

REPEATED STEP-SEQUENCES IN EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY CHOREOGRAPHIES

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INTRODUCTION

Many of the extant notated dances from the early 18th century are through-composed. That is, their component step sequences are not repeated in relation to repeats in the music. Especially for more complicated theatre dances, repetition seems *not* to be the norm in baroque dance. Paradoxically, it appears that the more complicated a section of dance is, the less it bears repeating.

Yet it isn't all that uncommon to find a notated dance in which a repeated step-sequence does correspond to a musical repeat. This afternoon I would like to discuss some of the ways in which such repetition can function as a choreographic device in baroque dance.

Repetition can be extraordinarily satisfying if it's used well. Let's look at an example of repetition in 20th century choreography. In this example, the choreographer repeats individual steps, sequences of steps, and entire sections of the dance corresponding to repeated sections of music. In the first section, the repeat is danced by different dancers; in the second section, the dancers are the same for the repeat. [VIDEO CLIP: "Symphony in C", opening of 3rd movement].

That was the opening of the third movement of George Balanchine's "Symphony in C", to music by Georges Bizet, choreographed in 1947 for the Paris Opera Ballet. In this video, it was performed by members of the Royal Ballet.¹

Would this sort of repetition be "allowed" in baroque choreography? Let us consider some of the possibilities found among the extant notated dances. (And here let me note that I have not made a comprehensive study of all the extant choreographies. I have focused on French sources, and I have selected certain dances that seem best to exemplify different types of repetition.)

In baroque dance music, there are three general types of repeat scheme: binary form (AABB), rondeau form (such as ABACA or AABACAA), and sequential forms like the chaconne or the forlane, which typically consist of a series of repeated two- or four-bar phrases. It is not uncommon for music of any of these types to be played through more than once for a given dance. Nor is it uncommon for a given strain to consist of two almost identical, or parallel, halves. So there are possibilities for repeats at several levels: within a phrase or strain; at the repeat of a strain; or at a repeat of the entire piece.

BINARY FORM

Let us first consider repetition in dances with binary form music. The most straightforward approach is to have the same dancer or dancers, on the same foot or feet as before, dancing the same step sequence in the same spatial pattern. An example is the opening of Pécour's "le Passepiéd" (LMC 6620; FL 1700.2/03),² in which the dancers separate, rejoin, and move forward during the first strain, and then repeat exactly the same sequence at the repeat of the strain. The passepiéd of Le Roussau's "The Dutches" (LMC 2540; FL Ms13.1/02), which you saw this morning, offers an interesting variant: the first figure involves an exchange of places, so that when the dancers repeat it they begin on opposite sides.

The dancer or dancers may mirror the sequence for the repeat, performing the same steps but on the opposite foot. A good example is found in Pécour's Gigue for a woman, danced by Mlle. Subligny in England (LMC 5020; FL 1704.1/06). The music is binary form, repeated: AABBAABB. In the first playing, the dance is also AABB: each figure is repeated on the opposite foot, with only a minor change at the end of the second A to allow the transition to the next figure.³

Two other notated dances, though not in strict binary form, offer further examples of opposite-foot repeats. These are Feuillet's "Gigue a deux" (LMC 4940; FL 1700.1/02), to music from *Roland* and his "Sarabande for a woman" (LMC 7880; FL 1700.1/05) to music from *le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. At the first strain (A) of the gigue, the dancers head downstage, then curve away from each other and return to their starting places. On the repeat (A'), they do the same steps and figure on the other foot, so that they cross with one another as they head upstage. The music continues with four measures that are not repeated, and the dancers likewise do four measures (actually 2 measures, repeated on the opposite foot) that do not reoccur. Then there are eight measures that are repeated in both music and dance—once again, on opposite feet—followed by a four measure petite reprise during which the dancers head upstage with a sequence of steps not previously used in the dance.

