THE BALLET COLLABORATIONS OF RICHARD STRAUSS

WAYNE HEISLER JR.

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WAYNE HEISLER JR.
MARCH 2009

Introduction

Richard Strauss, Dance, and Ballet

> With Strauss there is no second tier, only first tier—or works of negligible worth (zweiten Rang gibt es bei ihm nicht, nur ersten—oder geringwertiges).
>
> —Richard Specht, *Richard Strauss und sein Werk* (1921)

> In taking leave of [Strauss] I suggest that he should come with us to the Ball at the Ecole Normale; he makes a face, and says that he prefers to go to the "Federball," to the feather ball, in other words his bed. "Nevertheless, you must be fond of dancing?"—"Me? Oh, of course."—And with his big, gawky body he essays an entrechat in the middle of the drawing room.
>
> —Romain Rolland, diary entry dated March 10, 1900

In a letter written on December 12, 1940 to Clemens Krauss, then the director of the Munich Opera, Richard Strauss located "the real essence of dance" in "freedom from the earth's gravity" (*Befreiung von der Erdenschwere*).[1] This statement was made during the creation of Strauss's final ballet, entitled *Verklungene Feste: Tanzvisionen aus Zwei Jahrhunderten* (Bygone Celebrations: Dance Visions from Two Centuries, 1941) in collaboration with Krauss and the dancer-choreographer team of Pia and Pino Mlakar. In *Verklungene Feste*, the history of dance is rendered by an allegory that focuses on the transitions from baroque courtly ritual through eighteenth-century pantomimic *ballet d'action* to a romantic "white ballet" (*ballet blanc*) *en pointe*. Strauss gave his description of dance as "freedom from the earth's gravity" in reference to the latter, nineteenth-century layer of *Verklungene Feste*, its climax: ballerinas clad in tutus and dancing on the tips of their toes, as if in flight. On one level, the composer was issuing an aesthetic valuation of romantic ballet as dance in its ideal manifestation—passé in the eyes of dance modernism but not necessarily so to ballet's audience base. Strauss's choice of words also carries a philosophical resonance, deriving predictably from Nietzsche: the belief in the potential of dance, a profoundly physical art form, to transcend (or at least seem to transcend) earthly, mortal conditions and limitations.

That Strauss regarded ballet in such terms—at once both physically and metaphysically liberating—is striking: he of the "gawky" entrechat is not readily thought of as a ballet composer, much less a balletomane. Be that as it may, the

little-known *Verklungene Feste* was the capstone of Strauss's lifelong engagement with dance, one that was sporadic and (characteristically) varied, to be sure, but nonetheless invested, even adoring. The purpose of this book is to explore Strauss's interest and involvement in ballet, which began in the 1890s, resurfaced in the 1910s, and reached an apex in the 1920s and 1930s. Ballet is, of course, a collaborative art form, and my focus is ultimately not on music as music, but rather on "ballet texts": ballet as the collaborative output of choreographers and dancers, scenarists, composers and musicians, set and costume designers, audiences, and critics, too, in specific historical and cultural contexts. My focus on Strauss and ballet would be incomplete, dishonest, and less interesting if it did not include the syntheses and tensions that fuel collective artistic creations. Therein the interrelationships between Strauss's ballet collaborations and his canonic compositions emerge, illuminating the role of ballet in his worldview.

As has long been recognized, dance and dance music crop up occasionally but meaningfully in Strauss's stage works:[2] an exoticized, debased waltz at the heart of the "Dance of the Seven Veils" in *Salome* (1905);[3] the symbolic and expressionist finale to *Elektra* (1909)—"Be silent and dance. . . . I lead you in the dance";[4] eighteenth-century dances in *Der Bürger als Edelmann* (1917); choreographed ice skating in *Intermezzo* (1924); and the obligatory bacchanale in *Daphne* (1938). Dance music *sans* choreography is also present across Strauss's oeuvre: waltzes in the "Viennese" *Rosenkavalier* (1911) and *Arabella* (1933); in the former we also hear the phantom of a rarefied siciliana during the Marschallin's resigned Act 1 monologue ("Time is a strange thing");[5] the sardonic waltz at the climax of Strauss's Nietzschean tone poem *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1896);[6] and the murkier *München: Ein Gelegenheitswalzer*, also known as *Ein Gedächtniswalzer* (1939/1945, respectively), completed in its final form after the city's near annihilation.[7] Though not central to this study of ballet and its related genres (for example, ballet-pantomime), Strauss's reliance on dance in his operatic and instrumental works informs and is informed by his ballet collaborations.

Most dance scholars and musicologists—Strauss specialists not excluded—would be hard pressed to say much beyond the pedigreed facts about the handful of ballets in which Strauss had a hand: that *Josephslegende* (The Legend of Joseph, 1914) was his only collaboration with Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes; that it was conceived for Vaslav Nijinsky, who was replaced by Michel Fokine and Léonide Massine as choreographer and dancer, respectively; and that it was relatively unsuccessful; or that the extravagant *Schlagobers* (Viennese dialect for Whipped Cream, 1924), choreographed by Heinrich Kröller, was an unequivocal failure owing to the post–World War I recession. The list of Strauss's rather obscure ballet collaborations grows when the dance performances for which he compiled and arranged music by other composers are taken into account. Beyond *Josephslegende* and *Schlagobers*, Strauss's only completed ballets with original scores, he was involved in an array of incomplete and seemingly minor projects

that rarely garner attention, including *Die Insel Kythere* (The Isle of Cythera, unfinished, 1900); the Vienna Ballet's 1923 *Ballettsoirée*, also choreographed by Kröller; and the above-mentioned *Verklungene Feste* of 1941.

Although much attention has been directed toward the relationship between language and music in Strauss's compositions, dance has inspired relatively little discussion, and ballet specifically even less. Despite the resurgence of interest in Strauss's ballets in German musicological scholarship and dance studies over the last two decades, ballet as genre and signifier has been treated as a novelty, when not ignored altogether, in relation to Strauss's operas and symphonic works. The posthumous near disappearance of Strauss's ballet collaborations conforms to long-standing tendencies in academic writing about Western art music. Reflecting on the status of dance in musicology, Marian Smith asserted, "Many of the composers revered by our discipline . . . would surely be surprised to find out that dance—both theatrical and social—lies hidden from the purview of so many professional music scholars." As a musicologist who specializes in dance studies, Smith went on to query rhetorically,

> Of the composers in the musicological canon, how many lived in a world without dance? Certainly not Verdi, Brahms, Schubert, Ellington, Stravinsky, Monteverdi, Bartók, Mozart, Haydn, Liszt, Wagner, Telemann, and Beethoven (to name a few). They saw plenty of it, and they wrote plenty of dance music, some of it titled as such; some of them even danced themselves, or tried to.[8]

The marginality of dance and dance music in musicology is attributable to a host of well-rehearsed issues that do not require much elaboration here. They include, but are not limited to the mind-body split in Western philosophy and metaphysics; the valuation of instrumental, "absolute" music at the foundation of music history over programmatic, vocal, operatic, and dance scores (opera has caught up with symphonies, quartets, and the like, but its long-time partner ballet remains a wallflower); the high degree of specialization required for the study of music on the one hand and dance on the other (for dancers as well as dance scholars, who, however, often are or have been active practitioners); and the ephemerality of ballet and dance: dance "works" are tied to performance, an ontological condition that dance shares with music, lest we forget that our trusty, printed scores are distinct from the true *Ding an sich*.

