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Dance and Nation in Canadian Literature**

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**Never Was Such a Race of Dancers:  
Dance and Nation in Canadian Literature**

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## Abstract

This dissertation is an interdisciplinary project that brings dance studies to bear on a representative sampling of early Canadian novels, including Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1769), Rosanna Leprohon's *Antoinette de Mirecourt* (1864), William Kirby's *The Golden Dog* (1877), John Richardson's *Wacousta* (1832), Sara Jeannette Duncan's *A Daughter of Today* (1894), and L.M. Montgomery's *Anne* and *Emily* series, as well as *The Blue Castle* (1909-27).

The main argument of the dissertation is that the scenes and language of various forms of dance in these novels can be read as markers of textual concern with colonial and national health, whether physical, mental, or moral. The analysis is based on archival and theoretical investigation of various forms of dance (British social dance, Native dance, French court ballet, Romantic ballet, Delsartian and modern dance) including their contemporary cultural and ideological significance.

At the broadest level, this dissertation demonstrates how the relatively new field of dance studies – the theoretical and critical study of dance in its various forms and functions – can enrich literary criticism, in this case the study of early Canadian literary texts. The close analysis of dance in literature, when allied with an understanding of the particular dances themselves, can produce startling new avenues of literary investigation.

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## Introduction

In *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance* (1995), Ellen Goellner and Jacqueline Shea Murphy ask, “why is it that no one in English departments ever talks about dance...especially with all the discussion of gender, bodies, fluidity, performance, sexuality, popular culture, and multiculturalism animating literary studies?” (ix). They argue that the answer is found in the ways that dance and literature are “conventionally regarded by their critics as arts that may share metaphorical connections but that are fundamentally remote from each other” (xii). At the broadest level, this dissertation demonstrates how the relatively new field of dance studies – the theoretical and critical study of dance in its various forms and functions – can enrich literary criticism, in this case the study of early Canadian literary texts. As will be seen in this study of how dance functions to figure debates about colonial and national health, the close analysis of dance in literature, when allied with an understanding of the particular dances themselves, can produce startling new avenues of literary investigation.

In the fifteen years since Goellner and Murphy issued their demand for a scholarly examination of the role(s) of dance in literature, the field – albeit relatively new – is burgeoning. While the most common literary treatments of dance involve the reading of social dance in pre-twentieth-century texts such as those by Philip Sidney, William Shakespeare, and particularly Jane Austen, the literature of many countries is being observed in this new light. Examinations of American, German, Russian, Italian, and French literature are being added to the British research, and while most of the research focuses on canonical authors such as Charles Baudelaire and Johann Wolfgang Goethe, some interesting work is also being done on modernism and dance, particularly in Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, and

William Butler Yeats.<sup>1</sup>

This work primarily examines textualized dance from a perspective rooted in cultural studies, looking at how representations of dance reflect the assumptions of the text and its culture. While many arguments focus largely on dance as an expression of desire, some research is being conducted into how readings of dance can evoke clearer understandings of gender roles, racial fears, and political attitudes in the literature. This reading is not simply a thematic treatment of dance in the texts but involves a semiotic reading of the dance itself and of its figuration within the text. Working within dance studies to understand the historical and cultural production of dance, its specific functions, and various attitudes towards it, the literary researcher can find new tools with which to explore the texts.

Using such tools, this dissertation examines several canonical works of Canadian literature in order to consider the overlooked dance references in these texts; it will consider dance-related moments in the texts, from actual depictions of dancing, to the discussion of more generalized bodily movement, and even the language and metaphors of dance. It begins in pre-Confederation Canada with the first North American novel, *The History of Emily Montague* (1769), by Frances Brooke, and *Antoinette de Mirecourt, or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* (1864), by Rosanna Leprohon, in order to read the significance of British social dance in the colony of Canada. Once we have determined how integral this kind of dancing is in British Canada, we will turn to an English-Canadian examination of French

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Suzanne Braswell, "An Aesthetics of Movement: Baudelaire, Poetic Renewal, and the Invitation of Dance"; Ingrid Broszeit-Rieger, "Practice and Theory of Dance in Goethe's *Meister*"; Rishona Zimring, "The Dangerous Art Where One Slip Means Death: Dance and the Literary Imagination in Interwar Britain"; Langdon Elsbree, "Pillars of Flame By Night: The Dance Motif in D.H. Lawrence's Poetry"; Mark Kinkead-Weekes, "Dance in Yeats, Lawrence, Eliot, and Williams."

dancing, in William Kirby's *The Golden Dog* (1877); in this novel, set just before the Conquest, the imagery of French court ballet is connected to the villainess of the text in intriguing ways. French dancing is not the only source of anxiety for the British colony, however, and this section will be completed by turning to John Richardson's *Wacousta* (1832) in order to explore the British perception of frightening Native dancing. The second section moves forward in time to consider the young nation of Canada: Sara Jeannette Duncan's *A Daughter of Today* (1894) highlights contemporary concerns about ballet and stage performance in general, while L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), *Emily* series (1923-1927), and *The Blue Castle* (1926) argue for the freeing potential of modern dance.

Through the survey of these texts, chosen not only for their illustrative use of dance but also for their canonical status, we will see that not only does dance play a significant role in the literary work, but that it plays a consistent one: dance is used by these authors as a signifier of national health, whether physical, mental, or moral. Although the understanding of dance changes as the dance form itself changes through time, public opinion approves or disapproves of movement in recurrent patterns. Because dancing is intrinsically linked with the body, and often with sexual display, arguments of appropriate and inappropriate movement abound; whom one dances with is also as important as how one dances. Theatrical dancing as a public performance, as opposed to sanctioned social dancing, is another issue within these texts. In this dissertation, I argue that the authors examined use dance as a means to discuss the creation of a healthy Canada; reading dance in these texts is a significant, and completely overlooked, method of analysis in Canadian literary criticism.

## Dance Studies

Dance studies did not emerge as a distinct field within academia until the 1960s and 1970s, but its roots are much older. Alexandra Carter, in *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader* (1998), points out that in modern Western history, dance has been “studied” since the Renaissance, as it “was not only practised but also studied from various perspectives such as its social function; its anatomical basis; its educational value; the problems and potential of its aesthetics and the theoretical basis of its performance technique” (1). The renowned dance theorist Janet Adshead agrees, noting that although “descriptive texts on dance were written earlier (e.g., that of Arbeau, 1588), it is not until the seventeenth century that one finds substantial evidence of structured observation and analysis of dance preserved in writing...The writings of the dancing masters and dance theorists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries represent some of the earliest attempts to make sense of the dance” (16).

These early dance critics had to agree on terminology, and began to create a tentative system for analyzing and recording movement. John Weaver published his dance theory in *Anatomical and Mechanical Lectures Upon Dancing* (1721) in a form of dance theory that remains current, focused on “anatomical, physiological, kinesiological and biomechanical analyses of human movement” (Adshead 18). Jean-Georges Noverre attempted to develop a theory of dance as performance in an artistic context in his *Letters on Dancing and Ballets* (1803); François Delsarte’s movement theories in the late nineteenth century, on the other hand, examined the link between emotion and movement. Although this theoretical tradition was sporadic, and the “Victorian moral backlash against dancing prohibited the development of a solid body of serious literature” (Carter 1), by the beginning of the twentieth century, embryonic structures of dance theory were in place.

Unfortunately, once dance studies were placed within the Physical Education departments of universities and colleges in the first half of the twentieth century (a result of the Delsarte-derived understanding of dance as therapeutic), the field had to struggle to be taken seriously. Goellner and Murphy note that since it has been “long viewed as unintellectual, intuitive, and uncritically expressive, dance did not easily emerge as a scholarly discipline within the text-centered university, in part due to how dance was introduced to university curricula” (3). Even as dance studies successfully established an institutional grounding outside Physical Education, “scholarly prejudices against theoretical considerations of dance continued to hinder development of the field” (Goellner and Murphy 4). It prevailed, however, through the early 1960s and 1970s in North America and England, and “though marginalized, the oddity of dance studies did somehow flourish within the walls of academe, and several Canadian universities started offering dance majors with a theoretical component. The study of dance integrated knowledge and expertise from the related fields of cultural studies, anthropology, aesthetics, sociology, and politics” (Tembeck viii).

For the first few decades of dance studies, the practice was “largely divided in its research methodologies between history, movement analysis, anthropology, and aesthetics” (Goellner and Murphy 2), but with critical works such as Susan Foster’s *Reading Dancing* (1986), which applies Roland Barthes’ physical and dynamic concept of textuality to choreographic works, the critical field began to be approached from many analytical perspectives, “including those of gender and semiotics; within anthropological, philosophical, psychoanalytical and sociological frameworks” (Carter 2). Societies were established to promote research in dance, such as the American Congress on Research in Dance in 1967, the Society of Dance History Scholars in 1978 and the Society for Dance Research in 1982;

journals such as *Dance Studies* and *Dance Research* have broadened the subject matter of the field.

Austen scholars were among the first to venture to merge dance and literary study; Langdon Elsbree and Celia Easton, in particular, noted the impact of dance in Austen's novels, and used the burgeoning research in historical dance to help read the texts. Shakespearean critics such as Sujata Iyengar and Miltonists such as Blair Hoxby found dance a useful tool for discussion, but it was in the early 1980s that various lines of literary criticism "began moving into areas that intersected with dance: literary critics had adopted deconstructionist approaches that understood meaning and identity to be, as they are in dance, always in flux or in motion, and French feminist notions of *écriture féminine* had based an understanding of writing on the rhythms and responses of a heralded female body" (Goellner and Murphy 1). Literary and cultural studies began to focus on representations of "the body" as a way of interpreting texts, questioning categories of gender, race, and performance. The growth of film and cultural studies demonstrated that non-written "texts" such as dance could be viable material for critical analysis. By the 1990s, the study of dance with and within a text could "enliven discussions of the academy's new historicisms, poststructuralisms, gender and queer theories, multiculturalisms, film and performance studies, and popular culture studies" (Goellner and Murphy 1).

For example, Suzanne Braswell's *Dance, Movement, and the Emergence of a Modernist Poetics: Balzac, Mallarmé, Claudel, Valéry, and Cendrars* (2001) examines the role and impact of danced movement on poetic thought and form, analyzing how the poets' reflection on dance "challenges these authors to redefine and expand the poetic dimensions of prose while infusing poetic form with dynamism" (1). Cheryl Wilson, in "Choreography and

Counterpoint: Dance and Narrative in Nineteenth-Century British Women's Writing" (2005), argues that nineteenth-century British women writers used social dance forms as models for constructing their narratives; she does not merely close-read dance scenes to prove the cultural significance of dance, but "uses that cultural significance as a starting point from which to ask questions about the representational strategies employed by women writers and the ways in which the structural and thematic presence of dance promoted the communication of ideas between women writers and readers" (Wilson 3). Lisa Tatonetti's *From Ghost Dance to Grass Dance: Performance and Post-Indian Resistance in American Indian Literature* (2004) examines the ways American Indian authors have "adopted, resisted, revised, or rejected the figures of the 1890 Ghost Dance...in their constructions of Native identity" (1). Ingrid Reneau, in *Dancing the "Clearing" in African Diaspora Narratives* (2000), analyzes Paule Marshall's use of the circle dance, the Ringshout, in her novel *Praisesong for the Widow*, to understand how this ritual has historically provided African Americans with a means of maintaining a unified psyche in the New World.

### **Reading Dance in Canadian Literature**

There has been a distinct paucity of research conducted on dance in Canadian literature. Quite literally, with the exception of James Neufeld's superficial comparison of James Kudelka's narrative ballet *The Contract* and Miriam Toews' novel *A Complicated Kindness*, and Terry Goldie's discussion of homosexual possibilities in the dance scene in *As for Me and My House*, there is a compelling absence of articles, books, or dissertations involving dance and Canadian literature from any period, in any genre. This thesis considers the meanings of dance in texts ranging from the British colonial period through to the Confederation era; it examines how dance has been understood and figured textually as a means and as a marker of

strength and vigour, both individually and nationally.

As Adshead notes, in *Dance Analysis: Theory and Practice* (1994), every dance “is found in a particular cultural context just as, historically, it exists in a distinctive era and is made, performed and watched by specific, identifiable groups of people” (13). These factors are relevant in understanding the significance of any dance; the contextual knowledge of dance is valuable when reading its presence in a literary work. Sarah Davies Cordova, in *Paris Dances: Textual Choreographies in the Nineteenth-Century French Novel* (1999), notes that dance and literature are “two signifying practices motioning about their intent, moving in their configurations; two cultural processes that traduce and evoke their social historicity; pliable discursive bodies that blur and manifest the interstices of their constructions” (ix). An interdisciplinary approach allows the literary scholar to examine the intersections of culture and body. While dance scenes have occasionally been viewed by literary critics as a digression or interruption in the development of certain texts, Cordova notes that “the dancing can constitute an essential moment of the plot, serving as a site for narrative developments” (244). Instead of disturbing the narrative’s linearity, representations of dances and dancing bodies can make manifest issues of historical and cultural importance.

There is, of course, a difficulty in transferring scholarship of an art form depicting bodies in movement to an art form of words on the page; writers can only evoke images of dance in the text, while their readers must imaginatively recreate moving bodies in their minds. Literary scholarship, however, has done much with such thorny problems, particularly in regards to textual description of bodies. This dissertation is an attempt to further the communication between the printed word and the dancing body; the guiding assumption of this work is that dance is worth discussing in literary criticism, and that dance studies can

benefit scholarly research by illuminating texts in new and intriguing ways. I hope to answer questions about the changing depiction of gender in dance, the issue of morality in movement, and concerns about national health.

Beginning with canonical pre- and post-Confederation authors, the first three chapters of this dissertation explore the British perspective on the health of the colony as it is related to its dancing. I show the connections that were established between the moral, physical, and mental health of the dancers in the novels and the health of the newly emerging nation, and argue that related concerns about French and Native dancing played a significant role in justifications for British colonial rule. Indeed, foreign dances are seen as a corrupting danger to the colony and a sign that British rule is a necessity. The last two chapters look at two early Confederation-era texts, to see how this concern about health and the nation is codified still further, in texts that explore the dangers of ballet and the healthful arts of Delsarte.

The research has been conducted through close examination of the primary texts, as well as of archives of contemporary dance material and cultural artefacts such as diaries and periodicals. In each chapter, I discuss the specific dance systems from a historical perspective and then examine how dance is represented in each text. I draw on the wealth of material available on each of the forms of dance in the novels; for example, there are dozens of extant dance manuals from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that provide not only the steps of the dances, but also etiquette, courtship behaviour, and moral guidance. The same is true for the other forms of dance; there is a wide range of historical materials, from Italian and French engravings of court ballet, to eyewitness accounts of Native dancing, to whole librettos of Romantic ballet, and several manifestos of Delsartian dance, as well as a great deal of scholarly research available. With such a rich historical context, I focus on each author's use

of the language of dance in order to explore how contemporary cultural assumptions about dancing are revealed in, and in turn enrich, the literary narrative.

### **Part One: Pre-Confederation Dance**

This section considers the place of dance within the colony of Canada. It examines the nature of British social dance in England, and how it changes or remains the same in the colony, and how dancing is associated with the moral and physical health of the young territory. It then scrutinizes British concepts of French and Native dancing, to see how these other dance forms impact British ideas about the colony.

#### **Chapter One: “Never Was Such a Race of Dancers”: Creating the Colony through Dance in Frances Brooke and Rosanna Leprohon**

This chapter examines Frances Brooke’s *The History of Emily Montague* (1769) and Rosanna Leprohon’s *Antoinette de Mirecourt, or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* (1864) in the context of social dancing. It focuses on the nature of the education the heroine must undergo as she learns of courtship and marriage in the colony of Canada. As is the case for their counterparts in Britain during the same period, the heroines learn how to read their male partners through dance, an education which will prove far more important to their future marital happiness—and, by extension, to the domestic happiness and security of their community and nation—than any other educative process, and one which proves a difficult endeavour, fraught with misunderstandings, tension, and danger.

In this chapter, I explore the semiotics of dance literacy, in the context of British social dancing, as they are revealed in the dance encounters in both texts; for both novels, despite the almost hundred years between them, social dancing provides intricate clues for the heroines, which they ignore at their peril. In European culture of this period, dance was seen as a

primitive ritual of courtship which had been civilized through the proper implementation of social control. In order to learn the civilized rules of dance, one had to master more than steps and gestures; one of the most important aspects of social dancing was learning to read one's partner within the dance, since it would be through dance that a significant portion of his or her eligibility, compatibility, and character as a potential marriage partner could be determined.

The understanding of this social practice has been recently examined in literary studies. While focusing predominantly on a British context, most particularly on the novels of Jane Austen, the scholarly discussion regarding the importance of dance literacy within texts has been illuminating. Cheryl Wilson's excellent dissertation, "Choreography and Counterpoint: Dance and Narrative in Nineteenth-Century British Women's Writing" (2005), as well as articles such as "Dance, Physicality, and Social Mobility in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*" (2003), have proved very useful to this research, as has Karen Woods' "Dance in England Through a Study of Selected Eighteenth-Century Texts" (1995), and current investigations by Nora Stovel, Raymond Ricketts, and Celia Easton, on authors from T.S. Eliot to Daniel Defoe to Laurence Sterne.

This chapter applies this helpful discourse of British social dancing to the Canadian arena. I consider the potential dangers of ethnic mixing between French and British dancers, as social constraints are relaxed in the new colony; both authors argue for the necessity to establish traditional structures and social patterns, including those of social dancing. The novels make an explicit link between the proper conduct of social dancing and the healthful, orderly settlement of a new territory. British social dance itself is explained briefly, and then the focus is turned first to *The History of Emily Montague*, and finally to *Antoinette de*

*Mirecourt.*

## **Chapter Two: “She Trod the Earth With Dainty Feet”: French Court Ballet and Politics**

This chapter analyzes the representation of French court ballet in William Kirby’s *The Golden Dog* (1877), a device Kirby uses to instigate a political discussion regarding the necessity of British rule in New France. Through his depiction of Angélique des Meloises as a ballerina in one of France’s spectacular court ballets, more specifically as the dancer La Pompadour, the mistress of Louis XIV, Kirby is able to present a dramatic picture of the corrupt and feminine politics of the French. British narratives of French dance traditionally viewed it as dangerous, overly civilized, and effeminate, and of great concern when linked with politics. And French court ballet was inextricably linked with politics, as the kings deliberately used the spectacles as a means to display monarchical power, institutionalizing the dance and even dancing in the pieces themselves.

In this chapter, I focus on the ways in which Kirby links Angélique with ballet and political corruption throughout the novel, in terms of her movement, her body, and her relationship with the Intendant Bigot. Angélique becomes the symbol of the French obsession with ballet, spectacle, and female dancing – for Kirby, part of the reason the French deserve to lose Canada as a colony to the British. The treatment of French officials in the text is also considered: the corrupt Intendant and the noble Governor enact an interesting dynamic on the eve of British conquest. I also examine the position of Amélie de Repentigny and Colonel Pierre Philibert, the heroes of the text, and their relationship to “correct” British-style social dancing.

While this reading of the novel has never been considered before, there is a significant body of research in dance studies regarding French court ballet that has proved very useful.

