PAS DE DEUX FOR A CATHEDRAL AND A HUNCHBACK:

ROLAND PETIT'S BALLET 'NOTRE-DAME DE PARIS'

In 1965, the French choreographer Roland Petit set himself a challenging task: to make a ballet out of Victor Hugo's voluminous novel *Notre-Dame de Paris*. The result departed radically from earlier attempts to transpose that work into movement, by choreographers such as Jules Perrot and Marius Petipa (*La Esmeralda*, London 1844 and Saint Petersburg 1886). This paper argues that Petit's first ballet for the Paris Opera, which *Le Figaro Littéraire* called 'le plus grand spectacle de danse créé à l'Opéra depuis la guerre',[1] engaged with the literary source on a much deeper level than its predecessors. Petit's innovative ballet does not merely illustrate the novel, but reveals underlying elements in the source and sheds new light on it.

The idea to transpose Victor Hugo's novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* into an opera or a ballet might seem very ambitious. Its monumental length, multiplicity of subplots, themes – from architecture to philosophy – and characters, its social criticism as well as the extensive digressions and numerous comments by the frequently ironical narrator make the novel a challenging source for art forms expressing themselves chiefly through acoustic and visual means. In spite of these difficulties, *Notre-Dame de Paris* was repeatedly transposed into music theatre. The first adaptation of the novel for the opera stage was conceived by Victor Hugo himself: for the composer Louise Bertin, he wrote a libretto based on *Notre-Dame de Paris* in which he strongly simplified the action and adapted it to the conventions of the genre. As he shifted the focus from the cathedral to the love story between Esmeralda and Phoebus, he also represented the Captain, who appears as a rather unscrupulous seducer in the novel, in a more positive light. The opera *La Esmeralda* vanished from the repertoire after only six

[1] Christine de Rivoyre, 'Roland Petit retrouve l'Opéra de Paris', *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 2 December 1965.

performances at the Paris Opera in 1836. Julien Tiersot wrote about the libretto: 'Celui-ci, en effet, n'est pas un drame: c'est une suite de tableaux, et pas autre chose. […] En effet: ces quatre actes, qui prétendent résumer un roman d'un grand caractère, sont comme un 'comprimé' dans lequel il ne reste à peu près rien de l'œuvre primitive.'[2]

Like Hugo's opera, nineteenth-century ballet adaptations of the novel were named after their heroine. In 1838, Antonio Monticini created a ballet entitled *Esmeralda* in Turin which concluded with Esmeralda's rescue by a heroic Phoebus and Frollo's suicide; he eliminated both Gringoire and Quasimodo. Jules Perrot's ballet *La Esmeralda* (London, 1844) also ended with a resplendent Phoebus saving Esmeralda, while Frollo was killed by Quasimodo.[3] Based on Perrot's work, Marius Petipa created two versions of *La Esmeralda* in Saint Petersburg in 1886 and 1889. Alexander Gorsky's ballet *Gudule's daughter* was premiered in Moscow in 1902, and there were several subsequent adaptations, chiefly by Russian choreographers. In all these ballets, Frollo and Quasimodo were mimed (as opposed to danced) parts – if they were present at all. The cathedral, a major 'protagonist' of the novel which bears its name, became a simple backdrop.

In his ballet version of *Notre-Dame de Paris* which was premiered in December 1965 at the Paris Opera, Roland Petit chose a different approach to the source. He was the first

[2] Julien Tiersot, 'La Esmeralda' [1836], *La Revue Musicale*, 378 (1985), 37-53 (pp. 46-47).

[3] Cf. Chantal Poupard, *De la littérature à la danse. Notre-Dame de Paris, transcription sémiotique de l'écriture romanesque en écriture chorégraphique: le roman de Victor Hugo* Notre-Dame de Paris *et les ballets* La Esmeralda *de Jules Perrot au XIX^e siècle et* Notre-Dame de Paris *de Roland Petit au XX^e siècle* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université Lille 3, 1993), p. 153 (on Monticini) and pp. 156ff. (on Perrot). Cf. also Cyril W. Beaumont, *Complete book of ballets: A guide to the principal ballets of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (London: Putnam, 1951), pp. 293-301 (on Perrot).

choreographer to create a ballet which bore the original title of the novel and in which the hunchback and the cathedral featured prominently.

