Thackeray, William Makepeace
Calcutta 1841 – 1863 London

Flore et Zephyr Ballet mythologique Dedié à [vignette of Marie Taglioni as Flore] par Théophile Wagstaff [pseudonym of Thackeray; this title printed on the upper wrapper].


FOLIO (375 × 270 mm wrapper, 340 × 245 mm mounts), suite of eight lithographs on india paper applied to mounts having printed captions, plus vignette of the ballerina Marie Taglioni as Flore printed on upper wrapper, all the prints drawn by Thackeray, signed with his monogram W.T. (or T.W., denoting the fictitious Théophile Wagstaff), and lithographed by Edward Morton, the vignette coloured and the other plates lightly tinted, the eight plates hinged on guards, interleaved, original tan paper wrappers bound in (lower wrapper is unprinted).

Two unrelated drawings by Thackeray mounted on a card are inserted (see below).


Occasional light spotting on mounts only, tiny ink spots on upper wrapper, generally a well-preserved copy. Joints of binding splitting, corners and edges worn and abraded.

BINDING nineteenth-century brown half-morocco portfolio, stamped on the front free-endpaper Bound by Zaehnsdorf.

ONLY EDITION of Thackeray’s first publication, a volume of caricatures of a ballet divertissement in two acts performed during April and May 1833 in the King’s Theatre in the Haymarket, London, with the celebrated Marie Taglioni dancing the rôle of Flore and her partner of that year, Monsieur Albert (François Decombe), that of Zéphyr. A modern critic describes it as ‘a work of no small consequence’, which ‘establishes precedents and suggests patterns for most of

Thackeray’s first publication, a volume of caricatures inspired by the ballet ‘Flore et Zéphyr’, in which Thackeray detected ‘disturbing sexual innuendo and license’ (Muresianu). Reduced from 373 × 270 mm
Thackeray’s later major works’.

The so-called ‘Anacreontic’ ballet *Flore et Zéphyr* is the principal work of the choreographer Charles-Louis Didelot (1767–1837) and seems to have been one of the first ballets in which dancers performed on pointe. Written originally as one act of seven scenes, it was first staged in 1796 in London with Marie Rose Paul as Flore and Didelot himself as Zéphyr. The ballet was revived by Didelot in the Paris Opéra on 12 December 1815, as a two-act production (new music by Frédéric-Marc-Antoine Venua and added airs by Pierre-Louis Hus-Desforges and François-Charlemagne Lefebure), and remained in the repertoire of the Opéra until 8 March 1826, with 164 performances given to that date.

After a short rest, *Flore et Zéphyr* was revived in June 1830 in the King’s Theatre in the Haymarket, London (five performances), with Marie Taglioni as Flore and Antoine-Louis Coulon as Zéphyr. Two performances featuring Taglioni and the veteran Albert were then given in London during April 1831 and four performances during April–May 1833; it is supposed that Thackeray attended one of the latter.

On 4 May 1833, a satirical review of the ballet appeared in the *National Standard*, the first number of that journal published under Thackeray’s editorship. His caricatures were published in the spring of 1836 without text apart from the title printed on the wrapper (transcribed above) and captions printed on the mounts. The caricatures document a production in long Romantic ballet skirts and emphasise the illusion of flying obtained by elaborate stage machinery (counter-weighted wires and corsets).

The first six of the eight plates depict the ballet: The Dance making its offerings at the altar of Harmony (‘La Danse fait ses offrandes sur l’autel de l’Harmonie’); The innocent games of Zéphyr and Flore (‘Jeux Innocents de Zéphyr et Flore’); Flore laments Zéphyr’s absence (‘Flore déplore l’absence de Zéphyr’); In a pas-seul,

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Zéphyr expresses his extreme despair (‘Dans un pas-seul il exprime son extrême désespoir’); Sad and dejected, Zéphyr is unmoved by the charms of the nymphs (‘Triste et abattu. Les séductions des Nymphes le tentent en vain’); The reconciliation of Flore and Zéphyr (‘Réconciliation de Flore et Zéphyr’). The last two prints are of scenes after the curtain has fallen: Flore’s retreat (‘La Retraite de Flore’), showing Taglioni, wrapped in a shawl, receiving the adoration of a vulgar young swell and a stout middle-aged man; and The relaxation of Zéphyr (‘Les Délassements de Zéphyr’), depicting the forty-six year old Albert consoling himself with a pint of porter and a pinch of snuff.

The prints were issued uncoloured (copy in British Library, shelfmark C 59 h2) and lightly tinted (as here). The collector H.S. Van Duzer asserted that his uncoloured copy represented the ‘first issue’, a point sustained by the high price ($1900) which Jerome Kern paid for it in the Van Duzer sale (Anderson Galleries, New York, 6 February 1922, lot 93), if not by subsequent bibliographers. (In the Kern sale, in Anderson Galleries, 23 January 1929, the copy was resold for $2900.) Van Duzer reported his copy to be ‘as large or larger than any other copy we have examined’, its wrapper measuring 14 ¼ × 10 ¾ inches and plates 13 ¼ × 9 ¾ inches. The wrapper of our copy is of equal height, but ½ inch narrower; the plates of our copy measure 13 ¼ × 9 ¾ inches. In comparison, the plates of the highly regarded coloured copy in the Morris Parrish collection (now Princeton University) are said to measure 13 3/16 × 9 9/16 inches, and the plates of the Pierpont Morgan Library copy 12 ¾ × 9 ¾ inches.

Two drawings associated with the prints survive in the Edward FitzGerald scrapbook. Inserted in our copy are two unrelated drawings, both convincingly ascribed to Thackeray. One, a rapid sketch executed in pen and ink (176 × 120 mm sheet), depicts a female figure wearing a coronet, shown in profile, with a crowd of onlookers glimpsed through an open door; it very probably is a theatrical scene. The other drawing, executed in pencil and pen and ink heightened with coloured wash and ink (96 × 89 mm sheet), depicts a man in theatrical costume (broad-brimmed hat and sword).

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