Mark Franko's *Dance As Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body* (1993) and Margaret McGowan's *The Court Ballet of Louis XIII* (1991), in particular, are seminal works in a field that is now burgeoning with interpretations of gender, culture, and kingship as seen through the dance, such as Julia Prest's "Cross-Casting in French Court Ballet: Monstrous Aberration or Theatrical Convention?" (2003) and Sara Melzer and Kathryn Norberg's *From the Royal to the Republican Body: Incorporating the Political in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France* (1998). In addition, there are excellent resources regarding the position of the French king in the colony of New France, particularly Colin Coates' work in *Majesty in Canada: Essays on the Role of Royalty* (2006). These works have been beneficial to this reading of Angélique des Meloises and her place in the French community. Kirby makes very clear the political necessity of denying power to this aspiring and scheming young dancer, as he connects her to the opulent displays of the French court ballet.

### **Chapter Three: The Leaping Savage: The Pre-Confederation Native Body**

This chapter continues the investigation of British perceptions of dance in the colony, turning to Native dance in John Richardson's *Wacousta* (1832); the British, relying so heavily on social dance as a community bond, figure the Natives as the embodiment of raw, untamed, and primitive passion. I explore the depiction of the Native body as dependant on dance for communication, and as unable to speak correctly in any other form. This mode of communication is viewed by the British soldiers as inherently threatening, and one which must be civilized and controlled, if not entirely eliminated.

As in the previous chapters, the investigation of dance in the novel has been neglected, but there is a significant body of research, particularly postcolonial examinations of historical assumptions about Native bodies and the embodiment of the land, that has proved useful. In

dance studies, there is a flourishing discourse about Native dance, both historical and contemporary, with Gail Guthrie Valaskakis and Robin and Jill Ridington leading the discussion. While the Ridingtons primarily focus on the contemporary dance of the Dane-zaa and other Native North Americans, Valaskakis reaches back to first contact with the Europeans. She, along with other anthropologists and ethnographers, examines how early British and American assessments still colour contemporary perceptions of Native dance as primitive, violent, and meaningless.

This chapter uncovers the British perception of Native dancing in first-hand accounts, and applies the research to *Wacousta*; through these explorations into pre-Confederation mis/understandings of Native dance, the chapter illuminates some of the more obscure Native dance scenes in *Wacousta*. It analyzes the use of ceremonial ritual dance, along with other forms of dancing in the novel, to gain a better understanding of pre-Confederation British preconceptions and misconceptions about Native dance. This analysis of British dance highlights the colonial argument for civilized control of subject peoples.

## **Part Two: Dance in the Confederation**

This section considers the place of dance in the young nation. It argues that, although by the turn of the century, dance had changed significantly, the emphasis on dance as a moral (or immoral) force had not. Concerns about dangerous French dancing not only continue but grow stronger, while new ideas arrive from the United States regarding dance as a healthful occupation.

### **Chapter Four: Syphilis and the Sylph: The Ballet Chorus in *A Daughter of Today***

This chapter explores the contemporary discourse about ballet and disease in Sara Jeannette Duncan's 1894 novel, *A Daughter of Today*. The traditional interpretations of the body in

dance are investigated, as they connect with hysteria and health in the cultural imagination; I explain the rise of the Romantic ballet in the mid-1800s, and its subsequent decline and decay into music-hall entertainment, associated with accusations of prostitution and syphilis. Both the original French and the later British entertainment are considered as they relate to the heroine, Elfrida Bell, and her journey from America, through Paris, to London.

There is a rich field of research related to the Romantic ballet, particularly in regards to its dangerous aspects; critics such as Molly Engelhardt, in “Seeds of Discontent: Dancing Manias and Medical Inquiry in Nineteenth-Century British Literature and Culture” (2007), and Lynn Garafola, in *Rethinking the Sylph: New Perspectives on the Romantic Ballet* (1997), examine this connection, highlighting the hysteria seen in the plots of the ballets themselves, such as in *Giselle*, or *La Sylphide*, as well in contemporary literature, from social reformists and ballet critics alike. This research in dance studies allows an exploration of Duncan’s novel with an entirely new focus; Elfrida’s actions, her friends’ reactions, and even her bizarre death can be better understood through the lens of dance history.

As in the previous section, in which dance and a nation’s health are intricately connected, this novel works within a long-established tradition linking dance and disease. The discourse of the turn of the century deepened this connection, explicitly accusing ballet dancers of being both prostitutes and syphilis carriers. The sexualization of ballet, which has its roots in French theatrical dance, created several problems for its practitioners; as a New Woman novel, *A Daughter of Today* considers the personal and communal dangers of bodily freedom, here symbolized in the dance, both for and through young women.

## **Chapter Five: Nature’s Healing Dance: Isadora Duncan, Delsarte, and L. M.**

### **Montgomery**

This last chapter turns to the beginning of a new form of dance at the turn of the century: the rebellious new modern dance, which opposed the stagnant and sexually decadent ballet, inspired a liberating philosophy of movement. L. M. Montgomery's well-known fiction incorporates nature-based ideals about women's dancing, particularly those of Isadora Duncan; in this chapter, I examine *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), the *Emily* series (1923-1927), and *The Blue Castle* (1926). In these texts, images of Duncan's dance, as well as Delsartian theories of movement, echo strongly in the heroines' deep desire for a soulful and healthful form of movement.

Isadora Duncan is one of the iconic figures of modern dancing, and as progenitor of a new North American philosophy that changed a generation's consciousness, she has been extensively studied. There is a significant body of analysis from Duncan's own lifetime, from reviewers and critics such as Andre Levinson, to Duncan's own writing, including her autobiography and essays; Duncan research today focuses on everything from her teaching programmes to the gender issues inherent in her challenge to conventional America. Montgomery scholars, such as Irene Gammel, Mary Rubio, and Elizabeth Waterston, have done excellent work with Montgomery's texts, as well as with her journals; research such as Janice Fiamengo's work on Montgomery's nature, and Kylee-Ann Hingston's analysis of illness in the novels, have proved useful.

In this chapter, I explain both Duncan's style of dance and the Delsartian system of movement, which were readily available to Montgomery, as well as the connection to modern dance through Bliss Carman. Working in chronological order, I consider Anne Shirley, Emily Starr, and Valancy Stirling as the inheritors of this new cultural revolution of movement. Through the textual analysis of the novels, this chapter argues that contemporary ideas about

the freedom of dance and the inspirational power of nature are integral to Montgomery's texts, which explicitly present models of women's health—and by extension national health—through references to bodily liberation through dance.

In addressing works by Frances Brooke, Rosanna Leprohon, William Kirby, John Richardson, Sara Jeannette Duncan, and L. M. Montgomery, this dissertation will examine a canonical group of early Canadian texts from an original perspective, showing how the novels' concerns with stable government, social health, and the regulation of citizens' bodies can be read through the discourse of dance. This dissertation shows how dance is a potent, culturally variable signifier through which national, communal, and personal health and disease are figured. This research can contribute to knowledge of both Canadian literary studies and the growing body of dance studies, by undertaking a project of fusing the two in a way that has not yet been done. The dissertation focuses on the early history of Canadian novels not with the aim of providing an exhaustive work but in the hope that a discussion will be opened, and that other scholars will be stimulated to address the many questions still left to be answered.

## Chapter One

### “Never Was Such a Race of Dancers”: Creating the Colony through Dance

in Frances Brooke and Rosanna Leprohon

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain, dancing was “the single most popular and important recreation among any group of people. From the exclusive King’s Birthday Ball held annually at court to the dances held in provincial assembly rooms, people never tired of going to dances, even if only to drink tea or (for the men) play cards” (Wilson, “Choreography and Counterpoint” 1). Brought to Canada by European colonists, dance made its mark on a new landscape and in a new literature. The first novel written in North America, Frances Brooke’s *The History of Emily Montague* (1769) shows the significance of social dance in this new colony; a hundred years later, Rosanna Leprohon’s *Antoinette de Mirecourt, or Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing* (1864) echoes many of its concerns.

Both novels show the social importance of dance in a colony as a means of determining social hierarchy, an occasion for strengthening community ties, and the main event in the courtship process. In these novels of courtship and marriage in Canada, as in their counterparts in Britain during the same period, the heroine must undergo an education through dance, as she learns how to take her place in society and how to choose an appropriate partner. The process of choosing a husband in the new world becomes a significant endeavour in creating the colony itself. By examining the lessons that Emily Montague and Antoinette de Mirecourt glean from dance, we can see that learning to read their male partners in the arena of social dancing is more important to women’s future marital happiness than any other

educative process, and one which proves a difficult endeavour, fraught with misunderstandings, tension, and danger.

The roots of this form of social dance are to be discovered in Britain. While Mr. Darcy, in *Pride and Prejudice*, points out that “every savage can dance” (63), social dance in British culture played a complex role. The tacit theory of dance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw it as a civilizing structure employed upon a primitive form of expression. The image of dance as a solitary, liberating, self-expressive art form is a modern notion; prior to that, dance in Britain was embedded in cultural and social practice. Public dancing was seen as an opportunity to reinforce the patterns of society, functioning as a means of imposing social order and as part of an overarching practice that included etiquette, manners, and conduct.

The hierarchical nature of the country-dance has been well-documented in studies such as F.B. Pinion’s *A Jane Austen Companion* (1973); the steps and structure of the dances themselves mimic the order of the society as a whole. Partners form a set in two lines, men across from the women (hence the name *contre-danse*), with the leading lady “calling” or selecting the tune and the figure of the dance. This lady and her partner, at the top of the lines due to their social status, dance from the top to the bottom, followed by the next couple and so on, each couple moving to the top in turn. The set is over when all of the couples have danced down the line and the first couple have regained their position at the top. In this way, the country dance, like the court dances we will examine in the next chapter, became a social microcosm, replicating and reinforcing social hierarchy. In fact, virtually all the dances popular before the twentieth century – with the striking exception of the waltz in the late

nineteenth century – were group dances, as Myron Nadel notes, that “required clever organization for the movements of the entire group to be safely coordinated” (“Social Dance” 59). Inside the group, dancers were often paired in couples as well; as we shall see, this pairing becomes essential in a colonial setting.

The pairing of couples within a well-defined group lends itself well to courtship practices. Not only do the dancers indicate that they understand their place in society, and the pattern of the social order, but they also convey their own eligibility through their actions within that group. The country-dances of the eighteenth century, such as “Follow Your Lover,” “Haste to the Wedding,” “Cuckolds All in a Row,” “Sir Roger de Coverley,” and the “Boulanger,” as Nora Stovel explains, “clearly replicated mating dances, albeit in a formal, structured manner” (34). As the couples dance up and down the line, they separate and reunite, changing partners until they return to their original pairing, and sometimes even kissing each other. Because country-dances bring dancers into close physical contact, normally considered inappropriate, the dance is seen as an erotic event explicitly linked with courtship and marriage; the dancing is a socially sanctioned form of sexual display. The dance is, in fact, not simply a replication of the courtship process, but is also a significant means of participating in courtship. While going through a formal pattern of flirtation, the dancers are on display both to their partners and to the spectators in the ballroom.

Cecil Sharp, in *The Country Dance Book* (1909), asserts that “flirtation or coquetry lies at the root of nearly all its figures and evolutions” (10), and it is a flirtation designed to lead exclusively to marriage. Henry Tilney’s famous pronouncement links dance and marriage in *Northanger Abbey*:

I consider a country-dance as an emblem for marriage. Fidelity and complaisance are the principal duties of both; and those men who do not chuse to dance or marry themselves, have no business with the partners or wives of their neighbours...you will allow that in both, man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal; that in both, it is an engagement between man and woman, formed for the advantage of each; and that when once entered into, they belong exclusively to each other until the moment of dissolution; that it is their duty, each to endeavour to give the other no cause for wishing that he or she had bestowed themselves elsewhere, and their best interest to keep their own imaginations from wandering towards the perfections of their neighbours, or fancying that they should have been better off with anyone else.

(54)

It is worth considering some of the implications of Henry's argument in detail. First, he claims that "fidelity and complaisance" are the main duties of both dance and marriage; this statement seems to gloss over the dance's function as a means to attract a partner, focusing on the dance as a rehearsal of appropriate marriage behaviour. Of course, the performance of marital conduct within the dance would be an important guide for any potential partner, and Henry emphasizes the duties of loyalty and of pleasing one's partner in both the dance and the marriage.

Henry also stresses the dancers' place in the dance, or society, as a whole. He denounces those men who choose neither to dance nor marry, and points out that part of the contract of both entails staying focused on the partnership instead of looking to one's neighbours; however, he does not argue for ignoring or avoiding the other members of

society, but instructs the dancers to do their best to keep their partner happy so that they are not forced to contrast the imperfections of their pairing with those around them. Henry's articulation of the position of dance in society underscores the importance of being skilled in not only the art of pleasing one's partner, but also the art of choosing the correct one.

Learning to understand the discourse of movement, to read the dance, was a vital skill. One had to master more than steps and gestures; one of the most important aspects of social dancing was learning to read one's partner, since it would be through dance that a significant portion of his or her eligibility, compatibility, and character could be determined. In "The Manner of Reading: Semiotics of Dance" (2004), Molly Engelhardt claims that Jane Austen takes this mode of seeing dance as an essential part of a woman's education, and extends it further, by emphasizing the value of reading the dance. Engelhardt's feminist rhetoric focuses on the centrality of women "as planners, information-holders, interpreters" (237). In *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, Elizabeth Bennet reads people's expressions, body language, choice of partners, forms of address, grace and carriage in order to use "these multiple, variable, sometimes contradictory signs to read a person's character to better anticipate their next move" (Engelhardt 238). Through her characters, Austen – and other authors, as we shall see – uses dance to teach the reader the importance of the art of close reading. Juliet McMaster, in "Reading Body Language: A Game of Skill" (2001), argues that Austen draws on a body of doctrine very familiar to novelists, actors, and artists, and that was accepted as scientific fact; she notes that what we call generally "body language" today was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries "minutely discriminated and deeply studied" (91). Much of the comedy of Austen's novels, as Langdon Elsbree observes, arises from the discrepancy

between what the female character – for example, Catherine Morland – imperfectly sees or misunderstands, within the dance, and what the reader can see; the comedy would have been even stronger for a reader of Austen’s time, who would be skilled in such discernment to an extent that modern readers are not.

McMaster emphasizes the widespread importance of this skill, explaining that according to all the authorities, a properly educated person should be able to use close observation to determine internal motivations for behaviour, claiming that “at that time a large part of the literate population *was* so educated” (96). An intelligent person of the eighteenth or nineteenth century, then, was expected to be able to read the passions through the body, and would depend on this skill as much as he or she would on other modes of communication, such as literacy or speech. Of course, in practice, this was a difficult exercise, made even more challenging by what Engelhardt calls the “uneven codification of the male body” (238), with its mask of manners. I would add that the female body is equally codified, and just as difficult to read, since one of the conventions of femininity demanded that a woman conceal her feelings.

The problem is that the codes of conduct involving gesture and movement can be taught, and therefore the genuine nature of the body’s language can be overlaid by strict discipline and training. Raymond Ricketts notes the unease that can surround the figure of the dancing master, often represented as helping bodies to lie, particularly those socially destabilizing “‘pretenders to breeding’ who hired the dancing master” (21). Jenny Davidson, in *Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness: Manners and Morals from Locke to Austen* (2004), emphasizes the difficulty, for men, of reading one’s partner, since “women were not

merely allowed, but actively encouraged, to cultivate an unreadable quality in their relations with men and with society at large” (11). Manners and mannerisms can not only signify but can mislead; thus dance literacy involves learning how to read the dance, through rational thought and careful observation. It means not only being aware of the coded language of the body, but also gaining the ability to see through the coded gestures to the true intent behind them. Dance, then, an accomplishment usually seen through critical modern-day eyes to be as frivolous as the other feminine accomplishments such as a smattering of German and painting in watercolour, became a stratagem to negotiate the dangerous channels of courtship.

Given its important and deeply textured place in British society, it is not surprising that dance would continue to be an area of social centrality and ambivalence in the New World. As one of the many cultural markers of the Old World, like language, justice systems, government, and religion, dance has added layers of complication in the new setting. The tenuous balance of the social system is rendered even more unstable in the colony of Canada, where women are scarce, ranks are fluid, and half-pay officers are now, in some cases, wealthy landowners. Colonists, as Myron Nadel observes, brought both folk dance and social dance to North America, and even the Puritans tolerated and justified dance “because it taught manners, and manners were considered a part of morals” (“Social Dance” 62). Daniel Shields, in *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (1997), remarks on the scenes of sociability in British North America and their dependence on ritual action as opposed to conversation, from Sunday socials, holiday feasts, and court days, to horse races, card parties, and balls. He points out that all of these regular ceremonies of “complaisance” reasserted the character of a community and that participants “performed conventionalized roles that secured

them in a traditional communal identity” (141). Both individuals and families projected their status in this society by performing these rituals; in the colonies, without the landed aristocracy to command automatic deference, social rites that helped assert status became critical to self-understanding. Rites like dancing took on peculiar weight in the New World because of the “lack of signs that fixed one’s place in the social hierarchy in the Old World” (Shields 141). In North America, generally without titles or offices, the best way to establish one’s social place was to take part in these social rites of complaisance.

Balls in British North American colonies were complex entertainments featuring dancing and any of a number of subsidiary pastimes, which could include musical performances, cards, dinner, and conversation. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, several sorts of balls were commonly held. Officially sponsored balls, often in public places such as statehouses, courthouses, the executive’s mansion, or a tavern, celebrated royal birthdays, the installation of colonial executives, colonial anniversaries, or military victories.<sup>1</sup> Public assemblies were less splendid, but more common, and were usually sponsored by a society of subscribers. They might take place weekly, fortnightly, or monthly, depending on the size of the assembly rooms. Private balls held by important families would take place in their own homes, and were most commonly held for occasions of celebration, particularly for introducing a daughter to the public.<sup>2</sup> Peter Ward notes that balls and

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Shields notes that there is no indication that a masquerade was ever held in British America; it would be interesting to discover whether this applies to the French colonies as well.

<sup>2</sup> As late as 1932, in Gertrude Pringle’s *Etiquette in Canada: The Blue Book of Canadian Social Usage*, instructions for a ball to bring a daughter out into society were still given, with examples of a prominent family in Toronto.

assemblies were among the most popular amusements in nineteenth-century English Canada; in 1792, for example, the town of Niagara planned fortnightly subscription balls throughout the winter, while Montreal, as the largest city in the colonies, had long offered its community a busy annual round of dancing.

The ballroom, then, particularly in the untested waters of the colony, was of vital importance in regulating class structure. Carol Wallace notes that a ballroom is a controlled environment, with all the guests having been screened by invitation; because of this screening, there would be many opportunities for meeting an appropriate partner. For young girls seeking to make a match, and for concerned parents, only in a rigorously defined social structure such as a ballroom can courtship take place safely. The nineteenth-century dance manual *Social Etiquette of New York* (1886) claims that “Etiquette is the machinery of society. It polishes and protects even while conducting its charge. It prevents the agony of uncertainty, and soothes even when it cannot cure the pains of blushing bashfulness...It is like a wall built up around us to protect us from disagreeable, underbred people, who refuse to take the trouble to be civil” (qtd. in Aldrich 55). This wall of etiquette was built out of the fear of slipping social standards and the threat of social climbers, two phenomena which grew unabated throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly in the colonies; of course, it worked both ways, since etiquette could help identify outsiders while also assisting outsiders in learning how to become insiders. In her study *Manners, Morals, and Class in England, 1774-1858* (1994), Marjorie Morgan argues that a breach of the proprieties was instant evidence to convict an outsider; the arbitrary and constantly changing minutiae inherent in these rules were a means to keep “this defensive weeder – etiquette – effective” (qtd. in

Wilson, “Choreography and Counterpoint” 55). The dominant thought was that the instability of the social order could be mitigated by a rigid regard for the rules of dance in public assemblies and balls.