The repeat scheme of Feuillet's Sarabande is AABBBCCAABBCC. The dance follows this scheme with opposite-foot repeats until the second playing of the music, third strain repeated (CC), during which the dancer circles and then heads upstage to finish.⁴

Another, more commonly used, type of repetition is for the dancers to repeat the same sequence of steps, on either the same or opposite feet, but with a change or changes in orientation or floor pattern. This allows the possibility of switching from mirror to axial symmetry and, more generally, of varying the figure of the dance. A step in the sequence may be altered to allow for a change of direction or of symmetry, but the underlying choreographic structure of repeated sequences remains intact.

The best known example of repetition with modified path is the opening section (AABB) of Pécour's "la Bourée d'Achille" (LMC 1480; FL 1700.2/01), in which the step-sequence for each strain is repeated but with altered floor pattern.⁵ The first rigaudon (AABB) of Feuillet's "Rigaudon de la Paix" (LMC 7340; FL 1700.1/01), which Kimiko Okamoto discussed earlier, likewise uses this sort of repetition with modified path. The opening (first strain, repeated) of "la Savoye" (LMC 7980; FL 1700.2/07) follows the same scheme and even the same floor pattern as "la Bourée d'Achille", with the dancers repeating a four-measure step sequence on the opposite foot. The bourrée section of "la Bourgogne" (LMC 1560; FL 1700.2/06) is a single strain, repeated, and the dance is likewise a single sequence, repeated, with one of the steps changed to allow the transition from axial to mirror symmetry.

The prize for economical use of repeated steps in combination with varied floor patterns should probably go to Claude Balon, for his "Gavotte du Roi" (LMC 4920; FL 1716.1/01). He uses the two-measure gavotte step (contretemps, assemblé⁶) throughout, until the bow at the final measure.

Variants

The first solo canary section (AABB) of Feuillet's "Ballet for Nine" (LMC 1320; FL 1700.1/15) offers an interesting variant. At the repeat of the A strain, the steps repeat on the other foot. In the repeat of the B strain, the first two steps are different from in the first B, presumably to keep the dancer from travelling too far downstage; the remainder of the strain is an opposite-foot repeat.

Allowing for still more modification for the repeat of a step-sequence, we arrive at the possibility that the repeat might be an ornamented version of the original. I offer one tentative example, from the opening of Pécour's "Entrée de Saturne" (LMC 4000; FL Ms05.1/13). The steps are listed in Table 1. About half of the steps in the repeat are the same as in the first figure, though the spatial pattern is different; at least some of the remaining steps are arguably ornamented variants of the corresponding steps in the first figure. I have not encountered, or I have not recognized, other examples of this sort of ornamented repeat.

An interesting use of repetition occurs in Pécour's "Rigaudon à Quatre" (LMC 7300; FL 1713.2/09). The music is AABBAABB. In the first playing of the music, second strain, the dancers exchange roles so that on the repeat the men do the steps that the

women had done previously, and conversely. There's a similar role reversal in the second playing, from the second half of the first strain to the nearly identical first half of the repeat.

Table 1: Comparison of steps used in the first two figures of Pécour's "Entrée de Saturne". Steps in A2 could be considered ornamented versions of those in A1. Direction, amount of turning, and floor pattern differ from one figure to the next.

A1	A2
sauté, jeté	beaten demi-contretemps (sauté + pas marché), jeté
pas de sissone	beaten pas de sissone
pas de bourrée emboité	pas de bourrée emboité
coupé	coupé
contretemps	demi-contretemps (finish in plié), sauté
jeté, jeté	jeté, jeté
pas de sissone	pas de sissone
pas de bourrée emboité	pas de bourrée back, back, side
demi-contretemps, pas battu	contretemps
changement de pieds, pas marché	capriole, pas marché

Full repeats of the music

Note that although the music for this rigaudon is played through twice, the dance does not repeat at the second playing. In fact, it is unusual to find a notated dance in which a direct repetition corresponds to a repeat of the entire piece of music. One dance with such a full repeat is Feuillet's couple dance "la Matelotte" (LMC 5400; FL 1706.1/02). The music is AABAAB, with the second strain having parallel halves. Feuillet has constructed the entire dance using only two eight-bar step sequences, one for the first strain, the other for each half of the second. He maintains choreographic interest by varying the spatial patterns and type of symmetry, switching to axial symmetry in the middle of the second strain, first time, and then back to mirror symmetry at the middle of the second strain, second time.

