.}\]

\[\text{\begin{footnotesize}22\end{footnotesize}}\text{Pridden, op. cit., pp. 23-24.}\]
concerning the ballerina had much to do with the increasing decadence of ballet and the increased interest in the mimed passions and voluptuous movements of the ballerina.

Without inner motivation and meaningfulness of which he deprived the dance, it lost itself in the stereotype and sterile communication of visual splendor, acrobatic bravura, sensual and voluptuous impressions.\textsuperscript{23}

When the essence of dance was lost in the banal pleasures of a hedonistic public, that art was reduced to what was acceptable at that time.

During the Romantic period, the public became less concerned with classicism and purity and overly concerned with the ballerina.\textsuperscript{24} According to Sorell, "The main interest of the balletomanes and patrons of the arts was in the ballerina."\textsuperscript{25} Since the public interest was concentrated on the ballerina, the male was allowed fewer and fewer dancing parts and eventually assumed the role of support for the sole purpose of enhancing the viruosity of the ballerina.

Gautier's elevation of the ballerina to "star" status was encouraged by the public. Because of the emphasis placed on virtuosity, the public was quick to applaud the feats that were reminiscent of the music-hall attractions. This virtuosity had become possible through the use of pointe work and the kinetic freedom available with the

\textsuperscript{24}Pridden, op. cit., p. 40.
\textsuperscript{25}Sorell, \textit{Dance in Its Time}, p. 235.
advent of less restricting costumes. 26

Since, through his critiques, Gautier had helped to shape the public's preferences and expectations in dance, the manifestation of his delight in the feminine form and his sensuous descriptions determined what was acceptable in ballet during the Romantic period. Although he commented on various aspects of the production, his most "purple passages of ecstatic prose" were devoted to the ballerinas who "beggared description but on whom description of the most detailed and exaggerated kind were lavished." 27

It could not be claimed that Gautier was impartial in his judgments. Nor could it be declared that his comments were not determined largely by his predilection for beauty in the ballerina. Sorell explained:

His critiques ostentatiously reveal the thinly disguised eroticism in his sensual enjoyment with phrases such as: 'The languorous seduction of the ballerina'; 'Her bosom is full, a rarity among dancers . . . her breast does not exceed the fullness of an hermaphrodite of antiquity'; 'Her swooning arms'; 'intoxicated passion which sways in a frenzy of pleasure.' 28

As "spokesman for the Romantic ballet," Gautier appreciated "physical pleasure and feminine beauty." 29 He felt that the first requirement

29 Sorell, Dance in Its Time, p. 235.
of a dancer was that she be beautiful. In his eyes, a dancer was as much responsible for her beauty as an actress was for her enunciation. Because of this criterion, Gautier admired Taglioni, who was rather plain, but he fell in love with Elssler, who was prettier than Taglioni. The one true love of his life, however, was Carlotta Grisi, who, in Gautier's eyes, embodied the ethereality of Taglioni as well as the sensuousness of Elssler. He described Grisi as "a tea rose about to bloom." After her first performance of Giselle, for which Gautier wrote the libretto with Grisi in mind, he devoted nine columns to her praises and concluded simply, "If my name were not on the posters, what praises I should sing of this enchanting Carlotta."

Gautier delighted in the sensuous quality of Grisi.

Gautier felt attuned to the colorful sensualism of the female body as poeticized through rhythmic motion. The sensual experience and erotic magic emanating from a moving female body were for Gautier... a prelude to the awakening of all sense, a poetic substitute for the sexual act.

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30Pridden, op. cit., p. 20.
31Grant, op. cit., p. 102.
33Richardson, op. cit., p. 52.
His lusty delight is epitomized in this often quoted critique concerning Fanny Elssler:

She comes forward in her pink satin basquine trimmed with wide flounces of black lace; her skirt, weighted at the hem, fits tightly over the hips; her slender waist boldly arches and causes the diamond ornament on her bodice to glitter; her leg, smooth as marble, gleams through the frail mesh of her silk stockings; and her little foot at rest seems but to await the signal of the music. How charming she is with her big comb, the rose behind her ear, her lustrous eyes and her sparkling smile! At the tips of her rosy fingers quiver ebony castanets. Now she darts forward! How she twists, how she bends! What fire! What voluptuousness! Would you not say that in that hand which seems to skim the dazzling barrier of the footlights, she gathers up all the desires and all the enthusiasm of the spectators?35

To Gautier, beauty in ballet was represented by the female gender. His overwhelming fascination with the ballerina made her "all powerful" while he suggested that the male dancer was "something monstrous and indecent which we cannot conceive."36