In these ballrooms and assemblies, every movement could be codified according to a standard of class, and all could know their place at a glance if they knew how to read the signs. The codification was so exact that literally almost every motion could be a deliberate announcement of one’s status, much like a secret handshake. If you knew the correct way of moving, and of decoding the signs of movement, then you would be recognized and accepted. Numerous dance manuals gave explicit instructions for not only the steps of popular dances, but also the guidelines for general movement, including walking, carrying the head, bowing, and facial expressions, thus fulfilling Henry Tilney’s directive of “complaisance” within dance and marriage.<sup>3</sup> Through this sort of detailed discipline, as Wilson notes, dance manuals helped to construct a semiotics of dance literacy that assigned meaning to all movement, no matter how small. There was even an intricate code based on the movements of fans, parasols, and gloves, which the discerning lover could use to advantage. Wilson reminds us that though “these may appear humorously complicated to contemporary readers” (“Dance, Physicality, and Social Mobility” 61), the particulars of physical carriage and movement were indicators of gentility and eligibility; we may remember the significance of the “language of flowers” in courtship, but the language of fans, curtsies, and bows has been largely forgotten.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Pierre Rameau’s *The Dancing Master*, translated into English in 1728, and immensely popular throughout the century, spends five pages describing how to take off a hat and put it back on, including diagrams about details as small as the position of the thumb and the exact arc the hat should make as it moves from the head to the side of the body.

The code of class, then, is written in the dance, in a series of movements agreed upon and enforced by the social structure of the ballroom and its rigorous rules. For readers acquainted with the rhythms and language of dance, texts that included dance could reveal many layers of character and plot through the code of the ballroom.

But what happens to girls who don't know, misunderstand, or break the rules? *The History of Emily Montague* illustrates a cautionary tale about heroines who step outside the ballroom's strict conventions or who have not been properly educated in dance literacy when choosing their partners. For example, it is at a dance that all of the happy couples in *The History of Emily Montague* meet, and it is through a misunderstanding of the signs of the dance that they almost end in tragedy; both Edward and Fitzgerald dance with enticing but dangerous older Frenchwomen, and in retaliation Emily and Arabella dance with inappropriate men or refuse to dance at all. The happy resolution for the lovers only comes with the progress of their education in reading dance.

In October, 1761, France Brooke's husband, John, was formally commissioned garrison chaplain, and in 1763, with her son John Moore and her sister Sarah, Frances followed her husband to the New World in the year the Treaty of Paris ceded Canada to the British. She lived there until 1768, a residency which many critics agree "lent credence to *Emily Montague*'s claim to be a legitimate, eye-witness account of Canadian culture" (Wyett 37). While in Quebec, the Brookes lived at least part of the time in Sillery, a suburb four and a half kilometers above Quebec City, which provided the setting of much of the novel.<sup>4</sup> This

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<sup>4</sup> It is interesting that the first reference to the existence of dancing at a concert hall in Quebec mentions the Brookes. Under the French rule of Canada, there was no theatre or concert hall,

novel, a mix of sentimental and travel narrative, is composed of 228 letters dated over an eighteen-month period from April 10, 1766 to November 25, 1767. The action is set in Quebec City, during the brief period between Wolfe's conquest of Canada in 1759 and the American War of Independence of 1776. French Canada had been added to the still-growing British Empire, and the colonies that would become the United States had not yet seceded. The three couples who meet, fall in love, and get married during the course of the novel – Emily Montague and Ed Rivers, Arabella Fermor and Fitzgerald, and Lucy Rivers and John Temple – all participate in the letter writing, although the majority of the letters are written by Ed Rivers, Emily's suitor, and Arabella Fermor, Emily's friend and confidante.

Emily is the "typical eighteenth-century heroine of decorum and sensibility" (McMullen, *An Odd Attempt* 84), who came to Canada two years earlier with her guardian. After this guardian dies, she lives with a regimental major and his wife, and becomes engaged to a wealthy but shallow gentleman, Sir George Clayton, who remains under the thumb of his domineering mother. Emily begins to question her decision as she falls in love with Ed Rivers while waiting for Clayton to return from New York. Rivers has come to Canada to take his military half-pay in order to escape poverty in Britain, and he falls instantly in love with Emily, despite her engaged status. When Emily realizes her love for Rivers, she breaks her engagement with Clayton, and Emily and Rivers' true courtship commences in earnest. Her

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but Lorraine McMullen notes that "in the *Quebec Gazette* of Thursday 27 December 1764 is a notice of a public ball to be held at the concert hall, tickets available from M. Dienval. Two months later, a further notice indicated that the following Saturday a public concert was to be held at the concert hall, for the benefit of M. Dienval. This time, tickets were available at the home of Mr. Brooke as well as that of M. Dienval. The notice added that following the concert there would be music for those wishing to dance" (*An Odd Attempt* 73).

sweet, docile nature contrasts sharply with her friend Arabella's wit and liveliness; this charming foil and her father arrive in Canada just a few months after Rivers does, and Arabella's flirtatious romantic involvement with the Irish Fitzgerald provides the second romantic pairing.

Rivers' lack of money prevents him from proposing to Emily, since she has no inheritance either. The two could have done well enough for themselves in the new colony, especially after Rivers' sister Lucy marries, removing herself from dependency on her brother (Lucy and her suitor, John Temple, a friend of her brother's, are the shadowy third set of lovers in the novel, as they remain in England).<sup>5</sup> However, Rivers' mother is so affected by her son's absence that she will not live long unless he returns to England. In the harsh reality of the marriage market, Rivers is unable to marry a woman who lacks a substantial dowry if he is to return to England to support his mother, and Emily, recognizing this fact, hastily leaves Quebec to make Rivers' choice easier. Despite these complications, and other minor ones between Arabella and her beau, Fitzgerald, all works out in the end. In "one deus ex machina, Emily's long-lost father, having made his fortune in the East Indies, returns to England. In another, Ed turns out to be a distant cousin of Emily's father, who had wanted his daughter to marry Ed" (McMullen, *An Odd Attempt* 86).

Although *The History of Emily Montague* is set largely in Canada, and was written there, it is still essentially a British examination of colonial life, and the dance in the novel must be read through the British dance lens. Gordon Bolling, in fact, argues that while there

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<sup>5</sup> It is perhaps significant that John Temple is introduced in Paris; there may be a corresponding link between Rivers' concern about Temple's fidelity and frivolity and the British attitude towards the French, a link which will be echoed in *Antoinette de Mirecourt*.

is no doubt of its place as the first Canadian novel, the focus on its classification can obscure the fact that the novel also provides a European perspective on the Canadian colony. Jodi Wyatt summarizes the critical response to the novel as being divided into two camps, largely feminist or postcolonialist, while “less common are considerations of the novel as both imperialist and feminist” (35). Her acute pronouncement is useful for the purpose of this study, to examine the dance in the novel from both a colonial and a feminine perspective. The colonial viewpoint is valuable in its ability to show us how British concepts about dance, and its place in the courtship ritual, change or remain stable in a new context, and the feminist criticism is relevant particularly because the focus of dance literacy is aimed almost exclusively at female participants. Although the novel has some very intriguing pronouncements upon both French Canadian and Native dancing, these will be deferred until later chapters; for our purposes here, the ritualized communication between the sexes, and the resulting necessity of being able to read one’s partner in the dance, are what are at stake in this new world.

Indeed, the novel begins by drawing an explicit connection between courtship and the New World; in the first letter of the novel, Ed Rivers informs his friend John Temple that

I am just setting out for America, on a scheme I once hinted to you, of settling the lands to which I have a right as a lieutenant-colonel on half pay. On enquiry and mature deliberation, I prefer Canada to New York for two reasons, that it is wilder, and that the women are handsomer: the first, perhaps, every body will not approve: the latter, I am sure, *you* will. (17)

So, from the very outset of the novel, we can see that Rivers' motive is connected to the two vital issues of the courtship process in the dance: money and sex. Precarious finances mean that he has no hope of securing an advantageous marriage in England, while in the "wild" Canada he might find not only remedy for his financial troubles but also a "handsome woman." In the next letter, Rivers refers to Canada as a pleasure playground, as he tells his sister, Lucy, that "'tis impossible to know which to answer first; the country, the convents, the balls, the ladies, the beaux" (18). His is clearly not going to be the story of a sober pioneer, an early John Moodie striking out with Susanna in the rough bush, but that of a well-bred impoverished gentleman doing the only job he needs to do: solve his financial worries by taking a wife with a substantial dowry.

Until his appropriate partner arrives, Rivers does not dance; he informs Lucy that while "I have just had time to observe, that the Canadian ladies have the vivacity of the French, with a superior share of beauty," there are no dances as yet, since "as to balls and assemblies, we have none at present, it being a kind of interregnum of government" (19). It is intriguing that the dancing comes to a halt when the government is unstable; balls only return when the British have fully taken over control of the colony from the French. Until this occurs, Rivers writes to Temple of the dancing rituals of the Natives and the movements of the nuns, two groups of people he views with an anthropological fascination. As he makes his way to Montreal, and joins the other English officers, he learns that "they are fond of little rural balls in the country, and intend to give one as soon as I have paid my respects in form" (28). But it is only upon meeting Emily, "an angel...beauty, delicacy, sensibility, all that can charm in woman, hid in a wood in Canada" (29), that he participates in dancing himself, in

“one continued round of rural amusements; by which I do not mean hunting and shooting, but such pleasures as the ladies could share; little rustic balls and parties round the neighbouring country” (29). As Canada comes gradually under British rule, Rivers meets the appropriate people with whom he can form community ties; as the country regains its dancing, so can Rivers. It is worth noting that Rivers does not create a homosocial community through masculine activities such as hunting and shooting, but rather creates a mixed-sex community specifically through “such pleasures as the ladies could share” – the colony needing the integration of the sexes in order to form a viable community in which young people can marry.

Upon meeting Emily, in fact, Rivers decides to give a ball of his own; Mrs. Melmoth, with whom Emily is staying, is “to have the honours of it, but as she is with child, she does not dance” (31). This circumstance creates a case of sticky etiquette for Rivers, since he would be expected to dance first with the hostess of the ball; because she is pregnant and cannot dance, Rivers must dance with the next most socially significant female. He writes of the problem, saying that it has

produc'd a dispute not a little flattering to my vanity: the ladies are making interest to dance with me; what a happy exchange have I made! What man of common sense would stay to be overlook'd in England, who can have rival beauties contend for him in Canada? This important point is not yet settled; the etiquette here is rather difficult to adjust; as to me, I have nothing to do in the consultation; my hand is destin'd to the longest pedigree; we stand prodigiously on our noblesse in Montreal. (31)

The dispute over “etiquette” demonstrates the colonial problem of a fluid and uncertain class system; in England, it would have been easy enough to know one’s place in the dance, a duchess above a countess, an earl above a baron. In Canada, it is difficult to determine the “longest pedigree” partly due to the lack of simple aristocratic hierarchy, and partly due to the two nations mixing in one ballroom. Would a French comte outrank a British officer in a newly conquered colony?

It is only after a “dispute in which two French ladies were near drawing their husbands into a duel” that the “point of honour is yielded by both to Miss Montague; each insisting only that I should not dance with the other” (31). This small anecdote illustrates another example of New World disorder, since there was heated debate over the propriety of single women dancing with single gentlemen. It would be considered appropriate for the two married French ladies to dance with Rivers, since they would be thought above reproach and temptation, although their behaviour in fighting over precedent is vulgar; Emily’s position, however, is unclear, since she is engaged but not yet married, and her fiancé is not attending the dance.

Rivers may make light of the situation, but as a well-brought up gentleman, he would know that “dancing and etiquette are inseparable,” as Charles Durang wrote in *The Fashionable Dancer’s Casket* (qtd. in Aldrich 11). Since dancing was one of the few ways in which single young men and women could converse privately together or actually touch each other in the restricted social intercourse allowed to them, convention scrupulously dictated exactly how they could touch and how often. Nadel points out that very often it was considered improper for betrothed couples to dance together “because of the informality and

heightened desires such behaviour might provoke” (“Social Dance” 59). Timothy Dow Adams, in “To Know the Dancer from the Dance: Dance as a Metaphor for Marriage in Four Novels of Jane Austen” (1982), makes it clear that, particularly for women, dance rules were stringent, since “to accept one dance actually meant to accept two, and the rules of society required that a woman who turned down a proposal from one partner must not dance with another” (56). All of this societal anxiety over controlling the sexual desire of dancers helps us understand the importance of Rivers’ being paired with the correct partner.

That these rules were still followed in British North America is clear not only from the depictions of dance in novels, but also from the number of dance manuals printed and for sale; by 1876, the American Catalogue contained twenty-two titles of dance manuals, detailing dance steps and rules for deportment, “ranging in price from ten cents for *Beadle’s Ball-Room Companion* to DeGarmo’s more expensive *Dance of Society* for a dollar fifty” (Aldrich 11). When one compounds the situation by adding the knotty question of where to place the French dancers, technically a conquered people, but of a comparable class and cultural status, it is no wonder that Rivers’ ball is a complicated performance.

For Rivers, however, social etiquette is of secondary interest to the greater purpose of the ball: the display of femininity. Rivers writes to Temple, saying that “Nothing is, in my opinion, so favourable to the display of beauty as a ball. A state of rest is ungraceful; all nature is most beautiful in motion; trees agitated by the wind, a ship under sail, a horse in the course, a fine woman dancing” (31). This is an interesting definition of beauty for our purposes: it is not a static portrait, but depends on movement. According to Rivers, then, a woman must be not only attractive in her features, but also accomplished in the art of refined

motion. Arabella, in a letter to Emily, boldly claims her proficiency in making herself attractive, as she boasts that “The men here, as I said before, are all dying for me; there are many handsomer women, but I flatter them, and the dear creatures cannot resist it” (48). A handsome woman, according to Rivers’ definition, is not as attractive as someone with Arabella’s proficiency in graceful movement and agreeable manners.

In contrast to Rivers’ Emily, Arabella is the coquette of the text; several critics, including Wyett and McMullen, have remarked on her name, as it plays on Arabella Fermor, the real-life inspiration of Pope’s Belinda in *The Rape of the Lock*. This Arabella, however, “turns Pope’s Belinda inside out, creating in Arabella a character who uses frivolity as a front behind which she exercises her acute intellectual prowess” (Wyett 39). Indeed, Arabella admits her impressive intelligence to Lucy, writing that “I confess the fact, my dear; I am, thanks to papa, amazingly learned,” although “no creature breathing would ever find it out” (199). This intelligence animates Arabella’s voice; with the largest sum of letters given to any character besides Rivers, Arabella is the most prominent female voice, with seventy-seven letters – the same number as Ed Rivers – compared to Emily’s thirty-seven. McMullen points out that this contrast between the two young women is characteristic of all Brooke’s fiction, and “is implicit to the technique whereby she voices her feminist views, while still remaining a spokesman for her own century and its values” (“Double Images” 356). Even more relevant for the study of dance in the novel, Arabella is the key figure against whom the sentimental couple of Emily and Rivers are measured; she is the authoritative voice on dance literacy and dance education, and it is through her guidance that Emily learns how to negotiate the ballroom.

Like Rivers, Arabella insists on choice in marriage. She understands that remaining unmarried is not an option, pointing out to Lucy that, “One must marry, ‘tis the mode; every body marries; why don’t you marry, Lucy?” (65); although there is a laughing note to this dictum, the practical Arabella knows the realities of a woman’s economic situation. The only real choice she can have is to choose her own partner, and the necessity of the choice of a desirable life companion is one of Brooke’s strongest arguments throughout the novel, one which is worked out in the ballroom, as the young dancers learn to find partners. Katherine Green argues that *The History of Emily Montague* fits into the feminized genre of courtship novels due to its common theme that marriage should ideally depend on love, and not economic or class alliances. The revisionist view in these novels, which rejected marriages solely of class or economic alliance, meant that women were transformed from unwilling victims of marriages to “heroines with significant, though modest, prerogatives of choice and action” (Green 2); by transplanting the British courtship novel to the New World, Brooke gained not only travel-book material but also a new geographical arena for her reformist perspective on the institution of marriage.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Several critics are concerned with the fact that both Arabella and Emily marry the men their fathers choose for them, although neither is aware of it; as Stephen Carl Arch claims, “the narrative belies or resists or cannot yet accept complete free will on the part of the marriageable woman...Emily’s choice is controlled by the hidden hand of the father” (469). Robert Merrett argues that romantic resistance to traditional patriarchal narratives is only a charade, due to “the closure’s reliance on coincidences that displace plot-conflicts wholly” (106). To a certain extent, these critics are correct, and the narrative reinforces societal control over marriage choice; however, to assume that society must overrule all choice is to deny all agency for women within that society. Although Arabella and Emily both choose parentally-approved partners, we must allow the fact that they did make their own choices. Arabella’s father is fully aware of the power of his daughter’s mind, as she notes that he is “frighted to death lest I should counter-work him” (107) in advising Emily in matters of love

Arabella is not merely a flirtatious coquette, as W.H. New observes, but a “shrewd and sardonic observer” (9). She balances Emily’s sentimentality perfectly; Brooke may defend “sentiment against the tyranny of custom, law, privilege, and patriarchy, but she also warns the reader against sentiment undisciplined by sense or unlicensed by society” (Benedict 7). Therefore, Arabella does not fall helplessly in love like her friend; in fact, she claims that Emily “loves like a foolish woman” and herself “like a sensible man” (159). She tries to teach Emily to love prudently, lamenting that her friend’s romantic mind is a product of miseducation, noting, “Tis a mighty wrong thing, after all, Lucy, that parents will educate creatures so differently who are to live with and for each other. Every possible means is used, even from infancy, to soften the minds of women and to harden those of men” (159). This observation, reminiscent of Wollstonecraft, underlines the difference between the overly sensitive and ignorant Emily, and the well-read and realistic Arabella; William Fermor might occasionally lament his daughter’s intractability, but his careful education of Arabella leads her to a good marriage with a good man.