Richard Strauss is yet another composer who fits Smith's litany of those with dance on their radars. As far as Strauss is concerned, the above reasons for the general neglect of dance in music study are augmented by several circumstances that apply specifically to him and his ballet collaborations. The Strauss of the 1910s forward was, and still is in many circles, viewed as something of a has-been. Written in 1924, Walter Schrenk's durable assessment of this composer was already a cliché: "With *Ariadne* Strauss reached the peak of his creations and—surpassed it. What has followed is—all zealous protests of stalwart apostles of Strauss

will not change this—second-rate music, music of routine and technical skill, and not music of the heart."[9] Despite the challenges that Strauss scholarship has posed to this view of his last three decades as mediocre note spinning, Strauss's ballets, the completed ones of which all followed *Ariadne* in its earliest form chronologically, have barely climbed from the bottom of the heap.[10] Another justification for downplaying Strauss's engagement with ballet is the widely accepted notion that ballet is, in Norman Del Mar's words, "a medium which did not particularly suit [Strauss's] natural style."[11] By this I assume the writer was referring to the set-piece form of classical dance scores. Thus, in true teleological fashion, the allegedly low aesthetic value of Strauss's ballet music justifies its obscurity, which perpetuates continued indifference.

It has been posited also that Strauss had little ambition for ballet (owing to the self-knowledge that it was not in keeping with his "natural style"?) and needed his collaborators to spur him on in order to compose for dance.[12] That Strauss required a certain amount of pressure at critical stages in the creation of *Josephslegende* is well known, but owing, I argue, to definite convictions about ballet rather than ambivalence or antagonism toward it. Moreover, Strauss regularly initiated ballet projects or actively pursued them (in the 1890s, for instance), penned or contributed to dance scenarios in consultation with choreographers prior to and while composing (*Josephslegende*, *Schlagobers*, and *Verklungene Feste*), and organized performances of dance with his music and music by other composers (the *Ballettsoirée* and a series of other ballets performed by the Vienna Ballet while Strauss was codirector of Vienna's Staatsoper in the early 1920s). Two anecdotes help us infer further that Strauss's contemporaries regarded him as at least a part-time ballet composer, and that he thought of himself as one. While carousing after hours in a Paris salon with Josephine Baker in the mid-1920s, Harry Graf Kessler and Max Reinhardt cooked up a plan for a "jazz ballet" starring the famous American dancer-singer. Their unanimous first choice for its composer was Strauss.[13] And on the occasion of a Richard-Strauss-Woche in Zurich in June of 1936, the composer did not choose to have his perennially popular *Rosenkavalier* performed. Instead, he successfully advocated programming newly choreographed versions of such well-known dance pieces of the time (in German-speaking Europe at least) as *Josephslegende* and the *Couperin-Suite* (from the first tableau of the *Ballettsoirée*), as well as the choreography of his tone poem *Till Eulenspiegel*, recognized in dance circles since Nijinsky's 1916 choreography to it on the Ballets Russes' American tour.[14]

To describe this book as revisionist would be too bold, I think, and not very attractive. I could not and do not argue that ballet was a constant preoccupation for Strauss, or that it exceeded or even approached his dedication to opera. Strauss ran hot and cold when it came to ballet, more or less intensely depending on the circumstances and resources at hand (hot in the 1920s with Kröller in Vienna, cold in the late 1930s with Joseph Gregor tirelessly sending him ballet drafts). Revisionism in Strauss scholarship over the past two decades has cen-

tered on uncovering its modernist (and anticipatory postmodern) strategies with the implicit goal of rehabilitation, particularly of his post-*Rosenkavalier* music in the context of the Second Viennese School on the one hand and Stravinskian neoclassicism on the other.[15] Although trumpet calls to wrest Strauss's legacy from the progressive/reactionary dichotomy of modernism have ventured to escape from such dead ends, they often convert the "bad" into "good," carving a space out for Strauss in the progressive column rather than obviating such tallying altogether. I have consciously avoided the totalizing tendencies of both the traditional and more recent "alternative modernist" paradigms for Strauss because what I find to be most provocative and significant is the way in which this composer's involvement with ballet heightens the ambiguity of his relationship to artistic currents of his time, both reactionary and progressive.[16] Whereas the music of a Schoenberg or a Stravinsky arguably has lost a bit of its unruly punch over time, Strauss seems muddled and uncontainable and continues to ruffle feathers. Put another way: clear-cut modernism can be a bore. Strauss epitomizes the true messiness of the twentieth century.

Still, although this study is not a rescue mission, it has benefited from previous revisionism. More accurately, it is comfortably postrevisionist in that Strauss's obscure ballet collaborations emerge as an important and surprisingly coherent subcategory of his creations for the stage, reflecting and informing the better-known ones. (At times, this coherence lies in their shared multifaceted and contradictory castes.) Perhaps the principle value of this book is the way in which Strauss's ballet collaborations (again, "ballet texts" in the sense outlined above) demand an inherently pan-disciplinary approach: the synthesis of published Strauss literature and materials (scores, audio and video recordings, correspondence, criticism, and research) with unpublished and/or largely unexplored sources (scores and sketches, scenarios, production materials and *mise-en-scène* design, choreography gleaned from choreographers' and dancers' notes, scene and costume designs, reviews, and, if available, dance notation) in the wider context of music history and dance studies. (Dance studies have always been pan-disciplinary in their reliance on perspectives from musicology, art history, women's and gender studies, performance studies, history, philosophy, cultural and theater studies, and so on.) At very least, this study tills new terrain for Strauss scholarship and offers perspectives that give nuance to the popular, critical, and academic reception of his relationship to modernism in music and dance. And I hope that in its brightest moments, this book reaches beyond the world of this composer by revealing new avenues for the growing field of dance-musicology.