During the Romantic period, the audience had developed a real prejudice against the male dancer. He was not appreciated nor was his role understood.37 Kirstein declared that the role of the male dancer had significance during the 1700s but during the Romantic era, men were effaced even as partners. Male dancers were little

36 Sorell, op. cit., p. 423.
37 Haskell, op. cit., p. 20.
better than character or background dancers and used primarily as support for the ballerina to whom all solos were ceded.\footnote{38}{Kirstein, op. cit., p. 252.}

Gautier was cruel in his attacks against the male dancers. He felt that a ballet without men would be the height of good taste,

> for nothing is more abominable than a man who displays his red neck, his great muscular arms, his legs with calves like church beadle's, his whole heavily masculine frame, shaken with leaps and pirouettes.\footnote{39}{Kraus and Chapman, op. cit., p. 80.}

Although his personal bias against the male dancer was extremely strong, he conceded that a few male dancers were acceptable. He saw in Jules Perrot a representative of the eighteenth-century male virtuoso. Because this was a revelation to him, Gautier gave to Perrot that credit which was due and wrote:

> This praise is all the less suspect from us because we do not in the least care for male dancing; a man executing anything but character dances or pantomime has always seemed to us a kind of monster. . . .Perrot has made us lose our prejudice.\footnote{40}{Pridden, op. cit., p. 41.}

The ideal male dancer for Gautier was Petipa, "the impassioned mime who devoted himself entirely to his ballerina so did not jar or distract the spectator."\footnote{41}{Ibid.}
Aside from these concessions, Gautier was intolerant of the male in ballet. His one-sided viewpoint was to have serious consequences in that the male-female balance in the ballet was no longer appreciated and the role of the male in dance would not be totally accepted by the public even a century later.  

By the middle of the 1840s the prejudice against the male was so strong that he was eliminated from the corps de ballet (group of non-soloist dancers in a ballet) whenever a justification could be made. The circle had turned full sweep from the 1600s when men danced all roles, dressing in travesty to represent women, to the 1800s when danseuse en travesti (female dancers in male costumes) was discovered and women danced roles that had heretofore been customarily considered male. Fewer and fewer boys entered the Paris Opéra to prepare for a career as a dancer. Even though talented male dancers continued to perform, the standard of their dancing gradually lowered and the career of a dancer had little appeal for young men.  

In his critiques, Gautier caught the essence of dance. His quest for beauty was never forsaken and he was aware of his influence. He preserved for posterity a guide to the quality of the Romantic ballet and, even in his vacillations and ambiguities, has

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42 Sorell, Dance in Its Time, p. 278.
43 Kraus and Chapman, op. cit., p. 81.
captured some of the elusiveness and ephemerality that is inherent in the dance. In that respect his contribution was significant.

Only the immediacy and remoteness of the poetic image can picture the visual image of the rhythmic sweep of human bodies in space and time, and can make us relive and remember the elusive quality of the dance.\textsuperscript{44}

Pridden has suggested that "without Th. Gautier our knowledge of the romantic dance would be a vague ideal; he has given it life and precision."\textsuperscript{45} Although in some ways Gautier reflected the public taste, he also helped shape the public taste and, as his writings increased in popularity and acceptance, he became more and more responsible for the direction of public opinion concerning the arts.

\textsuperscript{44}Nadel and Nadel, op. cit., p. 219.

\textsuperscript{45}Pridden, op. cit., p. 52.
CHAPTER V

COMPARISON, CONTRAST, AND CONTINUING INFLUENCE
INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Although superficially Noverre and Gautier seemed to be in agreement on many of their ideas, in reality, this was seldom the case. While Noverre remained true to his basic precepts throughout his life, Gautier seemed unsure of his views and frequently contradicted himself. The areas each discussed in his criticisms included use of subject matter, presentation of beauty, unification of elements, costuming and expression through mime and movement as opposed to virtuosity for its own sake, and the relationship between the male and female in dance.

As has been shown in Chapter III, Noverre's influence was widespread and his concepts have been perpetuated in an unbroken line through the present time. Gautier's influence, although negative in nature, has also continued and its effects have remained evident today in attitudes concerning dance, dancing and dancers. His impact on the elevation of the ballerina to star status and the relegation of the male dancer to the role of support for the ballerina has not yet been totally overcome. Reflecting his personal prejudices were his comments concerning men in dance: they simply did not belong. Even up to the current time, dance had not been considered a masculine occupation in many countries, especially the United States.
It has been maintained that both Noverre and Gautier have been major influences in the development of dance despite the fact of their frequently conflicting views. Following is a reiteration of their basic ideas which is presented in an effort to establish comparisons and contrasts in their concepts.