Arabella’s practical view of marriage extends to the tricks of courtship, and she instructs Emily in all of her secrets to attract and manipulate her partners; in both love and dance, Arabella attempts to show Emily that a balanced approach of flirtation and clear-eyed common sense is best. Arabella demonstrates, in detail, her accomplishments in the art of coquetry, bluntly telling Emily that “I can blush, look down, stifle a sigh, flutter my fan, and

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and how to choose a partner. Arabella’s keen mind prepares her to choose her own partner; it is a sign of her good education – and Emily’s – that she chooses the same man her father did. As in any country dance, the pattern is set, and one must not deviate from it, but individuals within that pattern are free to choose their partners.

seem so agreeably confused – you have no notion, my dear, what fools men are” (48). These gestures, as previously noted, convey a wealth of meaning. Arabella knows how to exploit not only her innate attractions, but also those arts which she has learned; her use of the fan, for example, is typical of the coded language of gestures, as is her ability to act the part of an “agreeably confused” and naïve young girl, covering her sharp and artful intelligence. It is interesting that she mentions blushes as part of her repertoire, since blushes are supposed to be natural; it is unclear whether she has the ability simply to suggest a blush, by dimpling and looking down, or whether she is speaking of the long-standing tradition of biting lips or slapping cheeks to produce a glow. These gestures form part of the repertoire of dance studies that Arabella is attempting to teach Emily; as we have seen in the dance manuals of the time, instruction in dance extended to exactly these sorts of minute gestures that can express eligibility and desirability.

Not simply able to fool others, Arabella has a thorough knowledge of dance semiotics; Barbara Benedict observes that “her ability to ‘read’ others’ feelings allows her to decide her own course; she judges from observation and education, not just sentiment” (22). Even as she falls in love with Fitzgerald, she recognizes his effect on her, telling Emily that “the monkey has a way of being attentive and careless by turns, which has an amazing effect; nothing attaches a woman of my temper so much to a lover as her being a little in fear of losing him; and he keeps up the spirit of the thing admirably” (81). In other words, she admires in him the very intelligence and *savoir faire* in gendered ballroom behaviour that she herself aims to exhibit, obviously preferring a man who is not a fool to one whose emotions and desires are entirely transparent.

As their courtship progresses, Arabella delineates examples of Fitzgerald's flirtatiousness and her own, as they go back and forth in their battle for mastery over the other. She first mentions Fitzgerald at a dance, noting that "I suffered a foolish little captain to sigh and say civil things to me, pour passer le tems, and the creature takes the airs of a lover, to which he has not the least pretensions, and chuses to be angry that I won't dance with him on Thursday, and I positively won't" (62). Her heart is untouched at this point, as she notes the aspect of performance in Fitzgerald's conduct; he "takes the airs of a lover" even though Arabella fully understands he "has not the least pretensions" to such a position. He is not genuinely angry out of a lover's disappointment, but "chuses to be angry" as a form of theatrical display. She tells Lucy how she has followed Fitzgerald's pattern to keep herself safe from falling in love herself, as she has "prevented any attachment to one man, by constantly flirting with twenty: 'tis the most sovereign receipt in the world" (79).

At first, she and the tall Irish captain take turns to play the field; she laughingly tells Lucy of how "Fitzgerald took it into his wise head to endeavour to make me jealous of a little pert Frenchwoman, the wife of a Croix de St Louis, who I know he despises; I then thought myself at full liberty to play off all my airs, which I did with ineffable success, and have sent him home in a humour to hang himself" (141). This sort of calculated play-acting is combined with shrewd analysis of the other's true feelings; as she comes to feel something for Fitzgerald, Arabella cuts short another harmless flirtation with Captain Howard, since "this badinage, however innocent, may hurt my character, and give pain to my little Fitzgerald" (102). It is worth commenting that even as Arabella begins to care for the Irishman, she is careful of her own status, pulling back her flirtation as much for her own reputation (it "may

hurt my character”) as for Fitzgerald’s feelings. As she falls in love with Fitzgerald, however, Arabella feels the sting of his flirtations, genuinely angry when he “spends his whole time gallanting Madame La Brosse, a woman to whom he knows I have an aversion” (148); she understands the depths of her feelings at a dance in which he makes her truly jealous, when “he had the insolence to dance with Madame La Brosse tonight at the governor’s” (148). She is forced to sit out this dance, having assumed that Fitzgerald would stand up with her, and is humiliated as a consequence. As her feelings develop, Arabella’s dance behaviour changes; when Fitzgerald does not subsequently cut short his dancing flirtations, he comes close to losing her.

The path to marriage for Emily and Rivers is more fraught with misunderstanding. At the beginning, Rivers mistakes Emily’s blushes entirely, believing that she loves her haughty fiancé. He writes his sister, Lucy, saying that “astonishing as it is, she loves him...I am hurt, she is lowered in my esteem...I observed her when we entered the room; she blushed, she turned pale, she trembled, her voice faltered; every look spoke the strong emotion of her soul” (53). Here is another example of blushes – a supposedly unfakeable action – being misread; while blushes convey emotion, one must be able to read which emotion it is, joy or dread, attraction or discomfort. Ruth Yeazell, in *Fictions of Modesty: Women and Courtship in the English Novel* (1991), notes the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century’s “collective fascination with the sudden flow of blood to her cheek” (65) as a sign of a woman’s modesty and innocence. She points out that blushes held a sexual implication, since even as the blush was heralded as the sign of innocence, it also held “modesty’s other face – the implicit promise of her ardent surrender” (74). It was considered, therefore, a powerful charm of specifically

feminine beauty.<sup>7</sup> Rivers' misreading demonstrates the subtlety and acute perception required in reading a woman trained in suppressing passion. If Rivers had understood his love's body language better, he might have known that she was suffering from the realization that she no longer loved Sir George Clayton.

Unfortunately, not only is Rivers unschooled in the art of discerning the meaning of feminine behaviour, but he also decides to take his revenge. He admits to Lucy, that "you will scarcely believe the excess of my folly. I went after dinner to Major Melmoth's; I found Emily at piquet with Sir George....took my hat, and went to visit the handsomest Frenchwoman at Montreal, whose windows are directly opposite to Major Melmoth's" (53), where, in sight of Emily, he "asked this lady to dance with me tomorrow at a little ball we are to have out of town. Can you imagine any behaviour more childish? It would have been scarce pardonable at sixteen" (54). It is intriguing that his revenge takes a dance form, and that it is acknowledged by him to be foolish, as it breaks several rules of etiquette. Although he does not have an official understanding with Emily, even his growing friendship with her would preclude seeking another partner out of jealousy; his choice of partner is also suspect. Asking Mademoiselle Clairaut, "a little impertinent girl" (125), according to Arabella, to dance with him, in sight of Emily, is the kind of behaviour that even Rivers recognizes as childish pique.

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<sup>7</sup> It was also considered a particularly British phenomenon; like other immodest fashions, most people assumed the custom of rouging came from France, where they believed that fallow Frenchwomen needed to improve their complexion. Yeazell explains this, pointing out that "since all the world acknowledged the natural beauty of the Englishwoman, on the other hand, she had no need of artifice – and besides, she was reminded, a painted cheek was a threat to the nation's moral superiority" (74).

The lovers' quarrel stems from their inability to read each other's true feelings; it is mended only through Arabella's deft assistance and instruction. Luckily, Sir George Clayton provides an excellent foil for Rivers, as he "preferred the pleasure of parading into Quebec, and shewing his fine horses and fine person to advantage, to that of attending his mistress" (54), which allows Rivers unrestricted access to Emily. At Silleri, they dine and dance, and Arabella notes that Rivers' eyes "say a thousand agreeable things" (62). It is interesting that it is Arabella, not Emily, who can read Rivers' eyes, as Emily is not yet able to understand his physical language, or at least not willing to discuss its ramifications. The next day, Sir George again refuses the invitation to attend Emily, and Rivers again dances with her; on the third night of dancing, however, Sir George returns, and Rivers is unable to read Emily's behaviour at the ball, lamenting that "I misconstrue her friendship for me every moment" (64). While Arabella understands that Emily "was not gay at the ball" (66) because of Sir George's presence, and pities her, Rivers leaves in despair without telling anyone where he is going. He decides to buy an estate in the Kamaraskas from a Madame Des Roches, but rushes back when Arabella writes to tell him that Emily's wedding to Sir George is postponed. It is significant that Rivers returns only through Arabella's interference; without her, he would not have heard the news of Emily nor been able to interpret it.

Arabella is amused by her friends, telling Lucy that "I never saw more pleasure in the countenances of two people in my life, nor more pains taken to suppress it" (78). She recognizes how they feel about each other, and is not fooled by their efforts to repress their feelings. Rivers, in particular, is easy to read, as "his eyes are of immense use to him; he looks the civilest things imaginable; his whole countenance speaks whatever he wishes to say"

(81). Rivers, not as discerning as Arabella, is unsure of Emily's affections, telling John Temple that "I must also be well convinced of her tenderness before I make a declaration of mine" (94). Rivers is not the only man who is blind to Emily's emotions; Arabella's father is convinced that Emily has chosen to break her engagement with Clayton "from pique, not from the real feelings of her heart" (106), although his daughter knows better. In fact, Arabella encourages Emily to start exchanging letters with her, since Arabella claims that "I have long seen by her eyes that the little fool has twenty things to say to me, but has not courage" (107). Able to see that Emily needs her help, Arabella embarks on a written course of instruction for her naïve friend, which allows the shy Emily both to express her feelings about Rivers and to discuss the meaning of his behaviour towards herself.

There are no explicit descriptions of dancing in the novel, as the letter writers take it for granted that the intended reader does not need these scenes described, but there are detailed analyses of body language as the young lovers learn to read it. Rivers tells Lucy that Emily's "lovely eyes have a softness when they meet mine, to which words cannot do justice; she talks less to me than to others, but it is in a tone of voice which penetrates my soul; and when I speak, her attention is most flattering" (111). Arabella notes his progress in deciphering gestures, telling Lucy that she believes he can now see that Emily loves him; however, Rivers' fears make him "uncertain at present of the nature of her sentiments" (115). Still in her role as tutor, Arabella prompts Emily to be aware of her feelings, writing, "My dear, you deceive yourself: you love Colonel Rivers...It is of the utmost consequence to you to be clear as to the nature of your affection" (119). Once Emily has admitted the truth, Arabella is well pleased, "for she blushes more than ever when he approaches, and there is a

certain softness in his voice when he addresses her, which cannot escape a person of my penetration” (125). It is clear from these remarks that tone of voice, blushes, and the lowering of eyes are of prime importance in reading another.

Unfortunately, at the propitious moment of comprehending Emily’s love for him, Rivers departs suddenly to buy Madame Des Roches’ land with the intention of living there with Emily as his wife, and Quebec is awash with false rumours that he plans to marry the French widow. This misconstrual of his action is not helped by the fact that Madame Des Roches is “a widow about thirty, with an agreeable person, great vivacity, an excellent understanding, improved by reading” (71), who confesses her love for Rivers.<sup>8</sup> Upon hearing the rumours, Arabella is furious, asserting that “if he does not love Emily, he has been excessively cruel in shewing an attention which has deceived her into a passion for him. I cannot believe it possible: not that he has ever told her he loved her; but a man of honour will not tell an untruth even with his eyes, and he has spoke a very unequivocal language” (128). Although Arabella is mistaken to doubt Rivers’ constancy, he is certainly capable of bodily deceit, having admitted to Lucy that he was “jealous of Sir George” but able to “dissemble it better than I thought it possible for me to do” (64). While she is wrong in this particular case, Arabella stands for the discerning reader of body language; she reads Emily accurately when she claims, “she has speaking eyes, Lucy, and I think I can interpret their language” (115).

Distraught, Emily receives Rivers on his return with coldness, a “cool dispassionate indifference in her whole manner” (133). Presumably, this refers to physical behaviour as

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<sup>8</sup> Dermot McCarthy, in “Sisters under the Mink: The Correspondent Fear in *The History of Emily Montague*” (1993), has an interesting discussion of Madame Des Roches’s position as “Other,” in terms of race, sex, and language.

well as tone of voice and sharp words. Again, Rivers must turn to Arabella to explain himself and make peace with Emily. Indeed, he relies on his sharp-witted friend even to propose to Emily; he tries several times, but keeps getting nervous at the “possibility of my being mistaken” (149) about her feelings, until Arabella sends him a letter saying, “You are a foolish creature, and know nothing of women. Dine at Silleri, and we will air after dinner; ‘tis a glorious day, and if you are timid in a covered cariole, I give you up” (149). With such explicit instructions, even the overly sensitive Rivers achieves his goal. In fact, on gaining Emily’s declaration of love, Rivers helps bring reconciliation to a quarrel between Fitzgerald and Arabella after a dispute at a ball. Now he knows that Fitzgerald’s “behaviour at the governor’s on Thursday night was inexcusable” (151), where only a few weeks before, he did not understand the effect of such dance behaviour. Emily still needs Arabella’s guidance for a little while longer, as she is foolishly “determined not to dance till Rivers returns” (171); Arabella makes Emily understand that society would be shocked to see a girl refusing to participate in a dance without having a confirmed engagement, and Emily bows to Arabella’s better judgement. Happy outcomes, Brooke demonstrates, require diligent observation and vigilance in obeying social rules.

As if to emphasize the seriousness of her subject, Brooke interrupts her narrative when the lovers return to England to tell the tale of a young woman who meets her downfall at a dance. Fanny Williams, a young woman in a neighbouring cottage, relates the misfortunes of her friend, Sophia, who, “at a ball, had the misfortune” (279) to attract the notice of a notorious rake. Without any parental guidance, Fanny says,

we were alone, unprotected, delivered up to the unhappy inexperience of youth,

mistresses of our own conduct; myself, the eldest of the two, but just eighteen, when my Sophia's ill-fate conducted Sir Charles Verville to the ball where she first saw him. He danced with her, and endeavoured to recommend himself by all those little unmeaning, but flattering attentions, by which our credulous sex are so often misled; his manner was tender, yet timid, modest, respectful; his eyes were continually fixed on her, but when he met hers, artfully cast down, as if afraid of offending...he was enchanting, polite, lively, soft, insinuating, adorned with every outward grace which could embellish virtue, or hide vice from view; to see and to love him was almost the same thing. (280)

This narrative reveals some relevant markers of duplicity that Sophia, if she had known better, might have been able to recognize and avoid, including dancing without an introduction and too much intimacy upon first acquaintance. Fanny suggests that a too-perfect performance is suspect, and that a less credulous girl would see the artificial nature of Verville's act; there is also an implicit warning to avoid the blinding nature of immediate attraction, and to see below the surface manners to the true nature. Verville's "artful" eyes are deceiving, and prove the need for careful examination of character over an extended period. Through this episode, however, Brooke also points out that one of the perils of courtship is that one can never read one's partner with absolute certainty, no matter how perceptive one is, and Verville's role in the tale appears to be solely a cautionary one. One must be very skilled at the art of reading partners within the dance, or deception can lead, as in this dramatic case, to abandonment, an

illegitimate child, and death.<sup>9</sup>

Like the unfortunate Sophia, the heroine of Rosanna Leprohon's *Antoinette de Mirecourt: or, Secret Marrying and Secret Sorrowing, a Canadian Tale*, illustrates a cautionary tale about the dangers of choosing dance partners. Although written almost a hundred years later, in 1864, the novel echoes many elements in Brooke's novel, and is set in the same time period, directly following the British Conquest. Without parental guidance or education in how to choose a partner wisely, Antoinette, like Emily, makes mistakes in reading the signs of the dance. While the misunderstandings of Emily and of her lively friend Arabella are repaired without overly harsh penalties, Antoinette's misreading of her dance partner costs her dearly. Unable to see her British wooer's faults clearly, the naïve girl is trapped in a secret marriage contrary to her father's explicit commands, and finds herself at odds with family, religion, and race. Only through a narrow brush with death, and the redeeming love of a man gifted with powers of perception, does Antoinette's story end happily.

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<sup>9</sup> Lorraine McMullen notes that Brooke's "concern with the concept of 'chusing a husband'" (*An Odd Attempt* 102) leads her to insert not only Sophia's episode, but another, earlier one, about a hermit in the Kamaraskas who had married secretly against his parents' wishes, and his wife had drowned in a storm. McMullen argues that both the hermit's story and Sophia's tale provide a parallel with Emily's parents' story. Emily's father married secretly and against his parents' wishes, and was forced to leave immediately for the East Indies, while her mother was taken by a brother to France and died at Emily's birth. Emily was brought up by her uncle, whom she regarded as a father until, on his deathbed, he revealed her true story; here is yet another couple whose relationship has been ruined due to lack of parental advice. Whether ignoring one's parents, as Emily's parents and the hermit disastrously did, or simply not having the appropriate parental control, as in the case of Sophia and Fanny, Brooke's emphasis is clear: some form of knowledge, which is not inherent but must be taught, is essential in choosing a partner. Without that knowledge, a relationship cannot be sanctioned by society, and can lead to ruin.

Where Brooke sees relatively little tension between the French and English as they dance happily together, Leprohon, an Irish Catholic married to a French doctor, and with knowledge of a century of that tension behind her, is more sensitive to the ramifications of the French defeat and the resulting cultural conflict. Rosanna Eleanor Leprohon, née Mullins, was born in Montreal in 1829 and died in 1879. Her father, Francis Mullins, had emigrated from Ireland in 1819 and prospered in Canada as a ship chandler; she married Dr. Jean-Lukin Leprohon, an eminent doctor interested in both hygiene and women's health, and had 13 children. As Carole Gerson observes, because she lived and wrote in Montreal, Leprohon "enjoyed a diversified literary and cultural milieu which touched on the English, French, and Irish-Catholic strands of Quebec society" (196), an experience that allowed her to write with authority about both sides of the French/English divide. Prior to her marriage, she had five novels, fifteen poems, and one story published in the *Literary Garland*; while raising her children, her creative output slowed, but she subsequently published four novels, including *The Manor House of De Villerai* and *Armand Durand*, as well as *Antoinette de Mirecourt*, and also short stories about friendship, marriage, and women's education, and a series of poems.

The heroine, Antoinette de Mirecourt, is a young gentlewoman living in the country with her widowed father, Arthur de Mirecourt; she lives a quiet and contemplative life until she visits Lucille D'Aulnay, her older cousin, in Montreal, and falls prey to urban decadence and decay. There, most of the French gentlemen of rank have fled to France after the British takeover; Lucille, however, refuses to accept the diminished social circle, and welcomes British invaders of a higher class into her home. Thus, the naïve Antoinette is introduced to several British officers garrisoned in the city, most particularly to Major Audley Sternfield, an

elegant dandy, who wins her heart through his effusive gallantry. The charming Major, with the help of the romantic and giddy Lucille, convinces Antoinette to marry him secretly, given that her father will not agree to the match. Once the deed is done, however, his behaviour becomes cruel and neglectful, and Antoinette is victimized by his cold brutality.

In direct contrast to Major Sternfield stands the older and somewhat world-weary Colonel Evelyn, a senior British officer; he reluctantly comes to respect and then to love the young Antoinette, and she herself is haunted by a growing admiration for him even as her love for her secret husband dies. Even Antoinette's father, when meeting Colonel Evelyn by chance, approves of him despite his nationality; he has already instructed Antoinette that she must marry Louis Beauschesne, a friend of the family. Sternfield, increasingly erratic and jealous, challenges Louis Beauschesne to a duel, in which Louis mortally injures Sternfield. Antoinette falls ill of brain-fever after her secret is revealed upon her husband's death, but she is restored both to health and happiness by the love of Colonel Evelyn.