Although the monumental, immobile church seems an inappropriate 'protagonist' for a ballet, Roland Petit managed to fit it onto the ballet stage[4] and reveal its hidden animation. In fact, the architecture of the gothic cathedral contains a lot of dance-like movement: it aspires to such heights that it almost seems to negate gravity (which led to the collapse of many gothic towers). The heavy stone edifice is designed to create an impression of immaterial lightness; these qualities recall ballet dancers. Moreover, the gothic architecture is very lively and dynamic: it is animated by its rich figural ornaments and by the sunrays that enter through the colourful windows. Hugo frequently describes these light effects and the cathedral's aspiration towards the divine. Moreover, statues repeatedly seem to come alive in the novel. As in Hugo's work, the cathedral is both a setting and a protagonist in Petit's ballet. The set designer René Allio literally made Notre-Dame dance: it is repeatedly lowered from the ceiling and opens its wings – the two towers of the front façade – like an altarpiece. In one scene, Quasimodo seems to dance with the swinging bells. The light effects are reproduced in the costumes of the corps de ballet dancers: Yves Saint Laurent, who designed the costumes, was inspired by the colours of the cathedral's stained glass windows.[5] Due to their bizarre appearance, stiff posture and angular, grotesque movements, the ensemble dancers in the ballet's opening scene evoke stone monsters marching out of the cathedral.

[4] Thus, he refuted William Holdheim's ironical comment on Hugo's omission of the cathedral from his opera libretto: 'Sie wäre wohl auch noch schwerer auf der Bühne unterzubringen als die Elefanten von *Aida*.' ('It would probably be even harder to put on stage than the elephants in *Aida*.') William Wolfgang Holdheim, *Die Suche nach dem Epos: Der Geschichtsroman bei Hugo, Tolstoi und Flaubert* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1978), p. 48.

[5] Carmen Tessier, 'Yves Saint-Laurent a reproduit les vitraux de la cathédrale pour les costumes de *Notre-Dame de Paris*', *Le Journal du Dimanche*, 5 December 1965.

In his two-act ballet, Roland Petit focused on the love plot and its four most relevant protagonists: Esmeralda, Quasimodo, Frollo and Phoebus, who are the ballet's only named characters. Unlike previous choreographers, Petit makes all his protagonists dance, including Frollo and Quasimodo; he avoids plotless divertissements, mime passages and accessories.[6] Instead of historic realism and details, the sets and costumes aim at a modern, stylized simplicity.[7] René Allio's sets were based on drawings by Victor Hugo; the ballet's backdrop shows a view of Paris which recalls Hugo's description of the medieval city in the chapter 'Paris à vol d'oiseau'. The mobile sets facilitate seamless scene changes which allow Petit to create an uninterrupted flow of action. The smooth transitions between the scenes and the score by the famous film composer Maurice Jarre give the ballet a cinematic touch which recalls the 'film-like' elements in the novel.[8]

Hugo's work also contains numerous 'spectacles' that Petit highlights in his adaptation. The novel opens with the audience's arrival at Gringoire's play, which is described as a performance more entertaining than the play itself. This scene is followed by the election of

[6] Chantal Poupard states: 'Dans ce ballet, la danse fait plus que jamais partie intégrante de l'action. Tout est dit par la danse. Tout s'épure et ne signifie que par la danse. Tout le corps danse. Tout se dit avec et à travers les corps qui dansent'. Poupard, p. 213.

[7] Cf. Roland Petit in Bibliothèque Nationale de France, site Opéra, Dossier d'œuvre *Notre-Dame de Paris*, unidentified, undated newspaper: 'C'est un grand effort de dépouillement que je tente dans ma chorégraphie; ainsi l'attaque de la cathédrale se traduit non par le déferlement d'une foule délirante mais par une marche extrêmement dépouillée. René ALLIO dans ses décors, Yves SAINT-LAURENT dans ses costumes, ont suivi le même parti pris de sobriété.'

[8] Myriam Roman points out cinematic elements in the novel (which of course preceded the birth of the cinema). Cf. Myriam Roman, *Victor Hugo et le roman philosophique: Du 'drame dans les faits' au 'drame dans les idées'* (Paris: Champion, 1999), p. 658. In her study on various film adaptations of the novel, Rachel Killick calls Hugo a 'cinéaste of words'. Cf. Rachel Killick, '*Notre-Dame de Paris* as cinema: From myth to commodity', in *Victor Hugo: Romancier de l'abîme*, ed. by James A. Hiddleston (Oxford: Legenda, 2002), pp. 41-62 (p. 59).

the pope of fools, which evokes a 'sabbat' (*NDP* 50),[9] Esmeralda's dance and Gringoire's 'pas de deux' with the puppet in the 'cour des miracles', a theatre with obscure wings where false cripples dress up for their performances in the streets of Paris. Likewise, Petit's ballet starts with a series of spectacles in which he introduces the main protagonists. It opens with the election of the pope of fools and Quasimodo's first appearance. In the next scene, Frollo directs a mass inside the cathedral, which is followed by Esmeralda's dance in front of Notre-Dame. All three main protagonists are thus presented through a solo in front of an onstage audience, and they are characterized through their different movement styles. A bit later in the ballet, Phoebus makes a spectacular entrance in the midst of his soldiers.