This book is divided into two broad sections: "Becoming a Ballet Composer, 1895–1914" and "'To drive away all cloudy thoughts,' 1919–1941." In general, my research concentrated on the genesis, premiere performances, and initial reception of Strauss's ballet collaborations. Each chapter includes a number of figures and music examples; I have given preference to previously unpublished or nar-

rowly circulated images.[17] Because they span nearly a half century, the ballets in each of the five chapters are treated in individual essays so as to flesh out unique musical, choreographic, theatrical, historical, and cultural contexts: the world of *Josephslegende* in 1914 Paris was quite distinct from that of *Verklungene Feste* in Munich in 1941. Still, an overarching narrative underlies Strauss's ballet collaborations, which chronicle a gradual transformation from his modern-leaning, parodic conception of classical dance in the years leading up to World War I to a belated obsession with romantic-era ballet during World War II.

Strauss's interest in collaborating on ballet productions arose before and developed in tandem with his becoming established as a composer for the stage in the first decade of the twentieth century. In the first part of this book, my focus is on Strauss's earliest confrontations with ballet around 1895, eventually leading to the Ballets Russes' premiere of *Josephslegende* on the eve of World War I. In chapter 1, "Strauss en route to *Die Insel Kythere* (The Isle of Cythera, 1900)," I survey the series of long-forgotten ballets by early modernist writers for whom Strauss considered (and in some cases began) composing music in the years approaching the *fin de siècle*, including Otto Julius Bierbaum, Frank Wedekind, Richard Dehmel, Paul Scheerbart, and Hugo von Hofmannsthal. Culminating in the unfinished *Kythere*, which was inspired by French rococo paintings Strauss saw at the Louvre (by Jean-Antoine Watteau, most prominently), and for which the composer himself drafted a scenario and precious few musical fragments, these ballets and written correspondence concerning them show that Strauss and his contemporaries shared the widespread view of ballet as an ossified and outmoded tradition, one that was therefore ripe for making a statement about art in the modern world. Consistent with *fin-de-siècle* sensibilities, particularly Jugendstil, these ballets by Bierbaum, Wedekind, Dehmel, Scheerbart, Hofmannsthal, and Strauss foreground the ornamental and symbolic aspects of dance. They also imply a departure from romantic metaphysics, thus paralleling aesthetically and philosophically other parodic works in Strauss's oeuvre, for example, the *Burleske* (1886) for piano and orchestra, *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche* (1895), *Don Quixote* (1897), and the early opera *Feuersnot* (Fire Famine, 1901).[18]

Musically, however, the sketches for the ballets Strauss considered in the 1890s show a stylistic turn toward the eighteenth century, a turn that is arguably related to the decorative abstraction of Jugendstil.[19] For Strauss, dance was bound up with retrospectivism and the parodic or sardonic effect that quotation and/or stylization can imply. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, flights to the preromantic era commonly provided "sharpedged tools," to use Michael Tilmouth's words, in the service of overturning "the inflated idioms of late Romanticism."[20] I suggest that through his attempts at creating ballets such as *Kythere* in the 1890s, Strauss participated obliquely in the earliest phases of neoclassicism in music, its beginnings spawned by antiromantic, anti-Wagner, and (by association) anti-German sentiments in France at the end of the nineteenth century (including, significantly, a concomitant Watteau craze). Moreover, I

argue that Strauss's balletic ambitions around the *fin de siècle* foreshadowed and informed his predilection for parody during the years surrounding World War I, as he described in the oft-quoted letter he wrote to Hofmannsthal while revising *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912, rev. 1916):

> When you've heard the new Vorspiel [to *Ariadne*], . . . you'll understand what I mean and will realize that I have a definite talent for operetta. And since my tragic vein is more or less exhausted, and since tragedy in the theatre, after this war, strikes me at present as something rather idiotic and childish, I should like to apply this irrepressible talent of mine—after all, I'm the only composer nowadays with some real humour and a sense of fun and a marked gift for parody. Indeed, I feel downright called upon to become the Offenbach of the 20th century, and you will and must be my poet. Offenbach's *Helena* and *Orpheus* have reduced the ridiculousness of "grand opera" *ad absurdum*. What I have in mind with my impromptu suggestions, which you resent so much, is a political-satirical parody of the most trenchant kind. . . . Our road starts with *Rosenkavalier*: its success is evidence enough, and it is also this genre (sentimentality and parody are the sensations to which my talent responds most forcefully and productively) that I happen to be keenest on. . . . What *Rosenkavalier* lacks in compactness you have learned in the meantime . . . and what it lacks in lightness I have learned in *Ariadne*. Long live the political-satirical-parodistic operetta![21]

Strauss identified Offenbach's irreverent stage works as models for *Ariadne* and *Rosenkavalier*. But what exactly did he mean by "parody"? On the one hand, he used the term *parody* in the same breath as "humour and a sense of fun," identifying it as a means of exposing the "ridiculousness of 'grand opera,'" for instance. But although parody in this sense might seem synonymous with slapstick, Strauss's impulse was not motivated by or limited to the goals of low comedy. Rather, his modification of the term *parody* with "political-satirical" denotes a mordant critique aimed beyond the proscenium arch.

It seems appropriate to view the scenarios and musical sketches that involved Strauss in the 1890s as seeds for a gestating aesthetic-philosophical-political worldview rather than blueprints for particular performances. Indeed, the connection between acerbic parody, retrospectivism, and dance raises questions about Strauss's later ballet collaborations, in which he occasionally invoked themes and music he had originally envisioned for *Kythere*. Following the completion of the first version of *Ariadne* in 1912 and overlapping with revisions to it, Strauss began composing *Josephslegende*, his sole collaboration with Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, based on Count Harry Kessler and Hofmannsthal's adaptation of the Old Testament narrative. In chapter 2, "*Josephslegende* (The Legend of Joseph, 1914), Léonide Massine, and the Music Box Dancer," I revisit the troubled collaborative process behind this ballet-pantomime, which is a case study for the richness and pitfalls of collective creation. It is well known in the Strauss

literature that the composer objected to the religiosity of Joseph and that he returned (covertly) to his earlier *Kythere* sketches for Joseph's solo dances, which Hofmannsthal and Kessler imagined to symbolize transcendence. But the effect of Joseph's pastoral-rococo music in tandem with Fokine's choreography and Massine's performance in the title role (Nijinsky's contract was terminated in the midst of *Josephslegende*'s creation) invites speculation as to whether Strauss was efficiently conforming to his collaborators' vision of Joseph or blatantly disregarding it. Or did the composer go beyond disregarding and engage more deliberately with Kessler's and Hofmannsthal's shepherd boy by forging an ironic critique of dance metaphysics from the remnants of *Kythere*? The ambiguity of *Josephslegende* confounds a reading of it as parody in Umberto Eco's sense of a "subtler alternative to the more common, revolutionary ardor of the avant-garde"[22] and also raises the issue of self-parody. Strauss's own words speak volumes: again, "sentimentality *and* parody are the sensations to which my talent responds most forcefully and productively" (my italics). This begs the question of how—and *if*—he was able to differentiate between the two. (And how might *we* do so?)