Another dance in which steps repeat from one playing of the music to the next is Pécour's "les Contrefaiseurs" (LMC 2200; FL 1702.1), in which the steps used for the second playing replicate those of the first except for the final eight measures, in which the dancers circle back to their starting places for concluding bows (Table 2).

Question and answer

"Les Contrefaiseurs" employs two other types of repetition that, though not necessarily related to repeats in the music, are worth noting. One of these is "question and answer": one dancer does a step or two, then waits while the other replies with the same step or steps. Sometimes, as in "les Contrefaiseurs", this sequence is then repeated on the other foot. (We saw examples of question and answer in Roussau's "Dutches" and "Entrée for Two French Country Men" [LMC 4130; FL Ms13.1/08] this morning.) A related type of repetition might be called a "double question and answer": the dancers simultaneously do different steps, typically for a couple of measures, and then switch, each doing what the other has just done.⁷ "Les Contrefaiseurs" employs both these types. In "la Lorraine", by Balon (LMC 5220; FL 1718.2/02), a sequence of pas de rigaudon, pas de gavotte, and another pas de rigaudon is danced in canon, creating a sort of compound question and answer structure: question and (double question and answer and) answer.

In the baroque dance repertoire, probably the most familiar example of both single and double question and answer is in Pécour's "Aimable Vainqueur" (LMC 1180; FL 1701.1). This passage is outlined in Table 3.

Table 2: Repeat scheme of "les Contrefaiseurs", showing opening step or steps and symmetry of figures corresponding to musical strains or sections. For much of the second playing, the man and woman have exchanged places.

Strain or part of strain	First playing: opening step or steps and symmetry of figures	Second playing: opening step or steps and symmetry of figures
A	Pas de gaillarde: mirror	Pas de gaillarde: axial woman: same foot as before; man: other foot
A	Pas de bourrée: mirror to axial, as in <i>l'Aimable Vainqueur</i>	Pas de bourrée: axial, simple curve
B, part 1	Man: contretemps; woman: pas de rigaudon	Same figure; places exchanged
B, part 2	Glissés	Same figure; places exchanged
B, part 3	Q&A, man first: side, close, step	Same figure; places exchanged
B, part 1	Man: contretemps; woman: pas de rigaudon. (Figure rotated 90° counterclockwise from previous occurrence)	Same figure; places exchanged
B, part 2	Glissés (Figure rotated 90° counterclockwise from previous occurrence)	First four bars: same figure, places exchanged. Thereafter steps and figure differ from previous.
B, part 3	Q&A, man first: side, close, step. (Figure rotated 90° counterclockwise from previous occurrence)	

Table 3: Question and answer, and double question and answer, in measures 9-16 of *l'Aimable Vainqueur*, second strain, first time

	Question and answer		Double question and answer	
Woman:	contretemps, coupé ouvert	(rest)	2 pirouettes	balancé
Man:	(rest)	contretemps, coupé ouvert	balancé	2 pirouettes

Of course there is one type of baroque dance in which the same sequence of steps and figures is repeated each time through the music, no matter how many times it is played: the longways contredanse. In contredanses for several couples, each couple dances the same sequence repeatedly, with other couples joining in, in a prescribed

order, and repeating the same sequence of figures to the same music. It is perhaps significant that “les Contrefaiseurs”, a dance for one couple, is labelled “contredanse”.

We’ve looked in some detail at types of repetition in dances to binary form music. For rondeau and through-composed forms, these types remain unchanged: exact repetition; opposite-footed repetition with mirrored floor pattern; repetition of step sequence with modified floor pattern; and simple or double question and answer. It is only the relation of dance to music repeats that changes somewhat.