Gerson notes Leprohon's penchant for the Jane Austen plot structure in her novels, in which the central character is a young woman entangled in the "complexities of adult social and sexual relationships and who is without appropriate guidance, because she is either an orphan, the child of delinquent parents placed under an inadequate guardian, or simply because she is too strong-minded for her own good" (224). This description is useful here, as Antoinette's mother is dead, her father living in the remote countryside, and her "guide" a foolish and immoral society woman. This plot places an emphasis on education, both emotionally and morally, and stresses that happy, well-guided children grow up to be moral,

responsible adults, a process with particular importance for the founding of a new nation.<sup>10</sup>

Antoinette's motherlessness means that she has not received proper instruction in the deciphering of body language. Without a wise older woman to educate her, Antoinette is forced to rely on the religious advice of her nurse and the courtship advice of her giddy cousin. Through her ignorance, she misreads the signs of Sternfield's character, which are stamped on his body and his dancing practice. She does not yet understand that the demeanour of one's partner (which indicates his upbringing), his knowledge of the steps (which points to his social class) and his behaviour to his female partners (which demonstrates how he will treat a mate), are significant indicators. It is made clear that she should have been able to see through his performance, since the more experienced characters in the novel are able to do so; the sober and studious M. D'Aulnay refers to Sternfield as a "long-legged flamingo" (13). Colonel Evelyn, clear-eyed as usual, calls him "that perfumed fop, that heartless Sternfield" (144), and notes sarcastically that "He is as handsome as Apollo, dresses, dances, and flirts irreproachably" (109). This does not sound too much like a condemnation, except that his abilities in the ballroom are his only good qualities. The narrator takes pains to ensure the reader does not misread the Major's character, pointing out cynically that

Major Sternfield, "the irresistible," as he had already been styled by some of the fairer portion of the company; and certainly as far as outward qualifications went, he almost seemed to deserve the exaggerated title. A tall and splendidly-proportioned figure –

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<sup>10</sup> Ann Boutelle notes the connection between Brooke and Austen, pointing out that "in its quiet emphasis on courtship and the realities (including the economic realities) of the choices to be made, *Emily Montague* is a major step in the direction of Austen (while retaining the epistolary form and the veneration of sensibility)" (8).

eyes, hair and features of faultless beauty, joined to powers of conversation, and a voice whose tones he could modulate to the richest music, were rare gifts to be all united in one happy mortal. So thought many an envious man and admiring woman; and so thought Audley Sternfield himself. (29)

Sternfield's high self-regard is visible through his behaviour and grooming, but the narrator suggests that women, "the fairer portion of the company," are more easily taken in by his false charms, although even men are envious of his prowess. The point here is that he is faultless only in his "outward qualifications," with no mention of his inner self, qualities of kindness, or intelligence. His perfectly controlled voice, which he can "modulate," does not reflect a sincere or well-modulated interior; he is not known to be kind, thoughtful, well-read, or caring, and his military abilities are never touched on. Heather Murray points out that Antoinette "cannot 'read' the micro-language of body and gesture that tells so much" (250), effectively rendering her blind to his faults. Of course, through the narrator's insistence on his faults, as well as the connection of his name with the most scandalous sensational novel of the 1860s, *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), the reader is never taken in as thoroughly as poor Antoinette.

The less experienced or the simply flighty mistake the outward man for the inner; Lucille D'Aulnay insists that "Major Sternfield is certainly one of the handsomest and most elegant men I have ever met; and, what is more to the point, he is a perfect gentleman in manner and address" (13). All manner and no substance, the British gentleman wins Lucille's easily swayed esteem, as she pronounces him "superbly handsome, polished and courteous in manner, in short a most accomplished man of the world...though I received him somewhat

coldly at first, my reserve soon yielded to the deferential homage of his address, and the delicate flattery of his manner” (17). Initially prejudiced against Sternfield due to his nationality, Lucille is won over by his outer polish; he is clearly playing on her post-Conquest anxieties by treating her with deference and “delicate flattery,” in order to convince her that he is worthy of her salons. She mistakes his “half patronizing, half languid” air (31) and his military bearing as indicators of worldliness when they in fact indicate his arrogance as a British conqueror and his desperate desire for a wealthy match; compounding the mistake, she encourages Antoinette to see Sternfield through her eyes. Although this is almost a willful self-deception on Lucille’s part, the duplicity of the gentleman, in his perfect manners, recalls Sir Charles Verville in Sophia’s tale of woe.

Antoinette is thus left to learn the art of how to read a partner from a defective teacher, “an elegant looking woman, on the shady side of Balzac’s admired feminine age of thirty, and dressed with the most exquisite taste and care” (11). Lucille is, as Antoinette’s governess Madame Gerard warns the young girl before her urban adventure, “graceful, accomplished, and fascinating...eminently unfit for the responsible office of mentor to a girl of seventeen” (15).

While it is considered a benefit to be “graceful, accomplished, and fascinating” when attempting to attract a husband, Lucille – like Sternfield – has no other qualities to recommend her as a guardian. She abhors reading, talks of nothing but fashion and flirtation, ignores her own husband’s good sense, and is far more likely to be selfish than caring. The governess was all too accurate in judging Lucille’s character, the narrator laments, saying, “Alas, what a dangerous guide and companion had fallen to Antoinette’s lot! How little chance had her

simple childish reasoning against the refined sophistries of this accomplished woman of the world!” (59). As in Brooke’s novel, Leprohon is at pains here to foreground the importance of a proper guide and mentor in the world of courtship and marriage. Without the appropriate instruction, one can not only neglect the necessary lessons, but also learn bad habits, faulty assumptions, and poor manners. Indeed, such a guide is actively “dangerous” to a young girl, and blame for much of the following trauma is laid squarely at Lucille’s dainty feet.

In contrast to Brooke’s relatively benign portrayal of social dancing in the new colony, the danger of the ballroom is underscored heavily by Leprohon. The difference can be explained by the century that lies between the novels; by Leprohon’s time, the ballroom in Canada was situated firmly in the city and associated with its temptations. Leprohon highlights the country ideal with the brief history of Antoinette’s father, Arthur de Mirecourt, who travelled to Paris as a young man, and “soon began to weary of its glittering dissipation, and to long for the simple pleasures, the quiet life of his own land” (19). By the 1860s, as we will examine further in chapter four, British concern was seriously aroused by Parisian decadence and decay; it is unsurprising that Leprohon contrasts the artful and dangerous world of Paris – and Montreal – with Antoinette’s “quiet home in Valmont” (19).

In fact, dancing had begun to change in the ballroom during this period. While the ball, as yet, remained one of the most important social activities of the day, certain innovations of dance had altered the tempo of the dancers. Leprohon makes a point of this, reminding her readers of the difference between Antoinette’s time and their own, contrasting “the slow measured strains of the minuet, so different to the rapid polka, waltz, and galop of our days” (105). While the introduction of foreign dances into the British ballroom will be

discussed at length in chapter four, it is worthwhile to examine the change in dances briefly. During the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the minuet in North America, which Antoinette dances, was the longest-lasting foreign dance import “because its intricacies of style, movements and figures reflected the dancers’ high social status” (Nadel, “Social Dance” 62). But by the mid-nineteenth century, certain folk dance forms had been cleaned up and introduced to the international dance world. By the end of the French Revolution, dances with characteristics such as facing, clasping, or turning a partner could be seen in the nearly seven hundred public dance halls in Paris. The waltz, in particular, was seen as a dangerous temptation and a revolution in the social world of the ballroom; in 1825, Walter Hamilton denounced it as “riotous and indecent” because it allowed couples to face each other in what amounted to an embrace (qtd. in Stovel 33). The waltz came out of rough German dances such as the landler, but was transformed in Paris after Napoleon’s military successes on Teutonic lands; other fast-paced dances that Leprohon mentions (105), the polka and the gallop, were also derived from similar sources.

One of the major concerns critics had with the new dances was the breaking of the communal bond within the dance; instead of couples within a set working together, as in the minuet or the country dances, the new dances permitted couples to travel around the ballroom on their own, outside of any group pattern. Although each man had to lead his partner in the flow of dancers, he had complete control in determining steps and patterns. Dance opponents in North America were very concerned about the dubious morality inherent in these new dances, as Ann Wagner notes in her excellent examination of the critics in *Adversaries of Dance: From the Puritans to the Present* (1997). The danger inherent in social dancing had

been discussed much earlier in Britain, but focused more, as we have seen, on the risks of letting young women make decisions in the ballroom. Thomas Gisborne, in his 1797 *Inquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*, warns that while dancing itself is innocent, in “the ballroom, however, a young woman has more temptations to encounter than she has experienced at the public or at the private concert” (qtd. in Stovel 33). The vast majority of religious denunciations of dance later in the nineteenth century specified particularly modern or fashionable dancing, with the waltz and polka drawing particular wrath from Evangelicals. The closed dance position of these two dances aroused great suspicion regarding sexual modesty. Moses M. Henkle (1798-1864) declared that a young girl attending a ball “will inevitably be diminished in her purity and innocence. More serious, he charges that many of the worst marriages have been contracted in the ballroom” (Wagner 151). We have seen the danger of poor judgement in the ballroom already; by Leprohon’s time, the accusations were much louder, and Antoinette’s case would have served as a caution.

Warnings about purity often issued from male clergy who portrayed women as both victims and temptresses. If she was a pious and pure partner, a woman like Antoinette could succumb to the charm of a passionate waltz embrace, trapped in the devilish ballroom. She could also, however, be an evil seductress, dressing and flirting to attract men; Wagner notes that because dance opponents do not discuss degrees of intentionality, the Victorian lady is cast in the dual role of “both innocent victim and potential temptress” (225). Unmarried ladies were instructed to refrain from waltzing altogether, in private or public, while young married ladies might be allowed to waltz in private balls, as long as it was seldom, and with partners they knew well; of course, these directives were mainly ignored by the haute monde,

who were fascinated by the aura of danger about the dance. Although most people still believed dancing to play a vital role in the fabric of society, the new dances were continually singled out for condemnation, with T.A. Faulkner, a converted dancing master, summing up the conventional thought, saying, “No woman can waltz virtuously and waltz well” (Wagner 263).

It is intriguing that these condemnations were almost exclusively directed at women in the waltz and not their male dance partners. Part of the problem may lie in the discourse of women’s fragile mental, physical, and moral constitution. The waltz, with couples turning clockwise while travelling counterclockwise around the room, raised disturbing possibilities for some critics. This constant spinning, never reversing, as one doctor announced, “could and did produce a feeling of euphoria, or worse, vertigo, that could result in a loss of control” (Aldrich 19). Dio Lewis, a temperance preacher in the mid-nineteenth century, advocated dancing, but not round dances, because “the rotary motion is injurious to the brain and spinal marrow” (qtd. in Aldrich 19). This warning was directed specifically at women designated as “delicate,” since the dance could cause violent emotions and nervous symptoms.

Unfortunately, it was all too easy to be categorized as delicate, particularly because the ideal for the lady restricted her movements, as Wagner explains, since she would be considered physically unfit by today’s healthy cardiovascular standards. Disease and death from exposure to cold after vigorous dancing at a ball, as dance opponents claimed, may not have been as dramatically overstated as we might assume.

By the 1830s, female authors in particular became concerned with the health of women, with warnings to readers to observe the pallor of young girls after a round of

fashionable city amusements. Medical opinion frowned on the combination of overheated rooms, dancing to exhaustion, exposure in low-cut gowns to night air, and rich food consumed late at night; balls usually began between 9:00 p.m. and midnight, and carried on until at least 2:00 a.m. Franklin Wilson, an American dance opponent, reasoned that “the dance has proved to them [ladies] the herald of death, and the ball-room the gate of the grave” (qtd. in Wagner 161). The circuitous line of reasoning was self-fulfilling: the fact that ladies were chronically ill proved that they were born with delicate constitutions, and since they were so delicate, they must refrain from overtaxing themselves, mentally or physically, which meant that they had little, if any, exercise between balls.

We see the nineteenth-century concern with health and dancing in the story of Antoinette, as she is exposed to what the narrator calls “powerful and novel temptations” (39). From being initially a “rosy, good-humored little girl” (11), she descends quickly into ill-health. When her father arrives for a visit, he is appalled at Antoinette’s appearance, claiming that “Tis as I feared, little one! This gay, fashionable life does not agree with a simple country girl like yourself. Why, you look three years older than you did when you left home; and though your cheeks are rosy enough, these burning little hands tell that your roses are more of fever than of health” (89). M. de Mirecourt reads the symptoms of his daughter’s poor health correctly, but he does not understand the toll that her guilty conscience has taken on her physical frame, assuming that she is simply too delicate for the round of city dissipations. Although he takes no action, Antoinette’s father is only half-convinced by Lucille and his daughter to leave her in Montreal for the time being, saying, “I still cannot help thinking she would be better at home, than flirting and fluttering about with the military cavaliers” (95); he

is, of course, correct, but he is too late to prevent his daughter's fall. Indeed, once her secret marriage to Sternfield takes place, her health deteriorates still further, with the most noticeable effects being seen at dances. Colonel Evelyn notices her "excessive pallor" (106) at Lucille D'Aulnay's ball, and asks if she is ill, as does Doctor Manby at another of Lucille's soirees, who wonders if "you have been dancing too much? You look sadly exhausted" (221). Although Antoinette is not dancing "modern" dances like the waltz and the polka, the nineteenth-century's concern with dance and physical health is evident in these constructions of the colony's past.

Antoinette's ill health is not only physical, but moral as well, corresponding to her deterioration from a sturdy country girl in the flush of youthful innocence to an oppressed and exhausted figure caught in the lies of the ballroom. Antoinette reluctantly realizes this, asking herself

Was she really the same innocent, guileless little country girl, whose thoughts and pleasures a few weeks previous had been as simple as those of a child? – she, whose long conversations with Mrs. D'Aulnay ever turned on dress, fashion, or silly sentiment; who lived in a glittering gaiety, that gave no time for serious reflection or self-examination? What amusements had replaced her former quiet country walks and useful course of reading – her religious and charitable duties? (43)

Even the conversations with Lucille can be linked to dancing, the "glittering gaiety" of dress, fashion, and sentiment being reminiscent of a description of a dance. The focus of her self-accusation lies in the dichotomy between country and town and the temptations of the latter;

in a world devoted to frivolity, the influence of religion diminishes. If she continues to listen to Lucille and Sternfield, the narrator laments, “what chance against him had the yielding, child-like Antoinette, unsustained as she then was by the religious principles, to whose holy suggestions she willfully closed her heart?” (75). The suggestion is that the physical activity of dancing, very different from her former walks and charitable activities, has induced a way of thinking that crowds out more spiritual reflection.

In order to regain both her physical and spiritual health, and to break the hold of the “wily man of the world” (75), she must return home, at least in a mental sense. Antoinette realizes this early in the novel, saying, “Oh, if I wish to be again what I was, I must return home! The temptations of this gay house, the society of my kind-hearted but pleasure-loving cousin, are too much for my weak heart and feeble resolves” (45). Her father before her, when tempted by the “polished brilliant Paris” of which he had heard so much, returned to the “simple healthful tastes of his boyhood” in “his quiet home in Valmont” (20). Antoinette’s visit to Montreal follows a similar trajectory; like her father, she must return physically to the country, and mentally to a religious state of self-discipline and purifying reflections, before she can regain her spiritual and physical health, and find her proper partner in marriage.

The proper partner’s true character, as we have seen in *The History of Emily Montague*, is revealed at the dance. Although Antoinette and Sternfield presumably dance before their disastrous marriage, there are no scenes allowing the reader to see Sternfield’s actions in the dance until after the event; this intriguing circumstance could be a device to prevent Antoinette, or perhaps the reader, from seeing immediately through Sternfield’s smokescreen of gentility and chivalry. Through three significant balls held after the secret

marriage, we see his coldness and cruelty manifested in his actions, until even the tender-hearted Antoinette's love for him dies. After she accidentally angers Sternfield with her protestations about the "net-work of deceit and mystery" (105) with which he has bound her, Sternfield begins his torment of his secret wife by flirting outrageously with other women. At Lucille D'Aulnay's first ball, Antoinette sees him

by the side of a graceful, dark-eyed brunette, whispering in her ear with the devotion he usually vouchsafed herself. An uneasy feeling smote her, but she resolutely combated it, and accepted the hand of the first partner who presented himself. The dance over, her gaze involuntarily wandered in the direction of her lover. He stood just where she had last seen him, bending over his beautiful companion, toying with the flower she had given him from her bouquet, and adding, by his whispered flatteries, additional brilliancy to the bright flush that glowed on her cheek. (105)

Antoinette makes the mistake of ignoring her instincts here, as she watches Sternfield break dance etiquette; as we have seen with Rivers and Fitzgerald in *The History of Emily Montague*, male flirtation with other women on and off the dance floor gives women legitimate reason for doubting their affections. Even though Sternfield and Antoinette are keeping their marriage secret, it is unpardonable for him to toy with her emotions; even if they were simply the flirting couple they appear to be, under no circumstances should a man court more than one woman at a time. Antoinette is bitterly wounded, but she is "too proud, too maidenly to show it" (105). She again makes the mistake of ignoring her healthy instincts regarding Sternfield's character; as Arabella notes, this behaviour in a dance partner, let alone a professed lover – or in this case a husband – is completely reprehensible.

Not only are Sternfield's flirtations an evidence of personal moral fault, but they also point to his more general inappropriateness as a citizen of the new nation. Earlier in the novel, Antoinette had met The Honorable Percy Delaval, a young and pale British dandy who insults the colony as "as yet so utterly out of the pale of civilization, that I am not surprised at your tolerating any custom, however barbarous" (33); in answer, Antoinette serenely replies, "we can tolerate everything here but fops and fools" (33). It seems that before her corruption by Sternfield and Lucille and aided by the dangerous whirl of society, Antoinette knew instinctively the kind of virtuous and earnest man the young Canada would need. Aristocratic dandies more concerned with their looks than work and duty are not useful in the post-Conquest colony, which has need of a better quality of man. While Sternfield had previously kept his "sublime dandyism...in abeyance when in the society of Mrs. D'Aulnay and her cousin" (66), he lets go of the pretense once he has secured Antoinette, particularly at dances, as we shall see. Antoinette must realize that her secret husband is not only destroying her own health and happiness, but also can do the developing society no good.

Colonel Evelyn, the tall and proud English Catholic who "never danced" (38) due to his residual dislike of women after an unfortunate affair, comes to the rescue of both Antoinette and the fledgling nation. When Antoinette's father meets the Colonel, he is impressed at the English officer's kindness, reason, and strength. M. de Mirecourt describes him as "not only a person of high intellect, but also a just and liberal man, totally free from the prejudices that rule so many of his caste and race" (171); he is impressed at Colonel Evelyn's frank discussion of the country and his defense of a poor habitant caught in a winter storm. Evelyn is clearly a man who can help unite the two nations in Canada; indeed, Antoinette's

father makes the distinction between the Colonel and men like Sternfield, claiming that Colonel Evelyn is “a true man and soldier,” who “neither grumbled nor wondered, but worked; and when the shovels came into requisition, handled his with as much skill and dexterity as one of your rose-water heroes, fair niece, would twist his ivory-handled cane” (174). His mention of the ivory-handled cane is a shrewd hit, as it calls into question Sternfield’s performance as he dusted “his well-fitting boot with his tiny, agate-headed cane” (66). M. de Mirecourt pays Colonel Evelyn the highest compliment by saying to Antoinette that “I could have forgiven you if you had succeeded in winning this gallant Englishman’s homage” (173); as in *The History of Emily Montague*, the romantic denouement of the novel is clearly signaled by the father’s designation of the man he approves for his daughter.