Petit also used the visual potential of the antitheses and metaphors in the literary source.[10] In Hugo's novel, protagonists and affects are often juxtaposed: Esmeralda's radiant beauty is opposed to Quasimodo's grotesque ugliness, her saintly innocence to Frollo's evil passion, Esmeralda's and Quasimodo's pity to Frollo's destructive jealousy. Phoebus's apparent splendour hides his inner rottenness. According to Fritz Kirsch, the antithetical characters lack psychological depth and the entire novel recalls the puppet theatre.[11] The stark contrasts and the symbolic character of the rather stereotypical figures are common in music theatre, and several scholars have evoked the novel's kinship with operas.[12] Holdheim's complaint that in

[9] Quotations and page numbers in *Notre-Dame de Paris* refer to: Victor Hugo, *Notre-Dame de Paris* [1831]/ *Les travailleurs de la mer* [1866], ed. by Jacques Seebacher and Yves Gohin (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).

[10] Poupard has established an exhaustive commented list of the metaphors in *Notre-Dame de Paris*, divided into the categories 'geometry', 'animals', 'fire' and 'water'.

[11] Cf. Fritz Peter Kirsch, 'Die Struktur von *Notre-Dame de Paris* im Lichte des Kathedralensymbols', *Zeitschrift für französische Sprache und Literatur*, 78 (1968), p. 13.

[12] Cf. for instance Kathryn A. Grossmann, *The early novels of Victor Hugo: Towards a poetics of harmony* (Genf: Droz, 1986), p. 202: 'Hugo's novel coordinates a cast of thousands […] into a veritable operatic libretto.' Grossmann also mentions the numerous 'duets' which alternate with various 'chorus scenes'. Cf. also Francis A. Waterhouse, 'Victor Hugo's operas', *The Sewanee Review*, 29.2 (1921), 198-210. Waterhouse points out that

Notre-Dame de Paris, everything is 'ganz unnötigerweise hörbar, sichtbar, greifbar' ('quite unnecessarily audible, visible, tangible')[13] gains new meaning when the work is transposed into an opera or ballet. The novel also contains numerous descriptions of music and sound as well as movement, such as Esmeralda's dance or the crowd scenes.

Esmeralda's lightness and agility in the ballet recall the novel in which she is often compared to a small animal, such as a 'fauvette', 'agneau', 'alouette', 'demoiselle', 'guêpe', 'abeille' or 'mouche'(*NDP* 75, 471, 322, 98, 63, 99, 494). However, instead of Hugo's radiant and innocent young girl, Petit depicts Esmeralda as an accomplished seducer. Esmeralda, the only important female character and object of all male desire, is the only person to wear pointe shoes. This emblem of the Romantic ballerina links Esmeralda to the period when the novel was written and when the first ballet versions of it were choreographed. In Romantic ballets, pointe shoes helped to create an impression of supernatural weightlessness, as the Romantic ballerinas seemed to hover above their fellow creatures. In Petit's ballet, the pointe shoes mark the contrast between Esmeralda and the other female dancers, who represent beggars, prostitutes or townsfolk. However, Esmeralda's style differs from the lyrical and delicate dancing of the Romantic ballerinas. During her first solo, she does not whirl over the stage like a butterfly, as in the novel where Gringoire at first takes the dazzling creature for an angel. The scantily dressed gipsy alternates between slow and sensual movements and a more abrupt and angular style.[14] As in the novel, she is surrounded by an admiring crowd. In the

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many of the alleged weaknesses of Hugo's novels are strengths in operas. He also emphasizes the importance of sound and gesture in Hugo's works, and he concludes: 'Victor Hugo composed operas without music.' (p. 210).

[13] Holdheim, p. 36.

[14] Esmeralda's angular movement language, which brings her close to the bizarre stone figures of Notre-Dame, evokes Kathryn Grossmann's idea that both Esmeralda and Quasimodo are children of the cathedral, and that she seeks asylum there as in the womb of a mother. Cf. Grossmann, 173. Grossmann also draws a parallel between

ballet, the spectators imitate some of her gestures and reach out towards her, but only Frollo steps inside the circle to face the dancer, apparently not content to remain a mere spectator.

Petit's Esmeralda is more confident and less innocent than her literary equivalent: she immediately nestles against Phoebus and when he tears away her dress, she only starts briefly.[15] During their pas de deux in the tavern, Esmeralda's movement language becomes more rounded and lyrical, which indicates the awakening of her love for him. As in Hugo, she is broken in the course of the ballet due to Frollo's influence: in the execution scene, she resembles the 'chose morte ou brisée' (*NDP* 343) she is compared to in the novel. The seductress later becomes a martyr; as she is carried to the gibbet, her body with outstretched arms forms a cross shape. Thus, Petit visualizes the connection Hugo establishes between Esmeralda and Notre-Dame (the Virgin Mary).