Almost a century before the Romantic movement was popular, Noverre showed an inclination toward Romantic tendencies. According to Brown:

The predominance of imagination over reason found in Noverre's Letters is characteristically Romantic. Furthermore, Noverre expresses a typically Romantic view of nature, "if you must copy, imitate nature, it is a noble model and never misleads those who follow it."¹

He was aware, however, that successful plots for ballets could be drawn from all areas which included mythology, drama, and everyday life and encouraged choreographers to consider a broad range of topics.²

A leader in the Romantic movement, Gautier also believed in presenting imagination over reason. He felt that for a ballet to be credible, it must be incredible and utilize myths, fairy tales, and all such preposterous characters as fairies, wilis, sylphs, nymphs, and fauns.³ He also indicated that dance was not equipped

¹Brown, op. cit., 40.
²Murphy, op. cit., 34.
to handle dramatic situations, and those topics which would provoke any thought should be avoided. 4

Both Noverre and Gautier believed in presenting the beautiful; however, their concepts of beauty seemed to be different. Noverre felt that since nature was not perfect and certainly not always beautiful, those flaws should be corrected in choreography and dance productions. 5 Gautier’s idea of beauty seemed to be more of an ideal, e.g., he reiterated in his critiques that physical beauty was essential in a performer and that dance was a series of plastic poses in pleasing lines. 6

Noverre stressed the need for an integration of all the arts to present one unified production. 7 Gautier did not seem to be certain of his stand in this area. At times, he indicated that this integration was essential. 8 He also wrote, however:

Collaboration for a work of the mind is something incomprehensible from which can only result hybrid and monstrous products, even admitting the joint collaborators to be men of brains, which is rare. All inspiration is impossible; genius is solitary. 9

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4Pridden, op. cit., p. 40.
5Murphy, op. cit., 34.
6Cohen, op. cit., p. 86.
7Murphy, op. cit., 36.
8Sorell, The Dancer’s Image, p. 414.
9Pridden, op. cit., p. 48
In an effort to rid dance of its excesses, Noverre pioneered reforms in costuming and felt that period and character should be accurately represented in costumes. Additionally, he attacked the use of masks to depict characters. Gautier, again, vacillated in his opinions. In some reviews, he appeared to agree with Noverre's concepts on accuracy while in others, he completely changed his preference as to style and design of costumes:

Feathers, flowers, tinsel, silver worked gauze, gold and silver sequins, that we continue to repeat, is what should form the basis of a corps de ballet's attire.\(^{10}\)

His unpredictability was further evident in that he wrote

"These capricious masks often render the ways of life better than strictly realistic compositions do."\(^{11}\)

Noverre was willing to forsake virtuosity for its own sake and preferred movement to be an expression of the mood and a representation of the character.\(^{12}\) He insisted that dancers should be able to convey emotion through gesture, posture, and facial expression.

Children of Terpsichore, renounce cabrioles, entrechats and over-complicated steps; abandon grimaces to study sentiments, artless graces and expression; study how to make your gestures noble, never forget that it is the life-blood of dancing; put judgment and sense

\(^{10}\)Pridden, op. cit., p. 46.


\(^{12}\)Anderson, op. cit., p. 35.
into your pas de deux; let will-power order their course and good taste preside over all situations.\textsuperscript{13}

In contrast, Gautier subscribed to the credo of dance for the sake of dancing.\textsuperscript{14} His philosophy was expressed as follows:

The Opéra [Paris Opéra Ballet] has always scorned reality as is fitting . . . the principal charm of the Opéra . . . is that nowhere else is convention as forced and as far removed from nature. For what is less natural than to see . . . a woman in distress express her despair by performing cabrioles! Yet all that gives infinite pleasure.\textsuperscript{15}

He also wrote, however, of the necessity of expressing the passions through mime and preferred Elssler over Taglioni because she was a better actress.\textsuperscript{16}

Noverre's classical strain has remained unbroken through two centuries while Gautier's discrimination against the male dancer, lack of concern with the corps de ballet, and re-creation of the star system have continued to plague ballet companies and dancers. The influence of the philosophies of both Noverre and Gautier have continued through the relationships between teacher and student and between choreographer and audience through the intermediary of the performer. This line has continued into the twentieth century.

Because of its distance from Paris, the Russian ballet under


\textsuperscript{14}Sorell, \textit{Dance in Its Time}, p. 285.

\textsuperscript{15}Pridden, op. cit., p. 36.