In the second half of this book, I examine Strauss's remaining ballet collaborations against the backdrop of his aesthetic and personal crises following World War I and during World War II. The setting of chapters 3 and 4 is the composer's five-year tenure (1919–24) as codirector of Vienna's Staatsoper, where one of his goals was the "reform and modernization" of the ballet.[23] To this end, Strauss recruited Heinrich Kröller to the Austrian capital, where the dancer-choreographer mounted a series of ballets with music chosen, supervised, arranged, and/or composed by Strauss. The focus of chapter 3, "The Strauss–Heinrich Kröller *Ballettsoirée* (1923) and Interwar Viennese Cultural Politics," is their first intimate (and underexplored) collaboration, featuring over the course of four tableaux Strauss's orchestral arrangements of select pieces from François Couperin's *Pièces de clavecin*, as well as music under Strauss's supervision by Maurice Ravel, Jean-Philippe Rameau, and Johann Strauss Jr. I demonstrate that the 1923 *Ballettsoirée*, a celebrated, evening-length showcase of the Vienna Opera Ballet's dancers and workshop, was forged as propaganda to put Vienna back on the map of European culture by defining the city's future through its cosmopolitan past (in terms that were, however, fatefully nostalgic). In chapter 4, "Kitsch and *Schlagobers* (Whipped Cream, 1924)," then, I explore the ways in which cultural-political tensions in interwar Vienna were intensified through Strauss's next ballet, also choreographed by Kröller but with newly composed music. As he had done with *Kythere*, Strauss himself penned the *Schlagobers* scenario, in which a proletariat of pastries attempts to overthrow the ruling-class confections in a Konditorei—a revolution that is thwarted. In deeming its political subject matter and overly symphonic music inappropriate for ballet, critics revisited the long-standing theme of Strauss, kitsch, and cultural degeneration. My discussion adds insight to accepted wisdom about *Schlagobers* through a detailed consideration of

its choreography, staging, and reception. The self-affirming *Ballettsoirée* notwithstanding, Strauss's position in Vienna had always been tenuous, and *Schlagobers* tipped the scales that led to the end of his contract at the Staatsoper.

During the 1930s Strauss continued to pursue ballet projects, none of which came to fruition due to his inability to find a suitable collaborator or subject—also reflected in his operatic troubles during that decade—as well as the impoverished artistic climate of Nazi Germany. I survey these aborted ballets as well as his final, completed collaboration in chapter 5, "Verstrausster Couperin, Verklingender Strauss, *Verklungene Feste: Tanzvisionen aus Zwei Jahrhunderten* (Bygone Celebrations: Dance Visions from Two Centuries, 1941)." *Verklungene Feste* was an expanded version of the 1923 *Ballettsoirée*'s Couperin tableau, now incorporating additional arrangements of Couperin's *Pièces* and dances originally notated by Raoul Auger Feuillet (1700), reimagined by the dancer-choreographer team of Pia and Pino Mlakar. As detailed at the beginning of this introduction, Strauss along with Clemens Krauss and the Mlakars ventured an allegorical history of dance in *Verklungene Feste*—roughly equivalent to the opera-as-opera history in Strauss's final opera *Capriccio* (1942)—by staging the transition from baroque courtly spectacle to *ballet d'action* and, ultimately, romantic ballet. In light of the political and cultural tumult of the last decade of his life, Strauss came to view this latter style of dance as an escape and even as transcendent—"freedom from the earth's gravity," literally and figuratively. But rather than reversing a ballet aesthetic that had been a work in progress since *Kythere*, *Verklungene Feste* emerges as Strauss's autumnal meditation on composing, music arranging, pastiche, and the conceit of dance and music as transcendent art forms. Framed in the narrative as a hallucination, *Verklungene Feste* stands for Strauss's resignation to the ephemeral beauty of music and bodily movement—the creations of other artists as well as his own, both historic and modern.

Part One

Becoming a Ballet Composer, 1895–1914

Chapter One

Strauss en route to Die Insel Kythere *(The Isle of Cythera, 1900)*

> [Strauss] says he has only composed some small things since last year. He says, smiling as he does so, that he thinks he is suffering from senile decay.—He wants to write a ballet.
>
> —Romain Rolland, diary, March 1, 1900

In 1959, the musicologist Willi Schuh published Richard Strauss's scenario and fragmentary musical sketches for *Die Insel Kythere* (The Isle of Cythera).[1] The inspiration for this unfinished ballet occurred during the composer's trip in early 1900 to Paris to conduct two concerts. While in the French capital, Strauss also visited its cultural landmarks, including the Louvre, where he took interest in the French rococo, especially canvases by Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684–1721).[2] As he had done for his only complete opera to date, *Guntram* (1894), Strauss himself drafted the three-act libretto to *Die Insel Kythere*, which remains obscure despite its posthumous publication.

As the curtain opens on *Kythere*'s first act, labeled "Watteau," the peasant residents of the island return from a day of working in the fields. Supplementing the act heading "Watteau," Strauss noted "Teniers" in the margin of this scene, referring to one of the painters from the family of seventeenth-century Flemish artists. Thus, the Cythera peasants' happy-hour dancing was modeled on an image such as *Fête villageoise avec couple aristocratique* (Rural Festival with Aristocratic Couple, 1652)—albeit without the aristocracy at this point in Strauss's narrative—by David Teniers the Younger (a.k.a. David Teniers II, 1610–90), part of the Louvre's collection since 1794 (see figure 1.1). The native islanders depart. In the background a ship docks, and a company of nobles disembarks. The Teniers-inspired scene changes to an imitation of Watteau's *Pélerinage à l'île de Cythère* (Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera, 1717), one of the above-mentioned paintings that stirred Strauss at the Louvre. On the heels of the nobles a second ship arrives, carrying children, servants, *commedia dell'arte* players and musicians. The scene gradually transforms again to evoke Watteau's slightly later, embellished version of *Cythère* (1718–19), now housed in Berlin's Charlottenburg Palace (see figure 1.2).[3] In the margins of this scene, Strauss made reference to

Figure 1.1. David Teniers the Younger. *Fête villageoise avec couple aristocratique* (Rural Festival with Aristocratic Couple), 1652. Louvre, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, New York.

two other canvases by Watteau: *Mezzetin* (ca. 1718–20) and *La danse (Iris)* (ca. 1719) as models for the *Spielmann* (the principal musician) and Iris, respectively, who are both part of the comedians' entourage in *Kythere*. Three noble couples (a duchess and Marquis Y., a countess and Prince Z., and a baroness and Chevalier X.) perform a divertissement, followed by an *Affenballet* (monkey ballet)—a dance of war with young boys disguised as monkeys in military uniforms. Suddenly, Pierrot Gilles and Harlequin, two of the comedians who are now costumed as Adonis and Anteros respectively, interrupt the troupe to call for the night's entertainment to begin.

