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Letters On Dancing And Ballets

Jean Georges Noverre

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The dancer and choreographer Jean-George Noverre's Letters on Dancing and Ballets were first published in Stuttgart in 1760 and set forth his ideas for the reform of ballet, ideas which were considered revolutionary in their day and indeed anticipated changes to be carried out more than a century later by Laban, Fokine and Jooss. At a time when court ballet had degenerated into a meaningless succession of conventional dances, Noverre advocated a unity of design and a logical progression from introduction to climax in which the whole was not sacrificed to the part and anything unnecessary to the theme was eliminated. Movement was to be defined by the tone and time of the music and choreographers were advised to avoid overcomplicated steps and turn to nature for natural means of expression which could be understood by all. He advocated also the reform of costume and lived to see masks, full-bottomed wigs and cumbersome dresses abandoned in favour of attire better suited to the roles portrayed. Noverre's Letters can be said without exaggeration to be one of the most important dance books ever published and through its influence Noverre can be seen as the grandfather of ballet as we know it. The present translation was made by the great dance historian Cyril W. Beaumont and first published by him in book form in 1930.

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