Quasimodo is a very difficult figure for a ballet: due to his deformity, his balance and centre of gravity are displaced and he can hardly move normally, let alone dance. Previous choreographers significantly diminished the hunchback's importance and cast him as a mime role, or they eliminated him altogether. Roland Petit, who created the role for himself, did the opposite. He put Quasimodo in the centre of the ballet and elaborated a specific, challenging movement language for the physically and mentally crippled character which corresponds to the hunchback's unique way of expressing himself in the novel. Unlike in previous ballet

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the gothic architecture and Esmeralda's dance in the novel (p. 190): 'Les caractères généraux des maçonneries populaires […] sont la variété, le progrès, l'originalité, l'opulence, le mouvement perpétuel'.

[15] By turning Esmeralda into a seducer and showing Phoebus's lecherous interaction with prostitutes as well as the soldier's cruel abuse of Quasimodo, Roland Petit deviates from the novel and does the opposite of many nineteenth-century ballet librettists. The latter tended to reduce the erotic and violent elements in their literary sources, a process which Hélène Laplace-Claverie has called 'édulcoration' in her seminal study on the ballet libretto. Cf. Hélène Laplace-Claverie, *Ecrire pour la danse: Les livrets de ballet de Théophile Gautier à Jean Cocteau (1870-1914)* (Paris: Champion, 2001), pp. 152-155.

versions, he does not wear a false hump, but continually contracts his right shoulder, a posture that is very difficult to maintain throughout a two-act ballet. Quasimodo does not correspond to the type of the 'monster' but is represented as an unusual, relatively complex figure.

As in the novel, Quasimodo is an alter ego of Esmeralda. They are both outsiders who are constantly pursued by the fascinated gaze of other people – Esmeralda because of her beauty and talent as a dancer, Quasimodo because of his difference and ugliness.[16] Quasimodo's first entry – he suddenly appears in a crooked posture and with a dangling arm – stops the loud and chaotic music which accompanies the opening of the ballet. He is surrounded by a curious crowd that imitates his posture and movements. In Hugo's novel, Quasimodo is a mixture of complete immobility (he frequently sits still and resembles the motionless, century-old stone monsters in the cathedral)[17] and utmost agility (he often climbs nimbly inside the church and along the façade). In Petit's ballet, he is usually in motion, except when he watches other characters, such as the dancing Esmeralda and the preaching Frollo.

Hugo's Frollo, who furtively follows Esmeralda with burning glances, resembles a bird fixing its prey. When he watches her dance, he is described as follows: 'Son œil fixe plongeait dans la place. C'était quelque chose de l'immobilité d'un milan qui vient de découvrir un nid de moineaux et qui le regarde.' (*NDP* 242). In prison, he looks at her 'de l'œil d'un milan qui a longtemps plané en rond du plus haut du ciel autour d'une pauvre alouette tapie dans les blés' (*NDP* 322). In the ballet, Frollo's glances literally seem to devour Esmeralda during her first solo and her pas de deux with Phoebus. If Esmeralda and Quasimodo are constant 'spectacles'

[16] Kathryn Grossmann comments on the crowd's reaction to the two outsiders in Hugo's novel: 'This collectively unconscious matricide of our (Virginal) Lady of Paris implies that man is as deeply disturbed by pure radiance as he is by the uncommonly ugly. The dancing "folle" joins the "pape des fous" as an object of derision.' Grossmann, pp. 176-177.

[17] Cf. for instance *NDP* 384: 'on eût pu le prendre pour un de ces monstres de pierre par la gueule desquels se dégorgent depuis six cents ans les longues gouttières de la cathédrale.'

for the crowd, Frollo 'conducts' others instead of attracting their attention. In the mass scene, he directs the movements of his flock, and during the tavern scene and his pas de deux with the gipsy, he commands those of his unsuspecting or helpless partners. Thus, Petit visualizes Frollo's influence on the fate of other protagonists in the novel.

Hugo's philosophically-minded archdeacon is a difficult protagonist for a ballet, and his intellectualism gets lost in Petit's work. Unlike in some ballet versions, Petit's Frollo is not visibly older than Phoebus. One is a radiant, the other a dark pole, which is emphasized by the colours of their costumes,[18] but there are clear parallels between them. Both represent a higher – secular and religious – authority and are universally respected. As in the novel, Phoebus lives his passions, whereas Frollo has to repress them. In the tavern scene, Frollo literally becomes the captain's shadow or negative: Frollo is dressed in black with a large light cross on his chest, whereas Phoebus wears a light top with a black cross.

In the novel, the 36-year-old Frollo is described as follows: 'il était chauve; à peine avait-il aux tempes quelques touffes de cheveux rares et déjà gris; son front large et haut commençait à se creuser de rides' (*NDP* 64). In the ballet, Frollo is no longer the unattractive, prematurely withered opposite pole of Phoebus, but he seems as young and lively as the Captain. However, Esmeralda is repelled by his dark and chilling appearance, and his position does not allow him to hope for shared love. Petit endows him with magic powers which go beyond his alchemistic experiments in Hugo's work. His magically charged hands sometimes allow him to direct the movements of Esmeralda, Phoebus and Quasimodo. This might be linked to the fact that complex plans and intrigues are difficult to visualize in a ballet, whereas the supernatural influence on the movements of other protagonists is easier to represent.