With that, a further layer of the performance emerges in *Kythere*'s second act, labeled "Boucher," as in the painter François Boucher (1703–70). The nobles and *commedia dell'arte* figures disguise themselves and assume roles in "Der Triumph Amors" (Amor's Triumph). This ballet-within-a-ballet involves the plotting of Amor (Iris in disguise) and Anteros (Harlequin) to unite three pairs of lovers: Diana and Endymion (Columbine and Marquis Y.), Flora and Zephir (the countess and Prince Z.), and Venus and Adonis (the baroness and Pierrot). Despite complications—Diana's attempts to resist Amor's arrows,

Figure 1.2. Jean-Antoine Watteau. *Pélerinage à l'île de Cythère* (Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera), 1718–19. Charlottenburg Palace, Berlin. Photo: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, New York.

Zephir's infidelities with Flora's bacchantes, and the arrival of Venus's husband Vulcan (Chevalier X.)—true love prevails and Amor consecrates the closing spectacle by inscribing "Kythere" in the air with his torch. Here we should note that although Strauss did not specify particular canvases by Boucher for Act 2, several were already in the Louvre's collection as of 1900 that could have informed the composer's choice of mythological characters and the *fête galante* atmosphere.[4]

Act 3—"Fragonard" generically, after the artist Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806)—takes place the morning after Amor's triumph. At the nobles' breakfast *en plein air*, the worlds of the pilgrims and the native inhabitants of Cythera collide. As the peasants happen on the scene, both they and the pilgrims are disoriented by what they encounter. From the perspective of the peasants and the pilgrims alike, the "real," (overly) idyllic landscape has been made strange, brimming as it is with uninvited guests. Despite this initial culture shock, the peasants and pilgrims come together for music and dancing, including a burlesque performance by Oriental servants followed by a mock round dance by the duchess, the countess, and the baroness, all costumed as farm maidens who dance with the peasant men. All fun aside, jealousies quickly arise between two pairs: a betrothed shepherd couple (Lisette and Pierre) and Pierrot and

Columbine. Has Pierrot forgotten that Columbine was merely role playing with the marquis (as Diana and Endymion)? Does Pierre really believe that the countess's advances will amount to anything? When Pierre gets too fresh, the countess punches him. He (over)reacts by stabbing her with his pocketknife—an incident that sparks a battle. Once the frightened nobles escape to their ship and sail away, the scene transforms back to the rustic status quo, and life as they knew it is restored to the natives of Cythera.

To elucidate *Die Insel Kythere*'s scenario and musical snippets, which the composer set to paper between May and September 1900, Schuh penned a commentary and identified music from *Kythere*'s leftovers in Strauss's subsequent compositions, including *Feuersnot* (1901), *Der Rosenkavalier* (1910), *Der Bürger als Edelmann* (1912, rev. 1917), *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912, rev. 1916), and *Josephslegende* (1914).[5] Schuh reasoned that "because the best of [the music in] the sketches for *Kythere* was taken up in other works, the abandonment of the ballet plans that were important for Strauss's development at least does not signify a serious loss."[6] This conclusion rests in part on the notion that ballet was a transient and marginal endeavor for the composer—a common assumption, as we have seen. But if incompleteness is a criterion for lack of interest, we would have to question Strauss's commitment to opera composition in the 1890s, too, given his frustrated attempts up to this point, including the failure of *Guntram* and a handful of unrealized plans for the opera stage.[7] The earnest investments that Strauss made in ballet, however erratic, will become clear in the chapters that follow. For the present one, I am interested not only in the legacy of *Kythere* but also in its prehistory.

In addition to tone poems, numerous songs, and nearly perennial operatic musings, several dance scenarios passed over Strauss's desk (or may have done so) in the years leading up to *Kythere*. Here, a brief survey of this composer's encounters with ballet in the 1890s is in order. As early as spring 1895, the *litterateur* Otto Julius Bierbaum had his sights set on Strauss to compose the music for his ballet scenario *Pan im Busch* (Pan in the Rose Bush). However, whether or not this plan was presented formally to Strauss at that time remains unclear; in the end, Felix Mottl created a score for *Pan*, which had its premiere in Karlsruhe on March 20, 1900.[8] Bierbaum was not the only writer who desired to collaborate with Strauss on a ballet during the 1890s. In February 1896, Frank Wedekind wrote to the composer proposing a ballet entitled *Die Flöhe oder Der Schmerzenstanz* (The Fleas, or The Dance of Pain), a text that had been in the works for several years. Although Strauss apparently took this prospect seriously (Schuh reports that the composer even began sketching music for it), he abandoned *Die Flöhe* shortly thereafter.[9] Next, in March 1898, the writer Richard Dehmel offered Strauss *Lucifer*. From Dehmel's surviving correspondence with the composer, the latter seems to have found the scenario promising.[10] Strauss may even have begun one short musical sketch for *Lucifer*: on page 68 of the composer's Sketchbook No. 7 (ca. 1900–1), there is a passage labeled "Ballet. Solo mit Chor. II. Akt

Schluss" (Ballet. Soloist with choir. Act Two finale). The music, in C major and $\frac{6}{8}$ meter, is not fitted to any text, but Dehmel's project is the only one of the ballets that Strauss took into purview in the 1890s that employs choruses at the end of each of its seven acts. Nevertheless, like Wedekind's scenario before it, *Lucifer* languished after initial enthusiasm.

Aside from his own *Die Insel Kythere*, the ballet that seems to have piqued Strauss's interest most strongly in these years was Paul Scheerbart's *Kometentanz* (Dance of the Comets). On February 25, 1900, the composer reported to his parents, "The author Paul Scheerbart sent me a very pretty sketch for a one-act ballet: *Kometentanz, an astral pantomime*, which I will immediately set to music. Because one at least does not have to worry about singers and can storm about in the orchestra."[11] This is an interesting comment given Strauss's miserable operatic track record at the time. The composer also articulated his balletic intentions to Romain Rolland, who recorded an account of Scheerbart's scenario as narrated to him by Strauss in his diary entry for March 9, 1900—the day on which he and Strauss visited the Louvre together. Rolland also recorded that "the *maître de ballet* in Berlin has turned down [*Kometentanz*] 'as not serious!'"[12] In light of this information, it is a further testimony to Strauss's commitment to *Kometentanz* that he misrepresented (albeit lightheartedly) its fate in Berlin when pitching the ballet to Gustav Mahler, who was at the time director of the Vienna Court Opera:

> I am in the course of writing a one- or two-act burlesque ballet . . . —naturally something departing wholly from the accustomed hopping-about—by Paul Scheerbart. Would you accept the ballet for the Vienna Opera, have the first performance and use some nice scenery? On the strength of my honest face? If there is a chance of doing it anywhere else, I should prefer not to put on the first performance here in Berlin. It will be ready to be performed about autumn 1901.[13]

Mahler's answer followed promptly:

> Your ballet is accepted *in advance!*—If I seem to attach a condition, it is only an elaboration of my unconditional agreement: I must have a look at the scenario mainly on account of the *cost* of the scenery. Could you let me see it, and also allow our set designers, wardrobe master, etc. to make a very rough estimate? In a few days you will have my answer, which you can then take as a binding acceptance. . . . I regard it as a *matter of honour* for the Vienna Court Opera to have the première. That you will be pleased with the production I can *guarantee*![14]

Strauss appears to have taken the possibility of a Viennese premiere for his first-ever ballet quite seriously. In his Sketchbook No. 6 (ca. 1899–1911) there are approximately twenty-five pages of musical jottings for *Kometentanz* as indicated by textual cues, including: "with kind queries and bows to the king," the agent for

the dance performances in Scheerbart's scenario; "the poet," also a central character; and "nightingales and among them the contrasting music of the spheres," referring to the two principal acoustic motives that Scheerbart specified should recur throughout the ballet.[15] Where these sketches are identified, they seem to correspond mostly to act one of *Kometentanz*, and unfold in chronological order vis-à-vis the narrative. Strauss's music is, however, far from composed; it is no surprise, then, that in the extant correspondence between him and Mahler there is no further conversation about Scheerbart's ballet. Perhaps it did not meet Mahler's "condition," proving too expensive an undertaking for Vienna. At any rate, given the overlap of the dates of his communications with Mahler and his recent trip to Paris, it seems as if Strauss was well into the initial stages of the score for Scheerbart's scenario when it was gradually supplanted by his own *Kythere*.

Last, on the heels of the ballet scenarios by Bierbaum, Wedekind, Dehmel, and Scheerbart—and colliding with *Kythere*—Strauss received from Hugo von Hofmannsthal an offer for a ballet that the two had already discussed during the composer's recent trip to Paris. (Strauss and Hofmannsthal had actually become acquainted a year earlier, in 1899, at a gathering that included Dehmel, Scheerbart, and Count Harry Kessler.[16]) Hofmannsthal's libretto, entitled *Der Triumph der Zeit* (The Triumph of Time), was his first text written explicitly for music and inaugurated a long creative relationship with the composer. It also testified to the writer's growing attraction to gesture, pantomime, and dance in light of his *Sprachkrise* (crisis of language), articulated formally in the famous Lord Chandos letter of 1902. In correspondence with Hofmannsthal from November and December 1900, however, Strauss declined this ballet, citing the composition of *Die Insel Kythere* and also work on his second opera, *Feuersnot*. In the end, Alexander Zemlinsky created a score for *Der Triumph der Zeit*.[17]

Thus, in the 1890s Strauss stood on the threshold of becoming a ballet composer and thereby a collaborator on various ballet projects. What motivated Strauss to ponder branching out into ballet? Why did ballet spark his creative interests at that particular time? From the overview given above, it is obvious that Strauss did not expend equal effort in all of the ballet texts that he read and considered, or began sketching. Nor do I mean to imply that he directly modeled his own *Kythere* project on any one of them. Nevertheless, beyond their chronological proximity lie aesthetic, narrative, scenic, choreographic, and musical parallels (or at least a complementary *imagination* for music and dance), suggesting that Strauss and his contemporaries shared a vision of what ballet in the modern world could, and should, be.

In the remainder of this chapter, I first consider attitudes toward ballet evident in the scenarios by and communications between Strauss and Bierbaum, Wedekind, Dehmel, Scheerbart, and Hofmannsthal. In the climate of burgeoning modernism, ballet at the end of the nineteenth century was widely viewed as

a dying tradition; that is, as an art of the past. This situation made ballet ripe for rejuvenation; one might even say that ballet (and dance more generally) stood as a symbol for renewal per se across the cultural landscape. Following a discussion of the state of late-nineteenth-century ballet, I will explore how the artists under discussion here attempted to balance its pastness with its present and future.

To engage with ballet required knowledge of and a dialogue with history—something in which late romantics and early moderns alike were well versed, because historicist tendencies had gained momentum across the arts over the course of the nineteenth century. This phenomenon was, however, not monolithic. "The past" carried varied meanings for different people at different times, and was called on for diverse reasons. The nineteenth-century movement known as historicism, for example, incorporated a range of pasts, including antiquity, the Middle Ages, the baroque, and the Enlightenment. Historicism was manifested strongly in Western architecture, in which during the 1870s and 1880s, "the entire legacy of history served as a treasure trove for eclectics in search of styles appropriate to museums (Egyptian), theaters (Greek), and municipal or court churches (Gothic and Renaissance)."[18] One motivation behind this movement was the desire to infuse functionality with aesthetic value, a pursuit that was not wholly devoid of longing. *Historicist modernism*, on the other hand, is a term that has acquired currency when characterizing appeals to the past from the vantage point of the *fin de siècle*. Walter Frisch argued that in the music of Max Reger and Ferruccio Busoni, "techniques from the remote past are used prominently and vigorously as a way of achieving a distance from late Romantic styles." But rather than being triggered by nostalgia for preromantic music, historicist modernism "represents an attempt to bridge a historical gap without denying it, collapsing it, or retreating over it to return to the past."[19] In Reger's sole Piano Concerto (1910), for instance, Brahms and his first concerto for piano looms large, but not larger than J. S. Bach, from whom Reger mined several chorale melodies.[20] And then there is neoclassicism, that thorny, polyvalent term tagged to factions of the post–World War I avant-garde that had roots in France in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.[21] Often, neoclassicism in music has been characterized as looking back to the eighteenth century specifically. But a deeper difference between neoclassicism and historicist modernism was summarized by Frisch as follows: "Composers of historicist modernism . . . tend to take themselves seriously; they show little of the wit and detachment that we associate with the neoclassicism that emerged in the years just after World War I in composers like Stravinsky and Hindemith."[22] That the net of twentieth-century classicism extends beyond these two composers is obvious, thus making the alternative term *classicist modernism* somewhat more appealing. (*Klassizistische Moderne* should not be confused with the even more generic category *classical modernism*, commonly used in the visual and plastic arts for a host of artists from the teens through mid-century.) Under the rubric of classic*ist* modernism, select

works by composers as diverse as Alfredo Casella, Arthur Honegger, Kurt Weill, Béla Bartók, Carl Orff, Darius Milhaud, Manuel de Falla, Ernst Krenek, and even the serialism of Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School might be seen as evincing attributes of the past as a mode of modernity.[23]