Although a “professed, incorrigible woman-hater” (30), the Colonel has come to respect and admire the young heiress, and feels contempt for Major Sternfield. Unlike the unfortunate Antoinette, Colonel Evelyn is sensitive in reading the signs of the dance, and recognizes Antoinette’s distress at Sternfield’s misdemeanours, as he “at once detected that her carelessness of manner was assumed, and, as he looked at her more narrowly, there was something in the pallor of her cheek, the constrained look of her beautiful but unusually pale lips” (107). For a man who attempts to avoid female society, he is adept at seeing through Antoinette’s careless air, and interpreting the minute signs of suffering in her face. Although it is generally assumed, since he refuses to do so, that he cannot dance, the Colonel is quite capable, and promenades slowly with Antoinette until she can regain her composure. Interestingly, it is during this partnering that, for the first time, Antoinette realizes the Colonel’s worth, recognizing that “Colonel Evelyn possessed a rare and powerful intellect,

and, though his conversation was wanting in the graceful strain of compliment, the witty and constantly recurring epigram, which imparted such brilliancy to that of Sternfield, to a refined and cultivated mind, it was infinitely more interesting” (109). Instead of parroting pithy epigrams or paying flowery compliments as does Sternfield, Colonel Evelyn is capable of intelligent, meaningful conversation. He does not patronize Antoinette but assumes that she can participate in his dialogue. Through this partnering in dance, Antoinette has the opportunity of judging Colonel Evelyn; until he deigns to dance, Antoinette is unable to see him as a potential marriage partner.

In direct contrast to the Colonel’s mature partnership, Major Sternfield’s childish pique is even more evident. The pair, as they promenade “saw Major Sternfield seated on a causeuse beside a pretty, child-like creature of sixteen, whose blushing, embarrassed face, and downcast eyes betrayed she was totally unused to the new strain of adulatory conversation in which he was initiating her” (109). Not only is the rake now pushing his attentions onto yet another young woman, but his predatory nature is also made clear. Sternfield is no Rivers, whose crime lay in helpless attraction to mature French widows perfectly capable of looking out for themselves; instead, Sternfield preys on naïve and very young girls who are “totally unused” to his flattering attentions, and unable to defend themselves. Colonel Evelyn, seeing the pain in Antoinette’s eyes as she recognizes this trait in her secret husband, advises her to “remain in that happy country home in which you have grown up candid and truthful; remain with the tried, wise friends of your girlhood. You will meet none such in the gay, heartless life on which you have lately entered” (110). His well-meant advice echoes her father’s insistence on healthy country living in contrast to decadent city temptations; however, his

concern only injures her further, since it is too late.

In fact, Antoinette soon realizes that Major Sternfield refuses to let her confess the “rash act” (159) for fear that she will be disinherited; she is stricken to understand “the bitterly humiliating conjecture...that Sternfield had married her, not from any romantic feeling of attachment, but from cold calculation, from motives of interest” (159), as she finally realizes that she did not throw away her honour on a love match, but on a heartless, scheming scoundrel. The cold-hearted tyrant continues her persecution at the next dance, vexed at seeing Colonel Evelyn and his secret wife together in the “long contra-dance” (178). When Sternfield asks Antoinette to be his partner for the next, Colonel Evelyn shrewdly realizes that his “elaborate politeness...savor[ed] more of mockery than respect” (178). Here is another example of the Colonel’s superior ability to read body language; while Sternfield mistakes Antoinette’s motives in dancing with Colonel Evelyn, the older, wiser man is capable of seeing through Sternfield’s “elaborate politeness” to the real emotion underneath.

Annoyed that Colonel Evelyn continues to partner Antoinette, Sternfield engineers a deceitful and “odious plot to degrade her in the eyes of Colonel Evelyn” (184). He lures Antoinette into a deserted room, where he forces his attentions on her, knowing that Colonel Evelyn is right behind them; the love-struck Colonel is horrified to see Antoinette in Sternfield’s arms, and assumes that she is as false as his own painful experience has taught him women can be. It is perhaps worth noting that even Colonel Evelyn’s powers of physical literacy desert him in a situation of such elaborate deception; as in *The History of Emily Montague*, the novel suggests that no matter how skilled, one may still be mistaken, particularly if the subject is also skilled in deception. This scene also emphasizes the very

serious consequences which can arise for a woman who is misread as impure; as a direct result of Sternfield's manipulation of their body language, Antoinette is left without Colonel Evelyn as a protector, and Sternfield is free to work his machinations.

Major Sternfield harasses Antoinette even more mercilessly at the third ball, where he punishes her as they dance:

He contrived to effectually damp her assumed cheerfulness by favoring her with a chapter of reproaches and upbraidings...the dance concluded, he abruptly left her and sought out one of the budding young beauties with whom he was so fond of flirting. Whilst bending over the latter, looking and whispering tender things, he inwardly congratulated himself on the means and power he thus possessed of punishing that rebellious girlish will that ever dared to place itself in opposition to his own. (215)

Again we see the predatory rake seeking "budding young beauties" on whom to practice his charms and to punish Antoinette. Of course, we also see Sternfield's lack of insight, since he is punishing Antoinette for "assumed cheerfulness," and not any real happiness. He congratulates himself on the "power" he possesses, but he has long since killed Antoinette's love for him, so his power to wound her feelings is muted, and since she is only pretending to be cheerful to preserve dignity on the dance floor, he is not really repressing any rebellion on her part.

As part of maintaining dance etiquette, Antoinette is obliged to dance with other eager partners, most particularly Louis Beauchesne, her old friend and her intended fiancé. Feeling threatened by Sternfield's scowl, however, she refuses "Louis's request to join a cotillion then

forming, declaring that she felt much too fatigued to do so" (216). This does not appease her husband, unfortunately, and he tries to claim Antoinette's hand for the next dance, ignoring Louis's prior claim and all correct dance behaviour; if a lady refuses a gentleman, she is not allowed to accept the hand of another for the same dance. This unsubtle simile for their marriage does not escape Antoinette, but to insure her acquiescence, Sternfield threatens that "if you set me aside to dance with that fool, I shall teach him with a horsewhip to come between me and my wishes" (217). This display of violence is a shocking breach of dance etiquette, and one strong enough to have the perpetrator ejected from the ballroom if it was known; indeed, it is the basis for the fatal duel that the two men later fight, which resolves the narrative complications by causing Sternfield's death and Louis's exile to France.

Nursed by Colonel Evelyn, Antoinette is restored to health and social standing. The dangers of the dance are over when she has finally learned to read partners correctly, and to find herself a worthy husband. As an English Catholic, Colonel Evelyn symbolizes reconciliation between French and English Canada; in fact, Antoinette becomes the means of returning the straying Catholic gentleman to the fold. As in *Emily Montague*, Antoinette's father approves her choice even before she makes it, deeming Colonel Evelyn one of the only British gentlemen of worth in the country.<sup>11</sup> Leprohon, speaking from a distance of almost a century about her subject matter, sees this match as part of the creation of the Canada she knows, saying in her introduction that "If ANTOINETTE DE MIRECOURT possesses no

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<sup>11</sup> Karen Tracey's work on double-proposal novels is interesting here; although Antoinette's rejection of Colonel Evelyn is based on her own unavailability, the situation does fit into the category that can be identified by the heroine's rejection and acceptance of proposals from the same suitor, which opens a dialogue about the arena of love and marriage.

other merit, it will, at least, be found to have that of being essentially Canadian” (viii). Mary Jane Edwards has described the text as “probably the best novel about English-French relations in Canada published in the nineteenth century” (173), seeing Antoinette’s eventual marriage to Colonel Evelyn as a symbolic union of the old and new orders in Canada. Although she wrote exclusively in English, Leprohon was bilingual, and her own bicultural marriage made her particularly qualified to write of a unified Canada; interestingly, her work, in translation, appears to have reached a wider audience in French Canada than in English Canada.

Carl Murphy, in “The Marriage Metaphor in Nineteenth Century English Canadian Fiction” (1988), sees Antoinette as representing the best of New France, and Colonel Evelyn as the best of England; thus they are appropriate partners. He points out that when Antoinette leaves her father’s seigniory to come to Montreal, New France is symbolically detached from traditional values; through Lucille D’Aulnay’s limited moral vision, the most vital element of New France is almost lost to the worst the British have to offer. The wrong choices Antoinette makes, in choosing her marriage partner, in failing to seek her father’s blessing, in not publishing the wedding banns, and in taking part in what she calls “the ceremony” but not “the sacrament” of marriage, condemn her to suffer as his wife until she can regain her moral integrity. Murphy observes that Colonel Evelyn is worthy of the morally developed and educated Antoinette; superior in rank to Sternfield, and a co-religionist, though lapsed, and approved by her father, he replaces “the attempted colonization of her by Audley in the first marriage...by the mutual support of the partners in the second” (Murphy 5). The happy marriage for Antoinette de Mirecourt and Colonel Evelyn prefigures a larger political

marriage in Canada, the creating of a nation of French and English together.

In both *The History of Emily Montague* and *Antoinette de Mirecourt*, we see the impact of social dancing in the colony of Canada; from its roots in Britain, dance in the ballroom expanded its social role in the New World. While dance had always been important in Britain as a means of strengthening communal bonds and as a part of the courtship ritual, the fluidity of rank in Canada increased the role of dance as a social signifier and determinant. The presence of the French as a conquered nation made it all the more important for young people to find appropriate marriage partners, while the absence of a landed aristocracy exacerbated concerns about societal control. In the novels, dance becomes the arena in which our young heroines must learn to read the dance and the dancers within it, in order to participate in creating the new society in the colony.

## Chapter Two

### “She Trod the Earth With Dainty Feet”: French Court Ballet and Politics

“Her footstool was the hearts of men, and upon it she set hard her beautiful feet” (23).

Understandings of social dance in Pre-Confederation British Canada affected perceptions of performance dancing during the same period; the British viewed stage dancing with suspicion, and linked the form with French theatrical practices. The same distrust felt for French social dances, such as the waltz, was extended and magnified for the ballet. This dance form, created first and foremost for a Catholic monarchy, was seen in Britain, and in British Canada, as a decadent practice alien to the British concept of dance. The French court, seen as corrupt and debauched, particularly by the time of Louis XV, was intricately connected to its theatrical traditions; British narratives of French dance traditionally viewed it as dangerous, overly civilized, and effeminate, and of great concern when linked with politics.

William Kirby’s *The Golden Dog* (1877) employs the context of French court ballet in order to illumine the political discussion in the novel regarding the necessity of British rule over the colony of New France. In this novel, Kirby attempts both to sketch a historically rich past for Quebec, and to provide his reader with the sense that the British conquest was beneficial to a community suffering under political corruption. One of the most interesting ways in which he does this, and one which has never been examined in literary scholarship, is through the use of dance in the novel; by creating a firm connection between French court ballet and the corrupt governance of the colony, Kirby shows that decadent dance is an outward sign of the colony’s need for a redeeming British influence.

While France can lay claim to be the birthplace of modern ballet, the origins of ballet coincide with the arrival of Italian dancing masters at the French court in the late sixteenth century. In Italy, the figured dances called *balletti* were staged or semi-staged versions of the social dances of the day, and were popular events for court banquets; as Jennifer Nevile points out, there were already close similarities between both French and Italian courts, especially in their delight in grandiose spectacle combining costumed and masked performers, songs and instrumental music, speech and verses, mock battles, and dances. When Catherine de Medici came to France as Henri of Orléan's bride, she brought with her the Italian tradition of *balletti*, and soon transformed the practice into the long-standing and politically significant French court ballet.

The earliest of these performances preceded the invention of the proscenium stage; most of the audience viewed the performers from above, seated on tiers or galleries on three sides of the dancing floor. The dancers' costumes were based on the fashionable court dress of the day, and since they were meant primarily to impress with opulence and creativity, were often ponderous and cumbersome. The performances themselves began late at night, and went on for as many as four or five hours. They included spoken or sung verses called *récits*, usually deriving their themes from literary sources; Julia Prest explains that these verses were not read aloud by any performer, but were intended to be read silently by the spectator.

Printed librettos, called *livrets*, which contained these verses, as well as plot summaries and the names of the dancers for each entrée, were distributed to the audience. The performance extended well beyond the duration of the ballet itself, as both participants and spectators brought away the *livrets*, which could offer "an acceptable guide to interpreting the spectacle" (Prest, *Theatre under Louis XIV* 78). These *livrets* were also distributed around the kingdom

and throughout the courts of Europe; the court ballet's propaganda was thus diffused even further.<sup>1</sup>

From its beginnings, court ballet was a carefully calculated combination of art, entertainment, and politics. The magnificence of the spectacle, exhibited in the extravagance of the costumes, decor, music, and choreography, was a persuasive means of displaying, and enacting, the wealth and power of the monarch. In the earlier ballets, the solemn and the burlesque were brought together, as “manifestations of disorder danced into view and were subsequently, through the drama of the ballet, controlled and overcome by the powers of good” (McGowan, *The Court Ballet of Louis XIII* iii). Eventually, the personal taste of the sovereign, developments within the theatre, and the increasing use of the ballet as a tool for political propaganda separated the two forms; the first, a solemn and highly structured form, overtly political and relying heavily on splendid stage effects, involved large ballet ensembles danced by groups of nobles. The other was a burlesque form with a heavy emphasis on satire, and varied with individual ballets.

As Nevile notes in her introduction to *Dance, Spectacle, and the Body Politick, 1250-1750* (2008), “dance was part of the political process in a way that is often difficult to appreciate today, when the two are viewed as distinct worlds” (1). Ceremonies, like the ruler's entry into the city, or the coronation of a monarch, or the elaborate court ballets, were

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<sup>1</sup> The *livrets* are also of great importance to the dance historian, as they constitute much of the primary sources for our understanding of the performances. The vast majority of court ballet librettos were first collected in 1868 by Paul Lacroix, and since then, scholars have investigated the social, political, and aesthetic significance of court ballet. For the rest, the dance historian must rely on contemporary memoirs and other historical documents, archival sources relating to financial accounts, and, more rarely (and for some ballets only), a detailed account of the performance, describing the scenes, costumes, and dances.

events which did not simply demonstrate power in a symbolic way, but actually helped make power manifest in the ruling structure of the nation. Royal ministers and monarchs alike understood that the court ballet provided opportunities to reinforce the king's personal authority "by demonstrating allegorically and through the dance his ability...to demolish manifestations of evil or disorder" (McGowan, "Dance in Sixteenth-and Early Seventeenth-Century France" 108). As Mark Franko concludes in *Dance as Text: Ideologies of the Baroque Body* (1993), court ballets had commemorated occasions in the Valois period, but by the reign of Louis XIII, they became important events in their own right. Louis XIII began his true reign with a pointed ballet, *Ballet de la Délivrance de Renaud* (1617), in which a man is delivered from the grasp of an evil sorceress; Louis XIII had recently freed himself from the regency and court conspiracies of his mother, Marie de Medici, and used the ballet to announce his intention of establishing his kingly authority. Towards the end of Louis XIII's reign, Cardinal Richelieu turned the court ballet into a propaganda machine to consolidate the power of the king, by blending ancient mythology and more recent military victories to present the order of the State in ballets like the plainly titled *Ballet de la Prospérité des Armes de la France* (1641). The message of overt magnificence and splendour in a lavish and expensive ballet, already powerful in a time of peace, served to signify France's continued prosperity even after the expenses of military action; Richelieu, under Louis XIII, exploited the ideological potential of the ballet to its fullest.

The ballets were not merely spectacles for the nobility, but also vehicles for performance. Anyone striving for a position at court had to dance well, either at court balls or in the ballet, and children started dance lessons at an early age.<sup>2</sup> Nevile notes that Louis XIV,

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<sup>2</sup> Nancy Mitford argues that Versailles was a stage for all of the courtiers' movements, with

for example, started his lessons in dance – which lasted two to three hours a day – at age six, and first appeared as a dancer in the ballet at age thirteen, in 1651. In almost two decades of performing, he danced in forty major court ballets in eighty different roles; one of his illegitimate daughters, the Princesse de Conti, was also an excellent dancer and had leading roles in many major ballets, as did his son the Dauphin.<sup>3</sup> Under Louis XIV, the court ballet reached its apogee, and dance became a social and political strategy at Versailles. Members of the elite danced all year round, with some months at court where either ballets or balls occurred every night, particularly during Christmas and the carnival season before Lent. The king's grandmother, Marie de Medici, demanded that a ballet be danced in her apartment every Sunday, and no expense was spared; the costs of any court ballet could be ruinous.<sup>4</sup> Among its other functions, court ballet was thought to distract the nobility from any threats to power; of a recalcitrant courtier, Cardinal Richelieu wrote that “there was nothing to fear from him, music, carrousels and ballets being able to distract him from any thoughts that might be prejudicial to the State” (qtd. in Prest, “The Politics of Ballet” 231).

In the great theatre that was the court of Versailles, the nobility were indeed kept distracted; after the civil war known as the Fronde, Louis XIV gathered all the noble class in what Nancy Mitford wryly calls a “perpetual house party at Versailles, divorced from public opinion in their native provinces, as well as from the source of their wealth” (21). About a

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the most ordinary movements studied assiduously; she points out that “everybody could tell a Court lady from a Parisian by her walk, a sort of gliding run, with very fast, tiny steps so that she looked like a mechanical doll, wheels instead of feet under her panniers” (67).

<sup>3</sup> The Princesse de Conti was also the daughter of one of Louis XIV's favourite dancing partners, his mistress La Vallière.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the danger of putting on too magnificent a display was learned by Nicolas Fouquet, the superintendant of finances for Louis XIV; he commissioned the ballet *Les Facheux* in honour of the king, and was imprisoned two weeks later for his opulent display.

thousand nobles lived, or had a pied-a-terre, there by the time of Louis XV, and these courtiers lived by iron rules dictated by the King; Mitford points out that they could do nothing, not even go to Paris for the day, be inoculated against smallpox, or arrange marriages for their children, without his express permission. Their “privileges were enormous, and their power non-existent” (Mitford 23). Pleasure became an important part of the political process, since the nobles, removed from their estates, had to be pacified, contented, and amused, and dance played an unusually important role; nineteenth-century British historians were shocked in contemplating the tyranny of the King, as well as his court’s pointless acts of ostentatious self-display.

Louis XIV further reduced the power of the nobility by removing the noble class’s power to produce ballet performances. Although they continued to dance in the ballets, courtiers were no longer allowed to organize them without royal surveillance after 1661, when Louis XIV institutionalized control over the dance by founding a Royal Academy of Dancing. His Letters Patent, appointing a group of thirteen ballet masters, flatly accuses his aristocrats of “having corrupted and deformed dance” (Franko, *Dance as Text* 109) during the rebellion of the Frondes. The Royal Academy of Dancing and its partner, the Royal Academy of Music – which survived to become the Paris Opéra Ballet, still in existence today – were to re-establish the art of dancing, and turned out numerous ballets to be performed at court, including a series of comedie-ballets by Molière and Lully. Through this move, ballet was professionalized for the stage, and the performances were repeated for crowds in Paris after being staged for the court at Versailles; although this change was designed to combat disorderly “corruption,” ballet performances were, by the time of Louis XIV, reduced to being part of the spectacle of riotous debauchery and drunkenness that ruled his court. Jean-Baptiste

Lully, the famous Italian composer and dancer, was also infamous for his relations with young pages at the debased parties at “The Temple” (the home of the duc de Vendome), and after his death, the Opéra became a public scandal; Georgia Cowart notes that the ballet dancers, known as *les filles de l'Opéra*, were condemned as “immoral, corrupt, and scandalous” (176), as they were often Parisian courtesans placed there by powerful and influential lovers, since performers in the royal theatres were granted automatic immunity from persecution for immorality.