\textsuperscript{16}Op. cit., p. 36.
Petipa's autocracy, did not feel the strain of Gautier's biases. There was a balance through the influence of fine choreographers and teachers: Saint-León, Perrot, Lev Ivanov, Johanssen, and Cecchetti. Even into the twentieth century, however, ballet in Russia meant ballet in the manner of Petipa who developed his own creative style based on Noverre's principles but was as biased as Gautier against the male dancer. 17

Although Petipa's ideas effected a resurgence of the Russian ballet, he had developed a basic format for his ballets from which he did not deviate. Clinging desperately to tradition, questions and new concepts presented by curious, thoughtful students were discouraged. 18 Some of the young dancers who were eager to experiment found a sympathetic patron in Serge Diaghilev who recruited dancers from the Imperial Ballet Schools in St. Petersburg and Moscow from the classes of 1909 through 1912 and again in 1916.19

Serge Diaghilev, 1872 - 1929, was a member of the Russian aristocracy. A connoisseur of art, he was drawn toward the ballet and eventually became an impresario whose contributions have continued to be felt today in every part of the world. Charles Spencer has indicated that Diaghilev was the main impetus behind

17Kirstein, op. cit., p. 256-258.
18Sorell, Dance in Its Time, p. 350.
19Kirstein, op. cit., p. 294.
the formation of national and private companies not only in Europe and the United States but in South America, where the Ballets Russes toured, as well as in Japan, where Diaghilev was only known by proxy.20

Like Gautier, Diaghilev swore allegiance to the art for art's sake theory which had been popular during the Romantic period. In Russia, he founded a magazine, The World of Art, in which he had written, "The sole function of art is pleasure, its only instrument beauty."21 Diaghilev's real contribution to dance, however, was more reminiscent of Noverre's precepts in that he recognized that ballet was a fusion of components and was able to arrange collaboration among artists in all the related areas. Just as Noverre had worked with Boucher, Bakst, Gluck, and others, Diaghilev helped accomplish a unification of purpose among Stravinsky, Picasso, Matisse, Satie, Cocteau, Fokine, Nijinsky, Massine, Balanchine, and others.

The excitement generated by Diaghilev's Ballets Russes was due to the artistic alignment of talents he had assembled. The collaboration of these artists gave ballet a new look which presented a unity of all the arts through a fresh approach.22 Thus Diaghilev,


21Sorell, Dance in Its Time, p. 353.

though not a dancer, was responsible for a twentieth-century synthesis of Noverre's premise. He had an uncanny gift for discovering talent and gave many young artists opportunities for expression and exploration. Because of his penchant for youth, many of his "discoveries" are still living today and continue to be influential.23

In 1909, Diaghilev gathered a small group of young dancers from the Imperial Russian School for the purpose of presenting a summer season in Paris. For this first season, his company included Michel Fokine, Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina, Vaslav Nijinsky, and Mikhail Mordkin. Fokine was responsible for the majority of the choreography.24 According to Kirstein, the history of the classic dance in the early decades of the twentieth century "is to be found in a succession of choreographers."25

Fokine entered the Imperial School of Ballet in 1889 at the age of nine. Much disturbed by the stereotyped way in which ballets were choreographed, he embarrassed his teachers and choreographers by asking impertinent questions, for example:

Why is the style of dance seldom in harmony with its theme, costumes and period? Why does a dancer execute difficult steps if they do not express anything? Why is ballet technique limited to the movements of the lower

23Clarke and Crisp, Understanding Ballet, p. 58.

24Kraus and Chapman, op cit, p. 152.

25Kirstein, op cit, p. 294.
limbs and a few conventional positions of the arms when
the whole body should be expressive? 26

Obviously, these questions, asked of autocrats who were never ques-
tioned, provoked them to label Fokine a trouble-maker. Steeped in
the tradition of ballet, the authorities could only give tradition
as a reason. At twenty-four, Fokine dared to send to the Director
of the Imperial Theater a letter outlining his ideas on ballet
which included his preference of expression over virtuosity and
the integration of the various art forms. 27 Although this letter
delineated the same precepts proposed in Noverre's Letters a cen-
tury and a half earlier, Fokine was considered a young rebel and
his suggestions were ignored. 28

Fokine was disturbed by the "rigidity and sterility of the
Russian ballet" and he commented that the typical pas de deux was
an exhibition of "agility and virtuosity" with little actual pre-
determined choreography. 29

We did whatever we felt we could do best. I did high
jumps and Pavlova pirouettes. There was no connection
whatsoever between our 'number' and the ballet into which it
it was inserted. Neither was there any connection with the
music. We began our adagio when the music began and finished
when the music came to an end. 30

26 Sorell, Dance in Its Time, p. 350.
27 Ibid.
28 Martin, op. cit., p. 53.
29 Kraus and Chapman, op. cit., pp. 150-151
30 DeMille, op. cit., p. 138
To keep Fokine too busy to cause trouble, he was allowed to choreograph. Feeling inhibited by ballet convention, he converted the classical vocabulary into movement suitable to his themes. 31 His work, however, was not well received by his superiors nor by the Russian audience accustomed to seeing the traditional choreography. 32 The Russian ballet masters were unwilling to break with tradition although, paradoxically, Russian tradition had been the result of the reforms of Noverre. Through their shortsightedness, they allowed the finest, most inventive choreographers of the twentieth century to slip through their hands. Not until Diaghilev brought him to Paris as a choreographer for the Ballets Russes was Fokine's genius recognized. 33

Although discouraged in Russia because his innovations were not well received by the ballet masters or the conservative Russian audiences, Fokine found the Paris audiences enthusiastic. Ballet had become very mundane in Paris partially because of the lack of proficient male dancers.