Richard Strauss's engagement with the past—or pasts—is no less complex. To attempt a classification of just one of Strauss's retrospective projects, generally regarded as his definitive retreat into the past: is *Rosenkavalier* nostalgic, ironic, reverent, distanced, traditionalist, forward looking, or a muddle thereof?[24] Such conundrums must be faced head on in a consideration of Strauss as a ballet composer. Indeed, the fact that his ballet *Die Insel Kythere* was spurred on by an enchantment with Watteau demands our attention: the years around the *fin de siècle* witnessed the emergence of a cult of Watteau, especially on French soil, where the intersection of nationalism (read "anti-Germanism") and a concomitant fascination with the early eighteenth century (read "antiromanticism") secured for Watteau a zealous following.[25] In music, the late-nineteenth-century French penchant for Watteau and his time coincided chronologically and conceptually with the origins of neoclassicism. Strauss's fascination with Watteau, then, is remarkable: he was one of very few non-French composers representing the cult's musical manifestations, and his *Kythere* is, to my knowledge, the sole dance piece from this time inspired principally by Watteau.[26] The ironic twist here is that in the 1890s this German composer represented the very tradition that would spur on a neoclassicist backlash.

It is not my intention, nor would it be desirable, to affix a label such as "neoclassicist" or even "protoneoclassicist" to Richard Strauss. Indeed, it has been argued that Strauss enacted a fundamental *break* from history, specifically from the nineteenth-century concept of musical-historical "progress" that required deliberate building on the past. In the words of Michael Walter, *Rosenkavalier* is not a "copy of older styles, nor does it comment on older styles, but is rather a work that, in awareness of the availability of all musical means and styles, was composed beyond the bounds of their historical specificity."[27] Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that contrary to the stereotyped view of this composer, his simultaneous gaze "backward" and to the future was not suddenly manifest in *Rosenkavalier* as a sign of retreat from the avant-gardism of his preceding opera *Elektra* (1909). Rather, Strauss's earliest forays into remote pasts—namely, the world of the rococo and the French baroque—date to the 1890s during his quest to become a ballet composer, most notably when he was working on *Die Insel Kythere*. This circumstance falls neatly in line with the fact that during the latter half of the nineties Strauss became steeped in the philosophy of Nietzsche, who fueled the composer's antiromantic, antimetaphysical outlook. As I discussed in my introduction, it was not lost on Strauss that dance is a crucial motive in Nietzsche—dance as physicality, as metaphor, as symbol. Though not strictly neoclassicist, then, Strauss's attempts at ballet do show a composer adopting a stance that is commonly associated with neoclassicism: through ballet, he was looking for a

way out of the debris of romanticism, and in a manner that was rather cool, irreverent, even frivolous. To dance is to be free.

Not the least of ways in which ballet around the turn of the twentieth century partook of modernism was its collaborative disposition, through which ideas and strategies from across the arts meshed. Indeed, one calling card of early modernism in the last decades of the nineteenth century was the proliferation of convergences among literature, painting, music, and dance, and among artistic movements as well. In considering the vision of ballet that Strauss and his contemporaries shared, I will ultimately focus attention on one such movement: Jugendstil, the decorative style named after the Munich-based periodical *Jugend* (published 1896–1940). Originating in the nineteenth-century English Arts and Crafts movement, Jugendstil spread to continental Kunstgewerbe—arts and crafts, the applied arts—via architecture, interior design, painting, and poetry. Jugendstil was also contemporary with related but distinct movements in Belgium and France (art nouveau) and Austria (Wiener Sezessionismus).[28]

In writings on Jugendstil and music, Richard Strauss is commonly acknowledged as one of the composers who absorbed its style and aesthetic premises in the years around the turn of the twentieth century. (Others include Mahler, Debussy, Zemlinsky, Franz Schreker, and the Second Viennese School, particularly in its early years.) Strauss's connection to Jugendstil seems to be most legible in his Lied settings of poetry by writers associated with the movement; they include both Bierbaum and Dehmel, two of the composer's would-be ballet collaborators.[29] Because no single musical style can be termed "musical Jugendstil," the connection between this movement and select Lieder by Strauss is largely associative.[30] For Theodor W. Adorno, however, the link between Strauss and certain aspects of Jugendstil ran deeper. In his writings on the composer, Adorno used as a recurring motive the Jugendstil-related term *Kunstgewerbe* (again, arts and crafts). His category "musikalisches Kunstgewerbe" (musical Kunstgewerbe) was, of course, pejorative. On one level, it called attention to Strauss the technician, the composer as handyman whose compositions Adorno found superficial, to say the least. On another level, Adorno was targeting Strauss's tendency to draw on inherited stylistic and formal models for his musical materials, rather than from the music itself. Put another way: as "musikalisches Kunstgewerbe," Strauss's art lacked autonomy.[31]

Adorno's appropriation of the term *Kunstgewerbe* for music diverges in fundamental ways from its significance in relation to Jugendstil proper. As Karin Marsoner summarized, Jugendstil was concerned with the "reconciliation of art and life through the stylization and aestheticization of the everyday, *free from historical models*"—in opposition to Strauss's reliance on them, according to Adorno. Marsoner continued: "In contrast to the stylistic variety of nineteenth-century historicism, against which the [Jugendstil] movement was directed, Jugendstil was concerned with a unified, modern, and idealized style, through which everyday items and autonomous works of art were outwardly 'stylized' to become

decorative ornament."[32] Contra Adorno, Strauss's inability to muster up (or apathy toward?) autonomous music would also seem to suggest that a comparison between this composer and Jugendstil is inapt.

Nevertheless, bearing in mind the translation that occurs between such distinct media as symphonic scores and magazine illustrations, or poems and their musical settings, a shared territory between Jugendstil and Strauss becomes apparent: self-conscious stylization. Many Jugendstil artists had an affinity for both music and dance, owing to the abstractness and perceived potential for autonomy of these sister arts. (It is interesting that Adorno located "musikalisches Kunstgewerbe" not only throughout Strauss's oeuvre, but also in music as diverse as Stravinskian neoclassicism, Gebrauchsmusik, and "light music"—a category that included film music, *Schlager*, jazz, and the composed "jazz" of Stravinsky and Hindemith, as well as dance and ballet music.[33]) As I will argue, it is not happenstance that Strauss's attraction to ballet—a mecca for stylization and abstraction—would develop during the Jugendstil-infused 1890s.