[18] The colour symbolism partly corresponds to that in the novel, where the priest is always dressed in black, which is opposed to Phoebus's resplendent armour. Frollo, who wears white make-up in the ballet, is often as pale as marble in the novel.

In the novel, Frollo is repeatedly compared to stones and statues. Frollo, 'cette statue qui marchait, cet homme pétrifié' (*NDP* 288), is 'plus immobile que la statue du cardinal Bertrand' (*NDP* 287) and 'glacial comme une statue de sépulcre' (*NDP* 334). The crowd takes him for 'un des évêques de marbre, agenouillés sur les pierres sépulcrales du chœur, qui s'était levé et qui venait recevoir au seuil de la tombe celle qui allait mourir' (*NDP* 345). His confrontation with Phoebus is described as follows: 'C'était quelque chose du combat de Don Juan et de la statue.' (*NDP* 289). In the ballet, Frollo is usually erect and stiff, and he sometimes resembles a statue. In the opening scene, for instance, he appears like a shadow and observes the election of the pope of fools in utter stillness and with folded hands. This menacing, sculptural pose appears several times in the course of the ballet. However, Frollo's dancing is very light and sharp, and he darts his legs through the air like knives. His black limbs make him resemble the spider to which he is compared in the novel. The mass scene shows Frollo as a demonic, universally respected priest before whom the crowd literally crawls. His angular movements recall Quasimodo's first solo, but unlike the hunchback, Frollo is not crooked and slow: he is very erect and quick. In the novel, the archdeacon is compared to a 'chauve-souris' and 'oiseau de nuit' (NDP 461, 351), his hand evokes a 'serre d'aigle' (*NDP* 288). In the ballet, he moves around with huge jumps and his arms and legs sometimes resemble wings.

In Petit's ballet, the priest becomes the choreographer of a large part of the action. One the one hand, he increasingly gains control over Esmeralda and Phoebus; on the other hand, he loses his initial command over Quasimodo as the hunchback begins to recognize his master's true nature. Since Petit introduces a choreographer figure, the ballet reflects his own art form, which evokes the presence of the writer Gringoire in Hugo's novel. Petit's Frollo partly replaces both Gringoire and the narrator who frequently reminds the readers that they are reading a novel. In the ballet, however, the illusion is not disrupted and the critical distance created by the narrator's comments gets lost.

Unlike in previous adaptations of the novel – including Hugo's own opera libretto – the simple-minded libertine Phoebus is not transformed into a resplendent young lover in Petit's ballet. As in the novel, there is a marked discrepancy between Phoebus's dazzling external appearance and his true identity. The latter is mirrored in his soldiers who cruelly mistreat Quasimodo and whose helmets and kneepads make them appear massive and almost inhuman. As in the novel, the protagonists of the ballet change due to their interaction with other characters, which becomes obvious in their movement style. Petit created a highly original pas de deux between the ballerina and the hunchback which visualizes the growing trust between the two. Due to the extreme difficulty of dancing a pas de deux featuring lifts and pirouettes with a contracted shoulder, the dancer occasionally has to straighten up. Chantal Poupard interprets this as an effect of the hunchback's passion: according to her, Esmeralda's linear aesthetic affects the hunchback's angular style.[19] Esmeralda, in turn, imitates Quasimodo's crooked posture, probably out of sympathy for him. Quasimodo and Esmeralda's parallel movements in this scene reveal the kinship between the two outsiders. Petit's gipsy does not treat Quasimodo with the disgust that Hugo's young girl can never really overcome. Quasimodo is not as ugly and crippled as in the novel – in spite of the lowered head and the contracted shoulder, the dancer's trained body remains perceptible, and the deformation of the face is only hinted at through make-up.[20] Unlike in Hugo's work, their interaction contains intense body contact: in a ballet, a spiritual or emotional rapprochement is usually transposed into a physical one. Nothing indicates that the growing affection between the two outsiders is motivated by anything more than brotherly compassion. At the end of the pas de deux,

[19] Cf. Poupard, p. 217.

[20] Vgl. Roland Petit in Claude Fléouter, 'Entretien avec Roland Petit: "J'ai voulu faire de *Notre-Dame de Paris* un grand ballet avec du souffle et du fantastique"', *Le Monde*, 11 December 1965, on Quasimodo: 'Je l'interprète comme un type normal qui a un complexe parce qu'il a eu un accident. Je n'en fais pas un monstre avec des cheveux rouges, un masque à la manière de Fantômas et de fausses mains avec des poils dessus.'