RONDEAU FORM

Rondeaus offer the additional possibility of repeating a step sequence at each occurrence of the musical refrain. We find an example of this in Pécour’s “la Contredanse” (LMC 2140; FL 1700.2/04), like “les Contrefaiseurs”, a ballroom dance for one couple rather than a group dance. The music is a rondeau, played twice: ABACAABACA. The dance reflects this structure, but with a twist: rather than having just one step sequence to correspond to the refrain, there are two different step sequences, one for each time through the music.⁸

In a rondeau of the form AABACAA, there are theoretically even more possibilities for repeated step sequences. But it appears, on the basis of a very small sample, that a more likely structure for a rondeau of this form is for the same step sequence to occur only at the beginning and at each return to the refrain; that is, not when the refrain is repeated at the beginning or end of the piece. The first three dances listed in Table 4, “la Brissac”, “la Melanie”, and “la Transilvanie”⁹, have this structure.

Table 4: Repeated step sequences in rondeaus or partial rondeaus by Balon. Italics indicate repeated figures within a dance. In “la Brissac”, the steps for all but the final three measures of the final strain repeat the steps of the second strain.

Dance	Music repeat scheme
la Brissac (LMC 1640; FL Ms11.1/01)	AABACAA
la Melanie (LMC 5480; FL 1713.1/01)	AABACA; DDEE
la Transilvanie (LMC 8140; FL 1715.1/01)	AABACAA
la Clermont (LMC 2100; FL 1717.1/01)	ABACA; DDEE
la Czarienne (LMC 2420; FL Ms11.1/02)	ABA; CD

If the refrain of the rondeau has parallel halves, then each occurrence of the refrain may accompany a different repeated step sequence. We find this structure in, for example, Pécour’s “la Babeth” (LMC 1260; FL 1704.2/01: ABACA). His “Entrée Espagnole” (LMC 4100; FL 1704.1/12), a couple dance to music from *l’Europe Galante*, also has this basic structure, though with some adjustments in the final steps of the repeats.¹⁰

SEQUENTIAL FORMS

Let us turn now to dances with sequential forms. If the music includes sections made of parallel halves, as in typical chaconnes or forlanes, then the dance may include repeated step sequences to match. A good example of this sort of structure is Feuillet’s chaconne to music from *l’Europe Galante* (LMC 1900; FL Ms05.1/16), which as it happens is also a rondeau (ABACA). The sixteen-bar refrain consists of two eight-bar sections, each consisting of a repeated four-bar phrase. Feuillet’s dance reflects this structure: each refrain accompanies two sets of repeated (mirrored) four-bar step

sequences. Interestingly, Feuillet maintains the pattern of repeated step sequences even during the couplets, though musically these do not have internal repeats: the first couplet accompanies a step sequence of eight bars and its repeat, and the second accompanies two sets of four bars and their repeats.

We also find this sort of four-bar repeated step sequence, though not as consistently, in three extant choreographies to the chaconne from *Phaeton*. In Pécour's choreography for a woman (LMC 2020; FL 1704.1/03) there are some sections of four-bar repeated step sequences (as well as many repeated two-bar sequences); in his choreography for a man (LMC 1960; FL 1704.1/29), about a third of the dance is built of four-bar repeated sequences. The third, anonymous, choreography (LMC 1940; FL Ms17.1/10) consists chiefly of four-bar repeated sequences.

Repeated steps or step sequences are relatively common in forlanes, but these don't necessarily reflect the repeats in the music. The opening of Pécour's forlane for two women (LMC 4200; FL 1704.1/08) offers an interesting example: the dance consists of a four-bar sequence repeated, while the music is made up of two-bar repeated sections.

Sets of variations on la Follia, or les Folies d'Espagne, offer another familiar category of dance music that consists of a series of parallel-structured sections. Feuillet's six solo Follia variations for a woman (LMC 4740; FL 1700.1/08) reflect this structure, employing opposite-foot repeats.¹¹ Other extant Follia dance notations (LMC 4760; FL Ms05.1/24 and LMC 4780; FL 1704.1/34) are through-composed.¹²

There is not sufficient time this afternoon to discuss repeat schemes in multipartite choreographies, except to say that these too offer opportunities for repeated step sequences.