"This Moribund Art Form"

What exactly is "ballet"? How did artists as varied as Bierbaum, Wedekind, Dehmel, Scheerbart, Hofmannsthal, and Strauss view the ballet tradition? How do their perceptions of it square with the status of ballet in the late nineteenth century? Generally speaking, the term *ballet* is a shortened, generic designation for "classical ballet," a tradition of theatrical dancing grounded in classical movement techniques that were codified in the latter part of the seventeenth century. "Romantic ballet," then, refers to an *era* and a *style* of ballet that emerged in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and that constituted a continuation and expansion of classical technique.

Strauss and the artists with whom he contemplated ballet collaborations in the 1890s were well versed in dance history, in ways far more complex than a simple gloss of it can do justice. They all used the generic category *ballet*, whether in subtitles or descriptions of their works, or in communications about them. For example, Wedekind subtitled *Die Flöhe oder Der Schmerzenstanz* (again, The Fleas, or The Dance of Pain) a "Ballett in drei Bildern" (ballet in three acts). Yet Strauss and company also frequently mingled designations for genres of theatrical dance that historically had distinct identities. Writing to the composer on February 11, 1896, Wedekind classified *Die Flöhe* as "a grand spectacle, more precisely a ballet in seven acts."[34] Though ballet had often been spectacular, not every spectacle was a ballet. For his part, Strauss labeled his scenario for *Kythere* a "ballet outline" (Ballettentwurf). At the same time, he demarcated the second act as "Beginning of the Anacreontic Dance-Play" (Tanzspiel) and "Modeled on an Anacreontic Ballet," that is, featuring an amatory and celebratory atmos-

phere as in the extant fragments of the Greek poet Anacreon, which focus on Bacchic themes and love.[35] The tableau vivant genre is also obvious in *Kythere*, particularly at the moments where a resemblance between the staging and a specific canvas is struck (as when the ballet's nobility arrives in Watteau's *Pélerinage à l'île de Cythère*). Last, Strauss concluded his scenario with the declaration "End of the Pantomime."[36]

Strauss's contemporaries used both "Tanzspiel" (dance-play) and "Pantomime" as well. Bierbaum's *Pan im Busch* is subtitled *Ein Tanzspiel* and Dehmel published his *Lucifer* with the sui generis descriptor *Tanz- und Glanzspiel* (a magnificent dance-play), thus corresponding with Wedekind's spectacular ambitions for the spectacular in *Die Flöhe*. Furthermore, Scheerbart's *Kometentanz* is subtitled *Astrale Pantomime* (astral pantomime). Similarly, Hofmannsthal carefully promoted his *Triumph der Zeit* as "a grand ballet, actually a pantomime."[37] Of course, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there had been gray areas among these genres. The critical point here is that these early modern artists were rifling through dance history in an attempt to create a new, hybrid ballet for the future.

It is a truism that ballet entered into a period of decline in the latter part of the nineteenth century. As Susan Au unambiguously put it,

> In the last quarter of the century, the ballet seemed to have abandoned the Romantic period's poetry and expressiveness—its appeal to the heart—in favour of a more superficial concentration on technical virtuosity and visual spectacle. . . . By the close of the century, ballet in Western Europe had reached a very low point. The great choreographers of the Romantic era were dead [Jean Coralli, Filippo Taglioni, Jules Perrot, August Bournonville, Antonio Cortesi, Carlo Blasis, Arthur Saint-Léon], and no new talents had risen to take their places. Ballet seemed to have lost its creative momentum, and the public had ceased to regard it as a serious art form. It was no longer a mainstream art, as it had been in the 1830s and 1840s; it had lost touch with the times. Indeed, ballet bore all the symptoms of an art about to die of exhaustion.[38]

This viewpoint might be seen as propagating clichés. Such clichés, however, are grounded in the realities of ballet as experienced by late-nineteenth-century witnesses, including Strauss and his fellow dance enthusiasts. Recall that Strauss made the distinction to Mahler between Scheerbart's *Kometentanz* and "the accustomed hopping-about."[39] Strauss was undoubtedly referring to the virtuosic display that had come to dominate ballet and that carried less than artistic implications for its stories and music. Regarding the tendency of ballet's visual spectacle to eclipse the score and the narrative, Wedekind made it explicit to Strauss that the "grand spectacle" of *Die Flöhe* was conceived to be "abounding in musical subjects of every kind, from sublime lyricism to the magnificently elemental"

(that is, incorporating music that is not disinterested or merely metrically practicable accompaniment to the movement patterns), and to showcase diverse dances "of unsurpassed taste and effect that *arise from the story.*"[40]

Dehmel, too, emphasized the importance of reinstating narrative and musical integrity into ballet. Writing to Strauss, he stressed the dramatic nature of *Lucifer*, the plot of which, in his own words, "leads . . . from the ancient earth, through the medieval hell to the modern heaven."[41] Dehmel was summarizing his invented tale of the ascendancy of Venus and her beloved Lucifer in mythological times, their persecution under Christianity, and their ultimate rediscovery of eternal love and beauty in a post-Enlightenment world. Hence, when advancing his "magnificent dance-play" to the composer, Dehmel boasted of having overcome "the awkward inartistic elements of the old mystery play and the modern ballet alike."[42] By the latter category he meant ballet culture at the end of the nineteenth century and the charges against it as outlined by Au above. Indeed, Dehmel's vision for his ballet was avant-garde. In a letter to Strauss, dated April 22, 1898, he recounted:

> It's precisely the extra psychological depth of ballet that attracted me to write [*Lucifer*] in this form, and all the figurative elements in the first act (the mother and child, Saturn and Thanatos, the angels, Cupid and the little cupids, the fauns, apes, bats etc.) are only there to allow a psychological drama to develop in the second and third acts between Lucifer and Venus on the one hand, and between the pair of them and mankind on the other. As in all my poetry, the decorative, visual element is only a means to the end; just like the luxuriant orchestration in your own work.[43]

Dehmel tackled head on the superficiality of ballet stories, which in the latter part of the nineteenth century were often mere pretenses for technical exhibitionism. But rather than casting off ballet for what it had become, Dehmel tapped it for the depth that he believed was intrinsic in the combination of drama, bodily movement, and music. His emphasis on the "psychological" and "figurative" elements attests to his engagement with the burgeoning modernism in dance that, tending toward symbolism and expressionism, occupied the margins of the ballet establishment at that time. Dehmel's analogy between the ornamental aspects and content of his text on the one hand and Strauss's compositional style on the other reveals that he was concerned about the score in a way that was atypical of pre-twentieth-century ballet. Dehmel revealed himself to be more realistic than Wedekind, however, when he wrote to Strauss, "Of course you would have to make allowances for dance and march rhythms throughout, or the choreographer will go on strike." Nevertheless, Dehmel concluded this letter with an appeal that is similar to Wedekind's regarding musical freedom, reassuring the composer that "I think that even within those limitations an elevated style is possible in all moods, grave and gay."[44]