Quasimodo straightens up completely and seems to invoke heaven with outstretched arms. As Frollo is about to enter, his body contracts again and he seems to suffer from violent cramps, which might indicate the archdeacon's evil influence.

Frollo's negative effect on Esmeralda becomes apparent in the following nightmare-like scene in which he manipulates the gipsy's movements through his magic powers. At first, Esmeralda revolts against her fate and tries to flee with abrupt jumps, but in the end, she seems completely broken and hangs lifelessly in the arms of the priest who kisses and beats her. She fights against his first kiss, but eventually becomes a mere puppet in Frollo's hand.

The ballet contains various choreographic and musical leitmotifs which help to tell the story and create links between scenes. Several characters have a musical theme which characterizes them, for instance Phoebus's martial march music which is accompanied by corresponding military choreography. The music of Esmeralda's pas de deux with Quasimodo reappears when the hunchback descends the dead Esmeralda from the gibbet and embraces her. Thus, it accompanies the beginning and the brutal end of their relationship. Both Frollo and Esmeralda repeatedly touch their own neck with a strangling gesture, which foreshadows their death through suffocation. Throughout the ballet, Quasimodo frequently pushes down his right shoulder in order to assume a straighter posture. Petit regularly uses circular formations, especially around the outsiders Esmeralda and Quasimodo: in addition to the circles formed by curious spectators, there are threatening circles, for instance when the beggars surround Esmeralda or when the soldiers thrash Quasimodo.

Some situations in the ballet mirror each other, for instance the beggar scenes in the first and second act. During the second beggar scene, Esmeralda dances a desperate variation which reflects her first performance in the midst of an admiring crowd. As in the novel,[21] her

[21] Cf. *NDP* 308: 'aux yeux de tous, la bohémienne, cette ravissante danseuse qui avait tant de fois ébloui les passants de sa grâce, ne fut plus qu'une effroyable stryge'.

audience no longer delights in her grace as they did in her first solo, but they push her towards her doom. In the second scene, the beggars and Frollo in their black costumes resemble a host of spiders waiting for the fly Esmeralda, a metaphor that pervades the novel. Hugo's Frollo perceives himself as a spider that will destroy the helpless fly Esmeralda, but also as a fly that will be broken by the mistakes of his former life.

Petit not only visualized the metaphors in Hugo's novel, but he also took up some choreographic elements in the source, for instance Quasimodo's 'dance' with his bells. In the novel *Notre-Dame de Paris*, Quasimodo's ringing of the bells is described as follows:

> Tout à coup la frénésie de la cloche le gagnait; son regard devenait extraordinaire; il attendait le bourdon au passage, comme l'araignée attend la mouche, et se jetait brusquement sur lui à corps perdu. Alors, suspendu sur l'abîme, lancé dans le balancement formidable de la cloche, il saisissait le monstre d'airain aux oreillettes, l'étreignait de ses deux genoux, l'éperonnait de ses deux talons, et redoublait de tout le choc et de tout le poids de son corps la furie de la volée. Cependant la tour vacillait; lui, criait et grinçait des dents, ses cheveux roux se hérissaient, sa poitrine faisait le bruit d'un soufflet de forge, son œil jetait des flammes, la cloche monstrueuse hennissait toute haletante sous lui; et alors ce n'était plus ni le bourdon de Notre-Dame ni Quasimodo: c'était un rêve, un tourbillon, une tempête; le vertige à cheval sur le bruit, un esprit cramponné à une croupe volante; un étrange centaure moitié homme, moitié cloche; une espèce d'Astolphe horrible, emporté sur un prodigieux hippogriffe de bronze vivant. (*NDP* 153)

As the curtain rises for the second act of Petit's ballet, the audience sees the interior of the bell tower in which two bells swing. Quasimodo grabs the larger bell and seems to dance with it in a scene that shows the hunchback's beauty and sublimity. In the following pas de deux with Esmeralda, Petit visualised Hugo's idea that Quasimodo loves his new friend like or instead of his bells: as he sways her from side to side, both resemble a human bell.

Typically for Petit, the corps de ballet dancers are less a group of individuals than a 'chorus' which comments on the action. The choreographer also uses the ensemble scenes to create various moods and 'tableaux', which recalls the numerous long descriptions of scenery and people in the novel.[22] In the ballet, the spectator directly sees and hears the events which are vividly depicted by Hugo's narrator. Petit's opening transposes the noise and movement of the crowd at the beginning of the novel. Instead of grimacing extravagantly as in the source, Petit's contestants for the title of pope of fools compete in grotesque dances. Their angular, abrupt and bizarre soli deviate considerably from any traditional ballet aesthetic. When Quasimodo appears, the ensemble dancers imitate his cramped movements and meander around him like a multi-coloured millipede. They repeatedly form circular patterns which recall the rosettas of the cathedral and Hugo's comparison of the colourful crowd with a kaleidoscope: 'Qu'on se représente tous ces mascarons du Pont Neuf, ces cauchemars pétrifiés sous la main de Germain Pilon, prenant vie et souffle, et venant tour à tour vous regarder en face avec des yeux ardents; tous les masques du carnaval de Venise se succédant à votre lorgnette; en un mot, un kaléidoscope humain.' (*NDP* 49).