When the brilliant Russian dancers appeared on stage, in Fokine's colorful and dynamic ballets, using a range of movement that had never before been seen on the stage, disregarding the conventions of a past...

31 Harrold, op. cit., p. 35.
33 Sorell, Dance in Its Time, p. 351.
choreography, and dancing in a manner that involved real characterization, the audiences went wild.34

In his choreography, Fokine drew on every historic period and was conversant with the folk idiom not only in dance but in music as well.35 He insisted on a fusion of all the artistic elements into one unified whole just as Noverre had done one hundred and sixty years earlier. He refused to be limited by the basic vocabulary of ballet while remaining true to its precepts. Like Noverre, he insisted that the style of each ballet be suitable to its subject matter and that the dance idiom be reflective of this style.36

Through his work with Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes, Fokine's philosophy of ballet matured. In a letter written to the London Times in 1914, Fokine expressed his views on ballet which were a repetition of Noverre's Letters in very brief form. He dealt with the vocabulary of dance, use of the body to express dramatic action, relationship between movement and plot, use of the corps de ballet, and the unity of music, scenery, dancing, and costuming.37

According to Merle Armitage:

The contributions of Fokine place him directly in the great tradition of . . . Noverre. The impetus he

34Kraus and Chapman, op. cit., p. 152.
35Kirstein, op. cit., p. 277.
36DeMille, op. cit., pp. 138-139.
37Nijinsky, op. cit., p. 100.
gave to the dance made it one of the most vigorous and
vital expressions of the early twentieth century. 38

Fokine created ballets and developed a progressive style for the
Ballets Russes which was perpetuated by subsequent choreographers. 39

After leaving the Ballets Russes in 1914, he moved to New York
where he spent the rest of his life. In New York, Mikhail Mordkin
included Fokine and Adolphe Bolm in his plans to perpetuate the
Russian tradition they learned from Cecchetti and Petipa through
developing a new American ballet company. In 1939, with the back-
ing of Richard Pleasant and Lucia Chase, Ballet Theatre was founded
and later renamed American Ballet Theatre. Gradually a repertoire
of wide range developed utilizing Noverre's concepts. Thus, the
classical strain as conceived by Noverre was again being perpetuated.
In the American Ballet Theatre, however, there also appeared to be
some relationship to Gautier in that a star system was initiated
from the very beginning to attract audiences. 40

The second choreographer for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes was
Vaslav Nijinsky who had been trained at the Imperial School by
Cecchetti in the style of Noverre. Nijinsky's idols were Noverre
and Auguste Vestris. By the authorities at the Imperial Russian
School, his dancing was considered to be a reincarnation of the

38 Merle Armitage, Dance Memoranda (New York: Duell, Sloan &
Pearce, 1947), p. 45.

39 Kirstein, op. cit., p. 294.

40 Clarke and Crisp, Understanding Ballet, pp. 72-73.
classical principles espoused by Noverre and he was called "Le Vestris du Nord" (the Vestris of the North). Petipa, having seen some of the finest dancers of the nineteenth century, considered Nijinsky to have the "fire" of Marie Camargo, the "ethereal qualities" of Marie Taglioni and the high, sustained leaps of August Vestris. Nijinsky, like Fokine, rebelled against the rigid format of classical choreography and wanted to develop dance and drama into one unit through movement.41

His choreographic style was new and neither understood nor appreciated by the general public. The combination of Nijinsky's choreography and Stravinsky's music for Le Sacre du Printemps nearly caused a riot in Paris and his L'Après midi d'un Faune was considered explicitly sexual.42 Cohen has used discretion in stating that Nijinsky's choreography expanded dance beyond its balletic base. A less controversial choreographer was found in Massine whom Diaghilev later hired to replace Nijinsky.43

Diaghilev's choice of Leonide Massine as choreographer seemed capricious. Massine had been trained in character dance in a dramatic school so did not have the Imperial Russian Ballet background of his predecessors. Sensing an artistic gift in this