CONCLUSION

Let me begin my conclusion with the following question: When we encounter repeated step sequences that correspond to musical repeats, are we to think that the choreographer was being lazy, or at least economical; or rather that he or she was making an effort to create a dance that reflected the structure of the music, rather than a concatenation of randomly chosen steps? Recall the selection from Balanchine's "Symphony in C": Balanchine was noted for his sensitivity to and affinity with music, so it is no surprise that for him a repeat in the music would imply a repeat in the dance. But it cannot have escaped his attention that by repeating a section of dance he was effectively cutting in half the rehearsal time that would be required.

It appears that Feuillet and Balon may have been more willing than Pécour to use repetition, though I have not done a thorough enough study to allow any firm conclusions. Their use of repetition may represent a choice to have the dance more closely reflect the repeat structure of the music. Repetition in later choreographies might also be a reflection of changing tastes at the transition from Louis XIV to Louis XV, or of the influence of contredanses, with their repeated figures, in French ballrooms.

Is repetition a cop-out? Maybe sometimes. But it requires careful management of steps and figures. Probably because figures, and variety of figures, play an important role in baroque choreography, it is much more common to find a repeat in which the step sequence is maintained but the figure is changed. Even mirrored repeats, without a change in the figure, are hard to find; and exact repeats are even rarer. And it seems that the more complicated a section of a dance is, the less likely it is to be repeated.

Repetition in baroque dance probably points to a different organizing principle for choreography than the rhetorical approach favored by some scholars today. The structure of the music provides a rationale for repeating step sequences; the desire for variety, a rationale for changing the floor patterns.

In closing, let me emphasize that, notwithstanding the examples I've presented, repetition that relates to musical structure is only one choreographic device among many in baroque dance. It is not uncommon, but neither is it pervasive; it occurs in only a minority of extant notated dances.

NOTES

1. The music is Symphony No. 1 in C major (1855) by Georges Bizet. Balanchine's ballet premiered on July 28, 1947. I wish to thank Janet Howes of the Boston Ballet production staff for arranging for me to view of videotape of the piece as performed by Boston Ballet.
2. Parenthetical references refer to entries in Little, M.E., and C. Marsh. *La Danse Noble: An inventory of dances and sources*. Broude Brothers Limited. 1992: Williamstown (LMC) and Lancelot, F. *La Belle Danse*. Van Dieren, Paris, 1996 (FL). These works provide exact titles and further information about the dances cited.
3. The dance does not follow this repeat scheme in the second half, the repeat of AABB.
4. Within these last sixteen measures, there are repeated steps and a near-repeat of a four measure step-sequence, but these don't correspond to repeats in the music.
5. The opening step-sequence reoccurs, again with a modified floor pattern, at the reprise of the bourrée section.
6. With or without a pas marché following.
7. Other presenters at the conference referred to this sort of repetition as "sequential imitation" or "dialogic response".
8. For a discussion of this dance and its structure, see Witherell, A. L. *Louis Pécour's 1700 Recueil de dances*, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor: 1982, 95-109.
9. At the conference, this paper was followed by a workshop devoted to the structure of "la Transilvanie".
10. There is an analysis of this dance in: Bayle, C. De la Composition Chorégraphique... à la Composition Chorégraphique. *Les Goûts-Réunis*, special volume: La Danse. Actes du 1^{er} Colloque International sur la danse ancienne, Besançon: Sept. 1982, 79-89.
11. A duo reworking of essentially the same dance (LMC 4720; FL Ms05.1/12) is credited to Pécour. If Pécour actually took credit for it on the basis of a few minor rearrangements, then all choreographic attributions must be called into question. Otherwise, either the anonymous attribution of the duo to Pécour, or Feuillet's own attribution of the solo to himself, is in error.
12. With the possible but highly unlikely exception of Feuillet's (LMC 4760), which shows only eight measures of dance for each sixteen measures of music. Partly because these don't alternate feet as do the variations for a woman, it does not appear that they were intended to be repeated.