In the mass scene, the dancers writhe in grotesque prayer poses, which might be an attempt to 'translate' the novel's irony and represent the crowd's superstition. The dancers blindly

[22] Holdheim, for instance, evokes 'die Aneinanderreihung von Tableaus' ('the sequence of tableaux') in the novel. Holdheim, p. 38. The succession of expressive and spectacular tableaux in Petit's ballet and his painterly composition of the group dancers evoke the eighteenth-century 'ballet d'action' by ballet masters such as Jean-Georges Noverre. Edward Nye has pointed out that Noverre's ballets, which consisted of quick sequences of pictorial tableaux, had cinematic qualities. These can also be found in many of Roland Petit's works. Cf. Edward Nye, *Mime, music and drama on the eighteenth-century stage: The ballet d'action* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011), p. 178.

follow the priest and execute excessive gestures of repentance; they might reflect and amplify Frollo's nervousness and feelings of guilt.

The next ensemble scene is particularly close to the novel. After her first solo, Esmeralda crosses the nocturnal Paris, pursued by Quasimodo. Like Hugo's Gringoire, she loses her way and is horrified by the threatening appearance of increasing numbers of false cripples.[23] Unlike in Hugo, they have no accessories and do not visibly differ in their handicaps. The moving 'masses ambulantes' (*NDP* 80) seem to form a flood of fire: all the bandits are dressed in bright red hooded cloaks and the stage is bathed in red light, which corresponds to the red light Gringoire sees in the novel. The dancers literally creep out of the soil since they emerge from holes in the stage, like Hugo's 'limaces après la pluie' (*NDP* 81). Instead of the multilingual cries of Hugo's beggars, the choir sings a single syllable which becomes increasingly loud and menacing. As in the novel, the beggars hardly seem human: their faces remain invisible and they form patterns in which they appear as creatures with multiple heads and numerous limbs. The continually moving crowd with its indistinguishable parts recall Hugo's description of the 'cour des miracles':

> Des feux, autour desquels fourmillaient des groupes étranges, y brillaient çà et là. Tout cela allait, venait, criait. […] Les mains, les têtes de cette foule, noires sur le fond lumineux, y découpaient mille gestes bizarres. Par moments, […] on pouvait voir passer un chien qui ressemblait à un homme, un homme qui ressemblait à un chien. Les limites des races et des espèces semblaient s'effacer dans cette cité comme dans un pandémonium. Hommes, femmes, bêtes, âge, sexe, santé, maladie, tout semblait être en commun parmi ce peuple; tout allait ensemble, mêlé, confondu, superposé; chacun y participait de tout. (*NDP* 82)

[23] In contrast, Hugo's Esmeralda is perfectly familiar with the maze of streets and the 'cour des miracles' and she entertains friendly relations with the bandits.

Petit's sense of pictorial composition becomes particularly obvious in the last pose of this original group scene in which Quasimodo interposes himself between Esmeralda and the beggars. The robbers, who form a pyramid shape, resemble a flame which threatens to devour Esmeralda. This pattern is later repeated when the crowd attacks the cathedral.

In the tavern scene, the ensemble helps to characterize Phoebus who dances enthusiastically with a group of prostitutes before Esmeralda's eyes. The excitement in the ensemble creates an erotically charged atmosphere which mirrors Phoebus's mood. After Frollo's thrust of the dagger, the women move around Phoebus's body like pumping May beetles. Once again, the corps de ballet dancers do not appear as individuals, but they express a collective emotion.

The trial scene features groups of dignitaries with colossal hats and nuns with huge bonnets who appear de-humanized due to the invisibility of their faces. This recalls the inhumanity of the representatives of the secular and religious authority in the novel, who are described with animal metaphors.[24] Their disproportionate headgear might imply that they neither see nor hear the truth, like the deaf Maître Florian during Quasimodo's trial in the novel. Unlike in Hugo's work, Frollo personally leads Esmeralda's trial, which visualizes his and the church's hidden power over her fate in the novel. The trial is a 'performance within the performance' in which Frollo is the master of ceremonies. Unlike in the novel in which many protagonists play-act, Frollo is the only 'actor' in the ballet, since he alone is obliged to hide his feelings and deeds.