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41 Nijinsky, op. cit., p. 147.
42 Sorell, Dance in Its Time, pp. 363-364.
43 Cohen, op. cit., p. 93.
seventeen-year-old, however, Diaghilev had Cecchetti train him in the classic precepts of Noverre.44

Educated in the classical ballet and encouraged to become a choreographer, Massine was allowed to experiment just as Fokine and Nijinsky had been.45 Diaghilev's perspicacity soon became apparent. With the collaboration of Cocteau, Picasso, Satie, and Massine, imagination was expanded. These men stimulated one another in the conception and development of ever-new ideas. Sorell writes that Massine's choreography "turned the balletic clock and helped to move dance into the twentieth century."46 According to Barzel, "The choreographic impact of Leonide Massine's symphonic ballets . . . started a trend toward abstract dance and using symphonic music.47

Diaghilev next became interested in the choreographic concepts of George Balanchine and hired him to work in that capacity. In 1914 at the age of ten, Balanchine entered the Soviet State School (formerly called the Imperial Russian School) where he was trained in the classical style of Noverre. The son of a famous Georgian composer, Balanchine was also a gifted musician and studied

44Kirstein, op. cit., p. 295.
45Clarke and Crisp, Understanding Ballet, p. 58.
at the Leningrad Conservatory of Music. A career in the field of music had been a strong consideration.⁴⁸

After his graduation from the Soviet State School, Balanchine choreographed for a small group of dancers who prepared programs called "Evenings with Young Dancers." Accustomed to traditional choreography, Balanchine's offerings were too advanced for Russian audiences, just as Fokine's had been. He sought permission to tour Europe with a group of young dancers called the Soviet State Dancers and, after several entreaties, was finally allowed to leave the country.⁴⁹

In Paris, Diaghilev saw this new group and recognized in Balanchine a choreographer of genius. At the age of twenty, Balanchine became ballet master of the Ballets Russes. Diaghilev also hired some of the dancers from the Soviet State Dancers to replace those of his company who had remained in the United States following a tour with Nijinsky.⁵⁰ Balanchine has explained that Diaghilev gave him his second education through the opportunity to collaborate with other great artists. It was during this period that he became acquainted with Igor Stravinsky who "was the greatest comfort I ever had."⁵¹ While choreographing for the Ballets Russes, Balanchine


⁴⁹Kraus and Chapman, op. cit., p. 158.

⁵₀Clarke and Crisp, Understanding Ballet, p. 58.

developed his own "avant garde" style which, although classical in nature, drew from the dance for the sake of dancing premise proclaimed by Gautier.52

Balanchine created ballets for Diaghilev for four and a half years and then left to accept the post of choreographer for other companies. After Diaghilev's death, Rene Blum and Col. W. de Basil tried to continue his company which, at that time, was known as the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo. Blum and de Basil hired Balanchine as their first choreographer in 1932. Balanchine worked in this capacity for one year and then formed his own company, Les Ballets in 1933, which was disbanded after seasons in London and Paris.53

In London, Lincoln Kirstein and Edward M. M. Warburg had an opportunity to see Balanchine's choreography and were impressed. They persuaded him to come to the United States to start a ballet school and establish a company. Just as Didelot had brought the pure, classic strain of Noverre to Russia, Balanchine was bringing it to the United States.54

On January 2, 1934, the School of American Ballet was opened in New York City and one year later, the American Ballet Company (the original predecessor of the New York City Ballet) presented its first

52 Charles Spencer, op. cit., p. 149.
54 Kirstein, op. cit., p. 235.
season. Balanchine's choreography was not well received by John Martin, then dance critic for The New York Times. Martin's denouncements were not to be trifled with for he was knowledgeable and respected in the field of dance criticism. Eventually, however, he began to see merit in Balanchine's choreography and became an ardent advocate.55

Balanchine believed in the craft of choreography and often said he did his creating "on union time."56 In this respect he was a modern counterpart of Vigano since they both seemed to need the presence of the dancers for inspiration.57 Also similar to the Noverre-trained Vigano, Balanchine was aware of the importance and value of developing choreography for the corps de ballet as opposed to having them remain in frozen poses. Just as an individual instrument has been featured and then returned to balance the orchestra, so Balanchine used his corps.58 He felt all corps members should be soloist quality and refused to make use of a star system, again in keeping with another of Noverre's suggestions.59

Choreographically, Balanchine has been living evidence of Noverre in that he has drawn from all areas and resources. DeMille
indicated that,

[Balanchine] borrows colloquially the laced interweaving of the American square dance, the acrobatics, stunts, and syncopation of our popular theater steps. He has in many ways taken on the coloring of a new background. . . .60