In England, the masque was the closest contemporary to the court ballet, a production involving song, dialogue, music, and dance. In the hands of Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones, however, the emphasis of the masque shifted more to drama than dance. Unlike the court ballet, the masque did not survive the monarch it served – Charles I – and the last performance was in 1640. After the Puritan Interregnum, England did not return to a use of dance as a political tool; indeed, the court ballet became a symbol in England of the worst of French excesses in theatricality. French fashions, while eagerly followed in certain forms in England, were generally suspect; Ricketts notes that even French social dancing was intimately linked to the grandeur of the French court, which was seen as an anachronistic and empty pageant. Indeed, by the end of the eighteenth century, the English country dance (as discussed in Chapter One) was the only British dance form performed in the ballroom, and there was much nationalist anxiety over what, as Wilson points out, were frequently called “invasions of our ballroom” (101).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Nevile notes that in addition to opening a formal court ball with the French suite of branles, other couple dances performed at balls were “the courante, menuet, passepied, bourrée, gavotte, rigaudon...the sarabande, gigue, forlana, loure, canarie, chaconne, passacaille, and entrée” (“Dance in Europe” 33), all dances originating in France.

Lawrence Klein, in “The Figure of France: The Politics of Sociability in England, 1660-1715” (1997), examines the way in which British Whig society, particularly men like Shaftesbury, Addison, and Steele, mapped the pathology of sociability – the disease of an overemphasis on high culture – onto France; he argues that they “created a British self-understanding for the Hanoverian age” (32) that distinguished between France and England in ways which would impact the two nations’ cultural relationship not only with each other, but also with dance itself. If the French were over-fond of empty refinements of manners, what Klein calls “alienated form” (35), pure appearances, covering either malevolence or hollowness, then the British must resist the corrupting influence. The English diplomat Matthew Prior stoutly condemned Louis XIV’s elaborate palace at Versailles, saying that it “is something the foolishhest in the world; he is strutting in every panel and galloping over one’s head in every ceiling, and if he turns to spit he must see himself in person or his Viceregent the Sun” (qtd. in Rule 43).<sup>6</sup> The attack on French fashions, in this case its theatrical dance, was intensified by war with the French, when, as Klein points out, the usual hostility to foreigners and Catholics deepened. In the British imagination, the hearty British soldier was positioned against the French dancing-master, with British opinion asserting that French manners either weakened the French, making them an easy target for the English military, as in *The Golden Dog*, or operated as a hidden weapon to corrupt the English from within. As

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<sup>6</sup> While it is Louis XIV who is famously known today as the “Sun King,” Prest explains that “a number of French kings before him had made use of sun imagery, including Louis XIII, who, moreover, employed the symbolism of the sun in a number of ballets” (“The Politics of Ballet” 232).

the British and the French were very often at war between 1689 and 1814, this motif continued almost unabated.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond the wartime agenda of turning French manners into the enemy, British society had long been distrustful of the theatricality of the French Catholic religion. The antitheatricality of the Protestant tradition saw dance, particularly the performance dance of the court ballet, as morally reprehensible. Ann Wagner, in *Adversaries of Dance: From the Puritans to the Present* (1997), notes that from the sixteenth century onwards, Calvinists, Puritans, Anglicans, Lutherans, and Huguenots taught, preached, and wrote against dancing in a way that entangled anti-dance sentiments with anti-Catholic feelings. Where, in France, dance was seen as a means of creating order and harmony, English Protestant dance critics commonly saw dancing as a manifestation of disorderly behaviour, associating it with a lack of physical control and the feverish indulgence of passion. Prest notes the difference shown in a telling comparison: the closure of all public theatres in England in 1642, only a year after Louis XIII, on the advice of Richelieu, published an edict absolving all actors in France from former charges of infamy.

Indeed, even the Jesuits performed ballets; historical and religious plays, put on by the students in the colleges, became so popular with both students and audiences that they expanded and developed rapidly, becoming ever more elaborate, with increased focus on

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<sup>7</sup> Anderson points out that one anecdote was frequently brought into discussion when debating the dangerous nature of court ballet: the ballet *Bal des Ardents* in 1393 nearly claimed the life of Charles VI, king of France. The king and several courtiers were dressed as savages, chained to each other and wearing bizarre costumes covered with tow and pitch; apparently their makeup was so convincing that spectators could not distinguish who the players were, and when the Duke of Orléans leaned forward for a closer look, the torch he was carrying set fire to the costumes. Charles VI escaped the fire, since he had slipped his chains moments before to flirt with the Duchess of Berry, but the other dancers died in agony.

spectacular elements such as decor, costume, and choreography. As Prest explains, Jesuit schools, particularly the Collège de Clermont in Paris, are famous for having cultivated ballet on the school stage, with professional dancers and dancing masters brought in from the Paris Opéra to assist; the productions spread to other teaching institutions, including convents, such as the Abbaye au Bois in Paris.<sup>8</sup> This combination of Catholic theatricality and French dancing made British society nervous.

By 1763, when Louis XV's France lost the colony of New France, public opinion in both England and France was vehemently opposed to the decadence of the French court. Burlesque ballets featured cross-dressing kings in unseemly roles from pickpockets to drunkards, or emphasized exaggerated male-female relationships of erotic desire, in which the king danced with his mistresses.<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Merrick notes that prolonged conflicts concerning religious, financial, and administrative issues in the 1750s suggested "that the king, apparently blind to the misery of his people and deaf to the protests of his magistrates, did not have the interests of the kingdom at heart or in mind" (17). Despotic, diseased, and increasingly debauched, Louis XV was the subject of numerous slanderous texts published in France as well as in England.

Historians in the nineteenth century were also appalled by his behaviour, and condemned the court of Versailles and Louis XIV through XVI with hysterical denunciations. After the French Revolution, British historians felt justified in their censure; so, when William

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<sup>8</sup> The Jesuit use of ballet extended even into their missions in Canada; Voyer and Tremblay note that in 1646, in *Le Journal des Jesuites*, there is the first mention of a dance, at a wedding, in which there was "un espèce de balet" (27).

<sup>9</sup> There was apparently some concern, in France as well as in England, over Louis XIII's burlesque cross-dressing roles, as it seemed to reflect his lack of interest in women and the long years of a barren marriage; Abby Zanger observes that a similar discussion took place concerning the duke of Anjou, Louis XIV's brother.

Kirby wanted to find a romantic and mythological past for British Quebec, he had to contend with the current body of thought regarding the nation that had possessed New France. In *The Golden Dog*, Kirby plays with the familiar perception of Louis XV and his corrupt French court, and proposes the decadence of the king and his court, manifested through the court ballet, as a reason for the loss of the colony to the British. In his narration of the story, the French deserve to lose the colony, the neglected colonists rejoice to have the British take control of New France, and Canada is left with a rich past of the best of both nations.

William Kirby was born October 13, 1817 at Hull, Yorkshire; his family immigrated to the United States in 1832. A staunch Tory, clinging to “the Established Church, the Conservative party, and things as they were” (Pierce, *Unpublished Correspondence* 14), Kirby entered Upper Canada in 1839. Speaking of himself as “the last of the Loyalists” (qtd. in Pierce, *Unpublished Correspondence* 17), the tanner by trade was a fierce spokesman for the Tory party in Canada. In 1848, he moved to Niagara, where he wrote *Canadian Idylls*, ten long poems, chiefly patriotic, collected in 1888 and *The Annals of Niagara* in 1896, as well as a much-famed, though anonymous, letter to the *Niagara Mail*, which the Canadian government had copied and distributed by the thousands in pamphlet form under the title Countermanifesto.<sup>10</sup> Firmly opposed to “politically-minded papists” (Pierce, *William Kirby* 29), Kirby was nonetheless both very religious and intensely concerned with Canada’s political ties to England. It is worth noting that despite his antipathy for French dance, Kirby was not opposed to dancing in general; Pierce finds in the historical record that “as a young

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<sup>10</sup> The Canadian Government ordered 8,000 copies printed in pamphlet form by James A. Davidson at the office of the *Niagara Mail*, and distributed them in Lower Canada. Pierce notes that this was done without Kirby’s knowledge or consent; years later he confessed to the authorship.

man he was tall, slim, handsome and a fair dancer” (6), and enjoyed attending balls in Niagara.<sup>11</sup>

The work for which he is best known is the novel *The Golden Dog*, published in 1877. The story is set in 1748, prior to the British conquest of New France, and tells a pseudo-historical tale of love and betrayal, with a real-life cast of characters. Kirby altered the facts, names, and dates substantially, as he was attempting to sketch a richly romantic history for Canada, and was less concerned with presenting a truthful account than providing a picturesque mythology for the British conquerors; as Carole Gerson observes, “the history of English Canada needed to be enlivened with an infusion of Quebec and Acadian romance” (“Three Writers” 241). However, there is at least some truth in the characters, as the last Intendant of New France, François Bigot, was a famous man, and Angélique des Meloizes, later Mme de Péan, was also a real member of Montreal society, as were Pierre Philibert and Amélie. The tale is a tragic one of a doomed people, condemned by the apathy and corruption of their rulers; the tragedy extends to the pair of lovers, and the only happy ending is provided by the optimistic view that the British, as the colony’s new rulers, will nurture Canada to its potential glory.

Amélie de Repentigny is a virtuous and generous-hearted girl in Emily Montague’s mould, and Colonel Pierre Philibert is her noble-minded childhood sweetheart. The two are reunited after Amélie’s several years’ absence, during which she has finished her schooling and grown into a lovely woman, with Pierre’s face firmly engraved on her heart; Pierre’s love for Amélie is just as enduring, and they gradually but gently arrive at an understanding of their

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<sup>11</sup> Pierce spoke with a Mrs. Secord, who remembered Kirby’s fondness for dancing, saying “He could dance, I tell you! He was fond of music, but could neither play nor sing, yet he was such a gallant dancer!” (qtd. in Pierce, *William Kirby* 48).

love. Amélie's brother, Le Gardeur, is unfortunately not as happy in his choice of partner, as he is foolish enough to fall in love with Angélique des Meloises, an ambitious and cruelly imperious woman. While Angélique toys with Le Gardeur, the naive man is at the same time being deliberately drawn into the clutches of La Friponne, the corrupt and debauched company of men led by the colony's Intendant, François Bigot.

Angélique does love Le Gardeur as much as she is able, but is tempted into dark deeds by her ambition. She decides to win Bigot, a man who might grant her access to the Royal Court at Versailles, and is only frustrated in her plans due to his secret mistress, hidden deep within his palace. In a move of desperation, Angélique contacts La Corriveau, a witch and descendant of famed Italian poisoners, and they concoct a plan to murder Caroline St Castin, Bigot's love. Meanwhile, Le Gardeur has become deeply entangled in the coils of La Friponne, as they play upon his despair at losing Angélique and keep his temper stoked with the fires of strong drink. With Angélique and La Friponne coaxing him on, Le Gardeur kills Pierre's father in a blind rage. The colony's defeat and conquest by the British follows immediately on the heels of this treacherous act; horrified at her brother's violence, Amélie refuses to marry Pierre as an act of penance, entering a convent, where she eventually dies of consumption. Both Pierre and Le Gardeur leave for the military and die in far off lands. Angélique, on the other hand, lives out her life in magnificent sin, but without ever attaining the position of power she sought.

The corruption of the French royalty, and the corresponding conflict between France and England, are present immediately as the novel opens; the war rages between France and England, and through the colonies of New France and New England. The French colonists, loyal to the ideal of "old France transplanted, transfigured and glorified" (3), are nonetheless

at odds with the declining French court of Louis XV. The narrator does not delay in accusing the court of Versailles of “sinking fast into the slough of corruption” (2). In this perilous situation, with the urban decay of France contrasting with the natural graces of the colony, we are introduced to our heroine. Amélie de Repentigny possesses all the grace of a natural dancer, without the corrupting influence of over-refinement. She stands as the opposite of the theatrical Angélique; her body’s “perfect symmetry” is “suggestive of the beauty of a tame fawn, that in all its movements preserves somewhat of the coyness and easy grace of its free life” (12). This natural beauty, related to the tamed but not over-civilized young deer, shines through her movements. She is not bold in displaying her charms, but is modest in her “coyness”; her “free life” contrasts to the mincing formality of the court of Versailles, where every word and every gesture are governed by precise and rigid rules. In fact, throughout the novel, as we will see, there are references to Amélie’s “royal” nature, as she becomes the proper Queen of New France, in direct opposition to the debased rulers of Versailles. Her ability to read those around her – in a manner reminiscent of the heroines of the previous chapter – is strikingly accurate, as she could “read unerringly your meaning more from your looks than from your words. Nothing seemed to hide itself from that pure, searching glance when she chose to look at you” (13). Her love, given with her noble judgement, is described as “a royal gift” (13).

While Amélie is the sovereign heart of the good in the colony, Angélique aspires to an altogether different – and more material – crown. Our first impression of this dark figure is one of movement and vigour, as she meets Amélie in town, “attired in the gayest fashion of the period, throwing the reins to the groom, [springing] out of the calèche with the ease and elasticity of an antelope” (21). At first she seems to be linked to descriptors that match

Amélie, as a youthful wild animal, although the pointedly up-to-date fashion of her dress strikes a jarring note. She is described as “tall, and fashioned in nature’s most voluptuous mould, perfect in the symmetry of every part” (22), again reminding us of the form of the virtuous Amélie, although “voluptuous” should likely be taken as a sign of indulgent and over-sensual femininity. But the reader is left in no doubt as to the nature of Angélique’s dangerous charms, with the narrator pointing out that her “ease and beauty of movement” are “not suggestive of spiritual graces, like Amélie’s, but of terrestrial witcheries, like those great women of old who drew down the very gods from Olympus, and who in all ages have incited men to the noblest deeds, or tempted them to the greatest crimes” (22). She is thus immediately connected to witchcraft and pagan religion, as opposed to Amélie’s innocent “spiritual graces,” and has a power over men that can lead them into criminal behaviour.

Angélique’s natural abilities to lead men are clearly different from those of Amélie, since the latter is unaware of her influence over the men around her, while Angélique feels her power, and believes that it is her “divine right” (23) to use it. Her complexion is “clear and radiant, as of a descendant of the Sun God” (22); this could be another pagan goddess reference, but given Louis XIV’s prominence in the narrative, it more likely establishes a connection between Angélique and the kings of France and their corrupt theatrical court at Versailles. The narrator continues with the condemning praise, claiming that “she trod the earth with dainty feet, and a step aspiring as that of the fair Louise de La Vallière when she danced in the royal ballet in the forest of Fontainebleu and stole a king’s heart by the flashes of her pretty feet” (23). This is one of the most important passages in Angélique’s opening description, as it contains both the first reference to her omnipresent dancing feet, and the first connection between the girl and a royal mistress.

The text is replete with references to her “dainty feet, shapely, aspiring, and full of character as her face” (150), a striking description of a dancer’s feet. For the time period, references to “dainty” or “shapely” feet are not uncommon, but it is fascinating that Kirby would portray Angélique’s feet as “aspiring” and “full of character”; indeed, her feet play a central role in her ambitious plans. They are also used as indicators of her mind, as she is seen “impatiently stamping her dainty foot on the floor” (226), or tapping the ground “while her dainty foot marked the rhythm of the tragical thoughts that swept like a song of doom through her soul” (384). Her passion and furious ambition seek an outlet through her feet, which are constantly in motion even while she is still. Her feet are also used as temptations, as seen in the above quotation regarding La Vallière, who also apparently had “aspiring feet,” and used them to her advantage. Angélique’s feet are generally aimed at the corrupt Intendant Bigot, since “there is not a girl in the city but laces her boots to distraction since it came out that the Intendant admires a neat, trim ankle” (166). Knowing of this weakness, Angélique spends a great deal of time exposing her feet to the Intendant’s view, “tapping the ground with a daintier foot than the Intendant had ever seen before” (171). Her deliberate provocation of his desire is underscored when she muses, “Why can I not subdue François Bigot as I have subdued every other man who exposed his weak side to my power?” and in response presses “her foot hard upon the floor” (299). Her foot is explicitly connected with subduing men, as she presses her foot down hard while contemplating their weakness.

In referring to Louise de La Vallière, the narrator associates Angélique with a royal mistress of the French court, in this case, one of Louis XIV’s mistresses and a renowned dancer. Angélique will more commonly be connected – and intimately so – with Louis XV’s mistress, La Pompadour, but it is significant that the narrator reaches back to refer to La

Vallière and the manner of her ascendancy as mistress, when she “stole a king’s heart by the flashes of her pretty feet” (23) while dancing a royal ballet. Here we have the first reference to the French court ballet and its relationship with political sexuality; a woman could access the highest, and traditionally least accessible, position in the land by dancing in the ballet and winning the heart of the king. Louis XIV had four children with Mme de La Vallière, who continued dancing in court ballets with the king for some time; their daughter, the Princesse de Conti, was also a devoted balletomane, and performed as often as possible. French historians have been kind to La Vallière, contrasting her behaviour as mistress with others who followed, considering her to be too empty-headed to have had political ambitions, but nineteenth-century British historians, such as Kirby himself, viewed the entire French tradition of royal mistresses with great distrust.

In the same scene as that in which she longs to subdue Bigot, Angélique also introduces the first reference to the royal mistress who will play a large role in the novel, and in Angélique’s own development – La Pompadour. Angélique defends the infamous Intendant Bigot to her disapproving friend, trying to convince Amélie that he is “noble, gallant, polite, rich, and all-powerful at Court,” the last due to the fact that he “is reported to be prime favourite of the Marquise de Pompadour” (30). But her boasting goes in vain, as even the young and inexperienced Amélie “knew enough by report of the French Court to cause her to shrink instinctively, as from a repulsive insect, at the name of the mistress of Louis XV” (30). Calling the royal mistress a “repulsive insect” might seem exaggerated, but Amélie’s “instinctive” reaction – another sign of her intrinsic good judgement – is echoed throughout the novel. Kirby places much of the blame for the court’s corruption, as well as the loss of Canada, on La Pompadour’s pretty shoulders – and, by extension, on the figure

who most closely resembles her in the colony, Angélique des Meloises. Amélie is concerned at Angélique's casual praise of the mistress, and "trembled at the thought of Angélique's infatuation, or perversity in suffering herself to be attracted by the glitter of the vices of the Royal Intendant" (30). This reaction is telling, in both Amélie's ability to see clearly the problems inherent in the polished society of the court, and in the description of Angélique's infatuation as "perversity"; one might expect less condemnation of a young girl's fascination with a powerful older man.

