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Hedy Law, *Music, Pantomime and Freedom in Enlightenment France*. Woodbridge and Rochester: Boydell Press, 2020. xvii + 265 pp. Musical examples, notes, and index. \$95.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781783275601; \$29.95 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9781787449374.

Review by Olivia Sabee, Swarthmore College.

*Music, Pantomime and Freedom in Enlightenment France* is an ambitious book in part because of the inherently interdisciplinary nature of its subject matter. In it, Hedy Law brings together music and musical criticism, literature and theater, as well as dance and dance criticism in order to argue that the exploration of pantomime in eighteenth-century France proved not only a space in which to experiment with non-verbal bodily communication and its intersection with politics, but also that pantomime helped “to *explore* the relationships between music and movement,” rather than “*prescribe*[ing] how or what” should be composed (p. xiv). The concept of liberty in various guises underpins Law’s argument; she proposes the book as a response to the question of “on what intellectual ground [...] Noverre relate[d] the ballet-pantomime to liberty” (p. 4). This exploration of pantomime and liberty is structured around three layers of moral liberty: first, liberty within the composition process; second, liberty in a performer’s interpretation; and third, spectators’ liberty to interpret performances.

The greatest strength of Law’s monograph is to propose a multiplicity of understandings of how pantomime functioned within ballet and opera during the eighteenth century. Rather than relying on one suggested structural understanding of the interplay between movement, narrative, and music (such as the oft-quoted analyses by Diderot and Grimm of pantomime as a sort of recitative used in alternance with aria), Law proposes that many such different interpretations co-existed with one another, supporting this thesis with ample musical and textual evidence.

The book regularly circles back to an analysis of one such interpretation, that of the Abbé Dubos in the *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719). Dubos, Law recalls, understands dance steps to be distinct from signs. Yet Dubos’s *Réflexions critiques* neglect the fairground performances that proved to be such a fruitful source of inspiration for theatrical reform in the French high theaters; Dubos’s understanding is inattentive to what Law refers to as “the possibilities of nesting: a play called a pantomime might include dance steps and, conversely, a dance might include signs abundant in pantomime” (p. 22). Early on, Law challenges the idea that dance steps cannot function as signs, providing a logic that underpins the book as a whole.

The first chapter opens with an anecdotal discussion of a staged conflict between pantomime and the *belle danse* in the *pastorale-héroïque Isbé* (1742) by Henri-François, marquis de La Rivière and Jean-Joseph de Mondonville. *Isbé's* prologue is set in the Tuileries gardens and references Servandoni's spectacles performed in the Salle des machines between 1738 and 1742. In *Isbé*, using the already extant tensions between French and Italian music, a nymph named "Fashion (*La Mode*)" enters to an "Italianate" prelude which is followed by an "unconventional dance called 'pantomime'" performed by Fashion's followers the Pantomimes. The character "Amour," however, prefers the dances of her own followers, the *jeux* and *plaisirs*, who performed *belle danse*, referred to as "sweet" rather than "bizarre" (p. 12). This interpretation of the stakes of the debates opposing pantomime to the *belle danse* did not match that of contemporary spectators; on the contrary, Servandoni's performances were tremendously popular, as were other performances featuring pantomimes. Here, Law emphasizes that the misrepresentation of the relationship between the two forms is not significant. Rather, it is significant that pantomime had reached a new cultural prominence and visibility, appearing ad hoc within operatic performances.

Jean Philippe Rameau's score for Voltaire's comédie-ballet *La Princesse de Navarre* (1745) is here given as an example; from this point forward, the chapter primarily focuses on Rameau's compositions. Returning to thematic ideas of liberty and melding them with compositional ones, the chapter recounts how Rameau took compositional liberties in his reversal of the meaning of Voltaire's text in the Act one, Scene six duet, substituting the word "rare" for "sweet" in reference to happy marriage. This, the author connects to the concept of liberty through the idea that Rameau believes that "a happy relationship prevents a sense of entrapment," rather than Voltaire's understanding of marriage as a form of slavery (p. 32). With *Platée* (1745), Rameau, perhaps influenced by Mondonville's innovations in *Isbé*, created a prologue marked by thematic density that mimics the density of pantomime itself. Law argues here that Rameau's music, unlike that of his contemporaries, "consists of signs" (p. 54), and that this music influenced future composers' approaches to pantomime, including those of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Shifting toward the consideration of spectatorship, the second chapter focuses on the two versions of Rousseau's *Devin du village* (1752) in conversation with his *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750). Law explains that her argument is built on the "development of [Rousseau's] thinking" that ultimately led him to "use [...] the art of pantomime to impart a moralizing message" (p. 57). In his opera *La Découverte du nouveau monde* (1741), a tragedy based on the life of Christopher Columbus, Rousseau had used *la belle danse* to represent western civilization, yet unlike Rameau, he did not oppose the *belle danse* to pantomime. By 1745, Rousseau had separated language from action. "This duality," Law writes, "provides a conceptual axis for Rousseau's *Le Devin du village*" (p. 64). Following from Condillac, Rousseau used dance as a form of action language (in addition to using it as dance *tout court*). Such an approach also emphasized viewers' agency as spectators, allowing them interpretational liberty. This approach not only left open the interpretation of signs but acknowledged that each spectator also had the potential to read different actions as signs, leaving much to the viewers' imagination.