This certainly has been evident in his choreography for Broadway musicals and motion pictures. Walter Terry has suggested that the popularity of a number of musical shows has been due to Balanchine's choreography.61 Dancers Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire have agreed that Balanchine developed the form by doing imaginative musical comedy and movie choreography. Among others, he created such hits as "Babes in Arms," "On Your Toes," "I Married an Angel," "Song of Norway," and "Where's Charley?" A rather unusual request was made for him to choreograph a "Circus Polka" for the Ringling Brothers. Balanchine and Stravinsky collaborated on a ballet for elephants!62

Aside from such interesting and challenging requests, his extensive musical background has aided Balanchine in responding choreographically to music. In collaborating with Stravinsky, he learned to be guided by the "dynamic use of silence." Considered an heir to Petipa's legacy, he has created many classic works which are reminiscent of the nineteenth century, but he has also embraced the angularity and dissonance of the twentieth century in his approach

60 DeMille, op. cit., p. 155.
61 Terry, Invitation to Dance, p. 102.
62 Gotfryd, op. cit., 54.
to pure ballet. In his unique merging of movement with music, Balanchine's work has seemed to become the object of a statement made by Gautier over a century ago: "The ballet is music that one can see." Similarly, Gottlieb described Balanchine's choreography as "visual design in musical setting."

Many "Gautier-like" ideas also have been evident in Balanchine's efforts. In fact, Cohen has contended that Balanchine has been more a theoretical descendant of Gautier, rather than of Noverre and Petipa, in his adamant declaration that "movement for its own sake was its own sufficient reason for being." According to Anderson:

> Only what can be revealed through movement interests Balanchine, and he has removed from many ballets not only plots but even elaborate costumes and scenery, so that nothing will distract attention from the movement itself. Balanchine puts his faith in the beauty and power of movement and his faith is deep.

> His most distinctive pieces are his plotless or abstract ballets. His narrative ballets notwithstanding, Balanchine is essentially an anti-literary choreographer. [His] best works combine extraordinary technical flexibility and a profound reverence for the inflexible canons of classical ballet.

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63Sorell, Dance through the Ages, pp. 219-220.


67Anderson, op. cit., p. 104.
He has seemed to be in agreement with Gautier that "dancing is beautiful and it should be a pleasing ocular and kinesthetic experience."\(^{68}\)

In Balanchine's quest for beauty, Gottlieb wrote that so much attention has been given to the enhancement of the ballerina that the male dancer nearly has faded out of sight. Although a pas de deux may have been performed as a love duet, in actuality it became a vehicle for the glorification of the female.\(^{69}\) Marcia Siegel has commented that for the last two centuries, ballet has been largely the art of the ballerina:

The ballet stage has been inhabited by beautiful females with uncanny skills of speed, balance, accuracy, and elevation -- women whose virtuosity gave tangible support to their stage roles as princesses or leaders, often endowed with super-natural powers. Countless ballet heroes have fallen helplessly in love with these splendid creatures . . . the ballerina is what you go to the ballet to see. A male dancer hoping for stardom in this world learns to incline his head and step backward with regal deference.\(^{70}\)

It has always been Balanchine's tendency to feature the ballerina. Interviewed by Flora Lewis of The New York Times, Balanchine gave this frequently quoted statement:

The principle of classical ballet is woman. The woman is queen. . . . The man is prince consort. . . . If the woman were less important, it would not be ballet.

\(^{68}\) Gottlieb, op. cit., 115.

\(^{69}\) Ibid.

The woman's body is more flexible, there is more technique. Why? Why is Venus the goddess of love, not a man? That's the way it is. Woman is like that. They don't have to fight, go to war. Men can be generals if they want, or doctors, or whatever. But the woman's function is to fascinate men. . . .

In this attitude was reflected the reincarnation of Gautier's views on women in ballet.

Although Balanchine's fascination and inspiration have been centered around the ballerina, his tendency has been, as Noverre indicated in his Letters, to avoid a star system. Critics have frequently expressed displeasure with his refusal to announce in advance the featured performers. An article in The New York Times by critic Allan Hughes was devoted to that particular subject. Ballet-goers often have planned their evenings in relation to which dancers were performing in a given production. Balanchine's views have remained intact: the choreography is the essential ingredient; the performer is the vehicle. Thus, Balanchine has embodied a fusion of both Noverre and Gautier and has become eponymous with ballet. His influence on dance has been widespread and profound.72

Regional ballet companies throughout the United States have been directed by Balanchine's disciples who have continued to carry on the artistic principles of Noverre while they have perpetuated the biases of Gautier. The American audience has largely accepted the


72Kraus and Chapman, op. cit., p. 172.
the aesthetic opinion of Balanchine in its view of dance.  