The last tableaux are highly theatrical: in a scene which could either be a nightmare of Esmeralda or a vision staged by Frollo, the priest, like a conjurer, suddenly reveals Phoebus who had been hidden behind a piece of cloth. Following a hand movement from Frollo, the

[24] Cf. for instance *NDP* 44: 'Le bailli du Palais était une espèce de magistrat amphibie, une sorte de chauve-souris de l'ordre judiciaire, tenant à la fois du rat et de l'oiseau, du juge et du soldat.' During the trial, Gringoire calls the masters of requests, clerk, advocate and proctor 'moutons', 'sanglier', 'crocodile', 'gros chat noir' (*NDP*, 302).

knight collapses and his body rolls down the stairs, tele-guided by Frollo's outstretched arm. This scene is followed by the attack on the cathedral: wads of smoke evoke the molten lead which Quasimodo pours onto the assailants. They momentarily break down and assume various bent poses, thus forming a bizarre tableau. Shortly after, however, they reassemble in the shape of a wedge, as if they wanted to demolish the portal. Frollo eventually relinquishes Esmeralda, and she is hanged while Quasimodo strangles Frollo. As in the novel, the gipsy and the priest die simultaneously, but unlike in Hugo, they also expire close to each other in nearly the same way. A moment later, the corps de ballet collapses in order to free the view on the final scene, Quasimodo's grief over Esmeralda's death. This ending, which evokes their 'marriage' in Hugo's novel, recalls contemporary *Romeo and Juliet* ballets by choreographers such as John Cranko (1962) or Kenneth MacMillan (1965). Similarly to Romeo in both versions, Quasimodo hardly seems to believe that his beloved is dead and throws her lifeless arms around his neck.

Roland Petit transformed Victor Hugo's panorama of a Medieval Paris into a modern love story which revolves around some key themes that pervade his works: an outsider's love for a beautiful woman, erotic transgression and fatal passion. The love story is isolated from the larger social context and becomes the centre of attention. The rather stereotypical protagonists of the novel are further simplified; thus, the inner conflict of the intellectual Frollo becomes a mere drama of jealousy.

Petit nonetheless takes up many elements in the source and creates an innovative ballet which comments on the novel. He is less interested in the detailed transposition of its action than the hidden significance of the events. Through the use of visual and acoustic means, the ballet brings out the underlying symbolism in the literary source, for instance the meaning of colours in the novel (Frollo's darkness versus Phoebus's splendour, the menacing red colour

associated with the beggars, the chaotically colourful and turbulent crowd which resembles a kaleidoscope image), Esmeralda's martyrdom, and the intimate connection between Quasimodo and Notre-Dame de Paris. By placing the cathedral and the hunchback that had been marginalized or eliminated in previous ballet versions at the centre of the ballet, he managed to reveal the hidden movement in one and the humanity and complexity in the other. Petit found innovative ways of characterizing protagonists and situations choreographically in a way linguistic description could not. The ensemble scenes directly convey the atmosphere depicted in the novel, and the corps de ballet dancers sometimes express a collective emotion which comments on the action. Moreover, the choreographer reveals and highlights the fact that in the novel, protagonists often express themselves through non-linguistic means: thus, Esmeralda's personality is revealed in her dance and her body language, from her gesture of pity towards Quasimodo to her love 'pantomime' with Phoebus in the tavern.[25] The grandeur of the nearly mute foundling becomes apparent when he rings his bells and dances with them, and in his actions, for instance when he saves Esmeralda[26] and defends the cathedral. The taciturn archdeacon Frollo literally becomes the bird of prey that hovers above the gipsy and the spider that catches her in his web. Even though he is the 'choreographer' of a part of the action, it is the hunchback – originally danced by the choreographer Petit himself – who gives the 'spectacle' its ending. Quasimodo, who opens and closes both acts – first carrying the

[25] Even though this scene contains speech, the narrator emphasizes that the words matter little in a conversation between lovers, in which body language is more important.

[26] Cf. *NDP* 349, after Quasimodo's rescue of Esmeralda: 'Alors les femmes riaient et pleuraient, la foule trépignait d'enthousiasme, car en ce moment-là Quasimodo avait vraiment sa beauté. Il était beau, lui, cet orphelin, cet enfant trouvé, ce rebut, il se sentait auguste et fort, il regardait en face cette société dont il était banni, et dans laquelle il intervenait si puissamment, cette justice humaine à laquelle il avait arraché sa proie, tous ces tigres forcés de mâcher à vide, ces sbires, ces juges, ces bourreaux, toute cette force du roi qu'il venait de briser, lui infime, avec la force de Dieu.'

living Esmeralda, then carrying her corpse away from the murderous crowd – is undoubtedly the ballet's focal point. This was probably the only time in the history of dance that a deformed character was truly the main protagonist of an evening-length ballet. It might also be the first ballet named after a building. At the heart of the ballet, the hunchback's pas de deux with the bells, which remains a scene of striking originality, most powerfully reveals the links between humans and architecture which tie together the multiple threads of Hugo's novel.