The third chapter addresses Christophe Willibald Gluck's operas and the pantomimes contained therein. Gluck, Law argues, tightened the dramatic relationship between ballet, pantomime, and drama in his operas, but also strengthened the connections between vocal and bodily forms of communication. Introducing François-Louis Gand Le Bland Du Roullet's, *Lettre sur les drames-opéras* (1776), which criticized Lully and Quinault's use of dance on inaccurate grounds, the author recounts debates around pantomime that came to a head in Paris in the late 1770s. In

Gluck's operas, the body became a "legible text" that had potential to communicate "psychosomatic complexities" beyond what was possible with words (p. 133).

In the fourth chapter, Law takes on freedom of motion and action. Citing Noverre's *Apelles et Campaspe, ou la générosité d'Alexandre* (1776), she underscores Campaspe's active seeking out of liberty in the ballet's scenario. Yet the chapter takes a particularly interesting turn in its presentation of an anecdote around Haydn's "Farewell" Symphony. In the April 13, 1784, performance she describes, the last performance of the Concert Spirituel in the Salle des Cent-Suisses, conductor Joseph Legros had choreographed a dramatic ending in which the majority of the musicians left the stage prior to the end of the symphony. However, this performance was interestingly referred to by Pierre-Jean-Baptiste Nougaret as a "pantomime" (p. 143). Taking on this connection between motion, agency, and pantomime, the remainder of the chapter examines four versions of *Ipermestra*, each of which takes a different approach to the representation of humanity that intersects with understandings of liberty. One particularly intriguing example comes from Maximilien Gardel's choreography for Antonio Salieri, Louis-Théodore de Tschudi, and Du Roullet's opera. "Gardel mixed up thirty-two dancers—sixteen brothers and another sixteen Danaïdes—of different ranks. These de-hierarchized dancers do not signal equality or a group identity; rather, they represent the Danaïdes's lack of agency and their homogeneity" (p. 164). Although Law does not articulate it quite this way, she alludes to the fact that their subhuman state—one might here also consider these dancers' lack of voice—further complicates dichotomies around the specific expressive potentials of pantomime and dance.

The fifth and final chapter focuses on Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais and Salieri's opera *Tarare* (1787). Considering the concept of reversal in broad terms, Law links Nougaret's pamphlet about pantomime with Beaumarchais' ideas around natural rights, arguing that if a genre like pantomime could be elevated to literary status, then so too could "a person of low social status [...] step up the social ladder" (p. 183). Contextualizing *Tarare*, Law considers several works from the first decades of the eighteenth century that depicted primordial chaos and were regularly restaged in the 1760s and 1770s. These earlier works, each framed with a prologue and epilogue, and familiar because of their place in the contemporary repertoire, provided structural inspiration for the framing of the orientalist opera *Tarare* with "a non-ethnic specific, universalist prologue-epilogue pair" (p. 210). In this frame plot, the character Nature debates with Fire about language, making the same distinction made by Dubos around natural signs and those of convention. By asking dancers to move "like atoms" in *Tarare*, Beaumarchais and Salieri arguably adopted a view of pantomime that moved beyond the expressive potential of a sign-based system (p. 190).

Ultimately, Law concludes that composers' examination of gesture profoundly influenced the musical repertory of the second half of the eighteenth century, in turn providing space for actors, dancers, singers, and musicians to engage in corporeal expression that was directly tied to structures of narrative or meaning. These experiments are significant in part, she argues, because they were invested in freedom of communication but came about prior to the emergence of a concept of freedom of communication.

*Music, Pantomime and Freedom in Enlightenment France* admirably blends Enlightenment cultural history, historical musicology, and dance studies. Nevertheless, a few factual errors distract from its overall argument, including the identification of doctor and antiquarian scholar Pierre-Jean Burette as a ballet master and the assertion that Jean-Georges Noverre made revisions to the

1774 Neapolitan staging of his ballet *Ipermestra*, when in fact it was his student Charles LePiq who set and performed the ballet during a long, productive period at the San Carlo in the 1770s and 80s.[1] Likewise, Marmontel is a key figure for Law, but some writings that are described as presenting ideas that were “new in 1787” (p. 142) had already been published in 1782 in Charles-Joseph Panckoucke’s *Encyclopédie méthodique* and then circulated in the *Journal encyclopédique* the following year.

Overall, however, the book provides a thought-provoking approach to eighteenth-century pantomime and music that will enrich future studies of ballet, mime, theater, and opera, nuanced in its emphasis on the interwoven nature of many eighteenth-century performance genres and its attempts to document the embodied nature of performance practices of the past.

## NOTES

[1] See chapters seven and eight, Anthony R. DelDonna, *Opera, Theatrical Culture and Society in Late Eighteenth-Century Naples* (Farnham: Ashgate Press, 2012) and Olivia Sabee, “Charles LePiq and the Neapolitan Ballet d’Action,” in Arianna Beatrice Fabbriatore, ed., *Il virtuoso grottesco. Gennaro Magri Napoletano* (Rome: Aracne, 2020), pp. 109–18.

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