Very slowly, the American public has begun to change its image of dance. Although audiences gradually have become indoctrinated into the fact that a story line has not been a necessary aspect to the enjoyment of dance, the same audiences have been indocile regarding the male in dance. Despite the great popularity of such male dancers as Rudolph Nureyev, Mikhail Barishnikov, and Alexander Goudonov, the feminine image continues to be influential. According to Gottlieb, the emphasis on female grace has so biased many people that, for them, dancer has become a feminine noun. Gautier's obviously sensual delight in observing the ballerinas and his descriptions of their movements and dress in explicitly provocative language were bound to remove the emphasis from the art form to voluptuous physicality. His fierce attacks on male dancers reflected and augmented the public's preference for the ballerina. These continue today in that dance has not been considered so much a serious vocation but a "frill," an adjunct to education, a hobby. Dance in education has largely been presented as a feminine activity while sports have been presented as a masculine activity. Males interested in dance rarely have had role models and have become discouraged. The stereotype of the man in dance as a homosexual has also caused

73 Sorell, Dance through the Ages, p. 221.
74 Kraus and Chapman, op. cit., p. 347.
75 Gottlieb, op. cit., 88.
parents and educators to discourage boys from entering the field. 76

Although this concept has been gradually changing through the
efforts of well known dancers such as Edward Villella, Mikhail Barish-
nikov, Rudolph Nureyev, Ted Shawn, Erick Hawkins, Jose Limon, Jerome
Robbins, and others, Balanchine, with his "Gautier-like" insistence
that "dance is woman," has retarded every forward step. Respect, how-
ever, has been growing from observing the sheer physicality and ath-
leticism of males in dance. 77 Dennis Fallon, a leading physical
educator, explained his reactions to a performance by a male dancer:

Never before had I witnessed such a display of
sheer power, quickness, and body control...his...presence on stage captured my complete attention while
raising disturbing simple questions. Who is this
dancer? Why is he the only male performer in the
company? And why is such a superb athletelike male
pursuing a career in dance? His performance made me
uneasy. 78

The battle for male acceptance in a female dominated art rages
for men in dance. The negative image of the male dancer has been a
continuing problem due to the influence of Gautier's critiques.
His prejudice has been felt through the public's perception of dance
as a female art. Gautier's influence has been centered more gener-
ally on the public and its acceptance of an image of beauty as related
to feminine beauty.

76 Kraus and Chapman, op. cit., pp. 347-349
78 Dennis Fallon, "A Man Unchained," Journal of Physical Educa-
tion and Recreation, May, 1977, 43.
While the effects of Gautier's critiques were more closely allied to the individual as a performer and to the public's view of those performers, Noverre's impact was focused on dancers as a group of individuals with the public reaping the benefits of better performances. Noverre campaigned for expression and dramatic feeling in movement as opposed to cold poses or virtuosity for its own sake. In Cohen's *Seven Statements of Belief*, Erick Hawkins summed up the previous concept succinctly, "I soon realized that pure movement is decorative instead of significant, if the inner quality is lacking."^79^

Throughout his life, Noverre fought against the very ideas that re-emerged through Gautier's critiques a century later. Both men fought against what each perceived as stagnant tradition in hopes of finding a more acceptable method of presenting an art they loved. Tradition, however, has a place for rebels. It is only a foundation from which to grow, to rediscover, and to reapply basic tenets through "cumulative wisdom of countless generations."^80^

In the words of Curt Sachs:

> As always the new style begins not with the great performers, but with people with ideas; as always, it turns back to the past to find not only form but courage to carry on.\(^{81}\)


^80^Amberg, op. cit., p. 63.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Both Jean-Georges Noverre and Théophile Gautier have had a lasting effect on dance. Noverre's *Letters on Dancing and the Ballets* established a criterion for training and choreography which has remained valid even today. His guidelines for the proper education of the dancer and the resultant manifestations of his choreographic principles have been evidenced through the last two centuries and have also been responsible for some of the finest dancers, teachers, and choreographers.

Gautier, through his critical writings for *La Presse* and the *Moniteur* in Paris, subscribed to the idea of dance for dance's sake, espoused the ideal of beauty, and was more interested in the feminine form than the artistic ability of the performer or the format of the presentation. His prejudice against the male dancer influenced the public taste so profoundly that men have avoided careers in dance even into the present time.

Through basically opposite viewpoints, Noverre and Gautier were, and still are, responsible for the development of dance and the shaping of public opinion in relation to that art form. Noverre's image of the story ballet and the integration of the various art forms into one unit have been extended from the eighteenth century to the present. Conversely, dance for the sake
of dance, interest in the star system, and the relegation of the male dancer to a limited position have been Gautier's contributions. The impact that both of these men had on dance has been deep and lasting. The image of dance today was essentially shaped by Noverre and Gautier in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively.
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