A brief background on La Pompadour is now necessary; Kirby's opinion of this most reviled of Louis XV's mistress is everywhere evident, and occasionally his disgust obscures the historical facts. Born Jeanne Poisson in 1721, she was a pretty and engaging Parisian who married M. d'Étioles in 1741, and had one daughter, Alexandrine.<sup>12</sup> As a member of the bourgeoisie, she could never be presented to the monarch, but she did have a country house near Versailles, and frequently took advantage of the king's hunting parties to drive her own phaeton in the path of the King. When Louis XV's current mistress, the duchess of Chateauroux, died, Jeanne had an opening, but still no opportunity to meet the King. Certain balls, however, particularly at the Opéra, where the court ballet was now officially housed, were open to anyone sufficiently well dressed; Louis XV frequently attended these fetes, but despite being masked, "his voice and characteristic walk would give him away, and he would be mobbed by lovely if importunate women" (Wallace et al. 14). At the masked ball, to guard his anonymity, the King and seven of his courtiers entered in the guise of clipped yew trees;

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<sup>12</sup> La Corne scornfully says "fish in the market is cheaper than fish in the sea"; the narrator explains that "La Corne's allusion is to the Marquise de Pompadour, whose original name of Jeanne Poisson gave rise to infinite jests and sarcasms among the people of low and high degree" (112).

one yew tree, later discovered to be the king, spent all evening with Jeanne Poisson, dressed as Diana the huntress. In the subsequent round of dancing celebrating the marriage of the Dauphin, in which during the whole month of February, 1745, there were balls nearly every night, the King danced “continually and always with the same person” (Mitford 55). The King gave her an estate, revived the extinct title of Marquisate of Pompadour, and installed her in Versailles over her grief-stricken husband’s complaints.

In one way, the new Marquise fit into the closed society of Versailles; the court’s inherent theatricality appealed to the young woman who was taught to act, dance and sing by a member of the Comédie-Française, and who, as Sarah Maza points out, learned to perform on the elaborate private stage on the estate of her husband’s uncle, Le Normand de Tournehem.<sup>13</sup> In her most popular move among the court, she started her own private theatricals to amuse the king; she built a small theatre – the Théâtre des Petits Cabinets – where she put on a total of sixty-one different plays, operas, and ballets, performing in them herself. However, the court, known by those who belonged to it as *ce pays-ci*, this country, had “a climate, a language, a moral code and customs all its own” (Mitford 66), and La Pompadour made enemies of the aristocrats who saw her as the incarnation of the Parisian bourgeoisie. They were appalled that Louis XV would give her the position of a *maîtresse déclarée*; no French king prior to this – even the licentious Louis XIV – had ever strayed from the bounds of the court when choosing a mistress, with Louis XV actually choosing all his previous mistresses from a single family, the Mailly-Néslés. Moreover, La Pompadour was soon hated by the

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<sup>13</sup>Maza suggests that she may have been the illegitimate daughter of Le Normand de Tournehem, her husband’s uncle.

bourgeoisie also because of her association with the government; they disapproved of her theatre, deeming it an unjustified extravagance in a time of war.

To be fair to the young Marquise, traditionally the king's mistress was, as Mitford points out, an unpopular figure in France, and a convenient scapegoat for the King. Thomas Kaiser notes the "highly gendered nature of Old Regime institutions and the deep fears regarding rule by women that infused them" (147), which led to suspicions of royal mistresses corrupting the king, or subverting his will through seduction. However, La Pompadour became steadily more unpopular, particularly after the Peace of Aix-le-Chapelle, in 1748, until the general hatred for her reached new heights. Countless slanderous pamphlets, songs, and thinly veiled allegorical novels were accompanied by threats of assassination, with one scurrilous song running: "A little bourgeoisie / raised as a choice piece / who brings all down to her level / has turned the Court into a slum / The King despite his scruples / for her madly burns / this ridiculous ardour / makes all Paris laugh, laugh / That cheap whore / insolently rules him" (qtd. in Bernier 135).<sup>14</sup> As La Pompadour grew older, Louis XV chose pretty little lower-class girls to be his mistresses while keeping the Marquise as his companion; these prostitutes were housed in the Parc aux Cerfs (the deer park), a small villa in the town of Versailles. Nineteenth-century historians accused La Pompadour of being the manager and procuress of this establishment, with rumours of more than eighteen hundred young ladies

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<sup>14</sup> Other songs had circulated about previous kings' mistresses; as the mistress of Louis XIV, Mme de Montespan was a fairly controversial figure in France, but Mme de Maintenon, Louis XIV's morganatic wife, generated the most vicious and greatest quantity of criticism, with songs circulating such as: "It is said that one prince today / Controls everything himself; / This is but a slander. / A woman in penance, / Widow of a little turd, / Holds the tiller of France; / That is the pure truth" (qtd. in Kaiser 149).

living in what one critic referred to as “a department for his pleasures” (Barriere 53), which La Pompadour supposedly created in order to continue the king’s debauchery.

Kirby clearly aligns himself with the censorious historians; although the Marquise de Pompadour was not the completely unrepentant sinner that her critics made her out to be, Kirby’s novel is full of condemnations of her, from the mouths of the lowest commoner to that of the governor himself. The governor equates her rule over the king with the disastrous corruption of the colony; Pierre is outraged that she responds directly to the governor’s despatches, crying, “Has France come to be governed by courtesans, like imperial Rome?” (105). He grimly voices the opinion that “the King’s armies and the King’s mistresses cannot all be maintained at the same time – women or war, one or other must give way – and one need not doubt which it will be, when the women rule Court and camp in France at the same time!” (106). Here is a clear example of what Maza describes as the anxiety about “public women” in the Old Regime monarchy, an anxiety arising from the perceived masculinization of women and feminization of men, with the ultimate impact being a usurpation of royal prerogative represented as the emasculation of the king. The perception that women rule over the king has, in the novel, a major role in Angélique’s plans, as she muses that “if women rule France by a right more divine than the Kings, no woman has a better right than I!” (152); she thinks that “if the prize of the King were her lot, she would outdo La Maintenon herself, and end by sitting on the throne” (172), making it clear that she would not stop at ousting the royal favourite, but would aim to usurp the king’s throne.

The French court’s corruption through dance is frequently emphasized, even in regards to the financial problems it causes. The men fear that orders will arrive to stop the defensive works at Quebec, with the treasury exhausted by the expenses of war in Europe; however,

they believe that the treasury is being drained less by the war than by how much is “lavished upon the pimps, panders and harlots of the Court!” (110). The inflammatory language here is intriguing, as it implies that the financial drain on the court’s resources is a practical problem that extends beyond the immorality of the King; the “pimps, panders and harlots” are not simply a seamy by-product of the ballet-dancing royal mistress, but also a serious practical issue of war-time funding. The conspicuous consumption necessary for a court ballet performance was highly expensive, but the problem of La Pompadour’s financial decisions is attributed not to the ordinary expenses of elaborate costumes and grand sets, including chariot floats, water fountains, and machinery that produced lighting effects, rain, and even a house on fire; instead, the problem seems to be that money is being spent on the sexualized lower class of professional dancers. The “pimps, panders, and harlots” sound a great deal like *les filles de l’Opéra*, suggesting an implicit connection between ballet dancers and court mistresses. Although La Pompadour was technically no more a professional dancer than any other noble at court, there seems to be resentment towards the contamination of Versailles by lower-class individuals.

The figure of La Pompadour is used throughout the novel not only as a historical figure, but also as a symbol for Angélique’s developing depravity. As Angélique’s ambition grows, she becomes more and more like this royal mistress; in the same way that Bigot stands in for the corrupt Louis XV, Angélique plays the role of the hard-eyed dancing mistress who will stoop even to murder to achieve her ends, causing the loss of the colony in the process. It is clear from the outset that Angélique is not merely an infatuated innocent, but a dangerous force that Amélie is right to fear. In this first introduction to our dark-haired temptress, she claims that her “ambition would not be content with less than a Governor or Royal Intendant

in New France,” while “in old France, I would not put up with less than the king himself!” (30). From this statement, we can assume that any young man – such as Amélie’s brother, Le Gardeur – will have little chance in Angélique’s affections as against the Intendant Bigot; the pointed suggestion that Angélique would happily set her sights on becoming a royal mistress links her with that other climbing woman of determination, La Pompadour. Angélique recklessly tells Amélie that “he is like Joseph in Egypt, next to Pharaoh in authority. He can shoe his horses with gold! I wish he would shoe me with golden slippers – I would wear them, Amélie!” (29). She would willingly sacrifice much to become Bigot’s property, to be “shod” with gold like his horses; although later she seems to take a dimmer view of Bigot’s abilities, now she is blinded by the promise of wealth and power.

Angélique also connects dance to her powers of persuasion, maintaining that “it will only be the price of another dance with the Chevalier de Péan, to discover all I want. What fools men are when they believe we love them for their sakes and not for our own!” (33). Angélique knows the power of dancing as a means to deceive men, to inveigle secrets from them, and to gain power over them; moreover, she is without scruples in this decision, and feels no shame in using dance to win de Péan’s confidence. Although she goes into no detail of how she does this, we know that she is skilled in the art of flirtation, and is adept at implying a promise of intimacy through her decision to dance with a man. She uses dance in a similar way at the Intendant’s ball, with the same duped de Péan, making him promise to bring Le Gardeur back to the city, within her reach, “or I will dance with you no more” (317). Although she laughs “so gaily as she said this that a stranger would have interpreted her words as all jest,” the Chevalier realizes that “She means it, nevertheless” (317). De Péan is trapped, regardless of his cynical understanding, since he cannot seem to untangle himself from

Angélique's coils; he consents both to the dance and to bringing Le Gardeur – his rival – back to Angélique.

As the novel progresses, we see the transformation of Angélique as she progresses from an ambitious girl just out of the schoolroom to “the most terrible coquette in the city” (140). Like La Pompadour, she first beguiles her prey – the most powerful man in the land – with her dancing abilities. Kirby's establishment of connections between the two women is not always subtle, as Angélique gets her maid to do her hair “up à la Pompadour” (149), making her resemble the royal mistress even more closely. Angélique bluntly states her ambitions, and her willingness to sell herself to achieve them, saying, “I am fit to be a Queen, too, and the man who raises me highest to a Queen's estate, gets my hand!” (151). This is a clear reference to the practice of the French court position of *maîtresse déclaré*, in which the king can “raise her highest to a Queen's estate” without actually marrying her; remarkably, both Louis XIV and XV had ballet dancers – although usually noble ones – as their *maîtresse déclaré*. In fact, we hear that Bigot is not her final objective, but “a stepping-stone to further greatness” (152); her dreams evoke the dancing mistress clearly, as her “vivid fancy conjured up scenes of royal splendor, where, introduced by the courtly Bigot, princes and nobles would follow in her train, and the smiles of Majesty itself would distinguish her in the royal halls of Versailles” (152). In effect, Bigot would work once more as a pimp for the King's new mistress, and she would replace La Pompadour. Indeed, Angélique muses on the fact that “La Pompadour was getting old, men said, and the King was already casting his eyes round the circle of more youthful beauties in his Court for a successor” (171); she clearly hopes to be the next powerful young mistress at court.

Bigot himself recognizes Angélique's power and abilities, and hopes to use them for his own ends, in the same way he found a royal protectress in his prostitution of Jeanne Poisson to the King. He admits to himself that "the man who gets her and knows how to use her might be Prime Minister of France" (170), obviously hoping for a more commanding position himself. Bigot indicates that one must also be able to "know how to use" the talents of someone like Angélique; presumably, he feels himself capable, after manoeuvring La Pompadour into an advantageous position, seducing Caroline St Castin, and keeping all of the women in Montreal at a safe distance. In a dangerous move, he plays to Angélique's dreams, telling her that "Versailles is the only fitting theatre for the display of beauty and spirit like yours" (171). Here again we have a reiteration of the idea of Versailles as one huge stage, upon which the theatrical life of the French court and its king is acted, and one in which Angélique would feel perfectly at home; her "free style was the most perfect piece of acting in the world" (297). She is as dangerous an actor as Bigot, and is attentive to the craft, preparing her looks and lines with "diligent rehearsal" (492). Although, like La Pompadour, Angélique would be an outsider at Versailles, albeit of the proper class, she is not daunted but "dazzled and overpowered by the thought of the golden doors of her ambition opened by the hand of the Intendant" (171). So secure in her determination to succeed the current mistress, Angélique drops hints of favouritism to come for her family, telling her brother he may "cultivate chou chou if you cannot raise a bride like Amélie de Repentigny" (195). Kirby takes no chance that readers not as familiar with the history might miss the allusion, as he spells out that this is a "broad allusion to the brother of La Pompadour, who, by virtue of his relationship to the Court favorite, had recently been created Director of the Royal Gardens" (195).

We meet Amélie's love, Pierre Philibert, when he journeys to the Intendant's palace to free Le Gardeur from the clutches of La Friponne; his heroism is immediately evident, but more important is the relationship established between the Intendant's palace and the court of Versailles. These correlations – Bigot as Louis XV, Angélique as La Pompadour, the Palace of the Intendant as the palace at Versailles – are emphasized throughout the novel, building to a climax that ends in New France's downfall. The "many-gabled Palace of the Intendant" is described as "the most magnificent structure in New France" (5), but Colonel Philibert is not deceived by its outward beauty. As he rides up to the palace with his summons for Le Gardeur, he is struck by the lack of guards, and hears the sounds of debauchery from without:

long ere he reached the door of the Chateau, a din of voices within, a wild medley of shouts, song, and laughter, a clatter of wine-cups, and pealing notes of violins struck him with amazement and disgust. He distinguished drunken voices singing snatches of bacchanalian songs, while now and then stentorian mouths called for fresh brimmers and new toasts were drunk with uproarious applause. (50)

Rampant drunkenness in a company of men charged with the running of the colony is clearly a serious problem, but this party also mimics the excesses of a court ballet performance; the "pealing notes of violins" accompany the "music" of the "shouts, songs, and laughter" in the same way that Italian violinists accompanied the dances. The "bacchanalian songs" can be connected to the ballet's love of pagan themes, particularly those celebrating revelry, such as *Les Fêtes de Bacchus*, and even the toasts are met with "uproarious applause," indicating that their performance is intended for the audience's appreciation.

In case his readers did not know their French history, Kirby makes an early point of describing the “vices of the times,” in which the young men of the colony “in dress, luxury and immorality, strove to imitate the brilliant, dissolute Court of Louis XV” (14). The narrator notes that the company of the Friponne are “in the garb of gentlemen,” although he will not go so far as to call them gentlemen in their behaviour, as they sit “all in disorder and soiled with wine, their countenances inflamed, their eyes red and fiery, their tongues loose and loquacious” (53). As Kaiser explains, as early as 1736, public dismay at Louis XV’s excessive regard for hunting was joined by anxieties over his reportedly heavy drinking. Rumour had it that wine was no longer strong enough for the king, and that he was “now mixing different liquors which he and his ‘companions in debauchery’ consumed until they collapsed on the floor and ‘lost their reason’” (Kaiser 142). Kaiser also finds that rumours were circulating about the king’s adultery, in which the courtiers followed the king’s licentious behaviour, and that all the ladies of the court were concubines of the king; it was reported that the tower at the royal chateau of Choisy had been garnished with placards reading “Royal Bordello.” William Doyle explains that after 1748, Louis XV locked himself away in his royal palaces, venturing only rarely to Paris and never to the provinces; the often exaggerated rumours about his conduct came out in scurrilous songs, with one refrain being “You liked lewd talk, / you loved your drink, / A famous king – in hunting pink. / Notorious in your taste for tarts: / Obituaries need all their arts” (Doyle 222). Although the public court ballets were unlikely to be affairs of great dissolution, one can speculate that the private “home theatricals” of opera and ballet which La Pompadour performed in the Théâtre de Petits Cabinets might be exercises in wantonness.

The Chateau of Beaumanoir, the Intendant's palace, is a place of "many a festive revelry that matched, in bacchanalian frenzy, the wild orgies of the Regency and the present debaucheries of Choisy and the *petits appartements* of Versailles. Its splendor, its luxury, its riotous feasts lasting without intermission sometimes for days, were the themes of wonder and disgust" (52). Again we have references to Bacchus, although this time with the agitation of a "frenzy," and also to "wild orgies" both of the past and of current "debaucheries" in France. Choisy was the manor that Louis XV and La Pompadour used for private parties, which also had a private theatre. In Versailles, the king had his own suite of rooms – the *petits appartements* – in which he often entertained; under Louis XIV, Nevile observes, courtiers were invited to these apartments for an evening of pleasure, the *jours d'appartement*, which included gambling, music, and dance. Louis XV, who spent most of his time in the private quarters of his mistresses, wallowed in orgies of food, drink, and spectacles of dance put on by La Pompadour, which Kirby might indeed have found "themes of wonder and disgust."

Kirby makes it clear that the decadence of the French court, as well as its Canadian counterpart at the Palace of the Intendant, were common knowledge; the Friponne and its corrupt behaviour are commented on with scorn among all of the colonists. Revels in the manner of the court of Versailles, with private ballets and drunken parties with dancing girls, not the honourable matter of governing the new colony, are the main concerns of the scandalous company. Kirby frequently makes the distinction between the corrupt nature of certain officials tied directly to the court of France through their behaviour, and the honest characters of the colonists, in an attempt to sketch a worthy past for the British Canadians of Quebec; those habitants disgusted with the Friponne will be the backbone of the new colony.

The Friponne, or “the swindle” as it was commonly known, is “the immense magazine established by the Grand Company of traders in New France” (35). Claiming a monopoly over the purchase and sale of all imports and exports in the colony, its privileges were based upon royal ordinances and decrees of the Intendant – in this case Bigot; its rights were “enforced in the most arbitrary manner – and to the prejudice of every other mercantile interest in the colony” (35). The position of the Intendant in New France was established as the judicial and financial head of the colony, while the governor was to be the military and diplomatic head; Colin Coates points out that formally, the colonial governor was superior to the Intendant, but in practice, their relationship was often complicated by disagreement. Bigot profits by the confusion, secure in his patronage by La Pompadour. Running in direct conflict with the profiteering outfit is the Philiberts’ Golden Dog, a company that faithfully serves the colony. Colonel Philibert’s father, now “plain Bourgeois Philibert in Quebec,” was Count Philibert in Normandy, but has become one of the richest men in New France as an enterprising merchant. It is implied that La Pompadour had some hand in his exile, or at least in seizing his lands after he left; the Governor speaks of the rumours that she “has obtained a grant of your father’s sequestered estate in Normandy, for her relative the Count de Marville” (102), yet one more condemnation against the current court.

In an effort to distinguish the family of Philibert from the general censure against the French, Kirby claims a distinct and admirable religious background for them, as Huguenots instead of Catholics. Doyle argues that it is “hard to overstate the extent to which Roman Catholicism permeated early modern French life” (79), pointing out that for the century between Louis XIV’s expulsion of the Protestants in 1685 and Louis XVI’s edict of toleration in 1787, Catholicism was the sole permissible religion. Rumours in the colony credit the

Philiberts with being either Huguenots – French Protestants in exile – or even Jansenists, a sect of Catholicism which was also banned in France; in this case, Kirby changed the facts to suit his story, as the historical Philiberts were Catholic. Dame Rochelle, the “worthy housekeeper and ancient governess of the Philiberts” (116), is even more of a Protestant, as she is the daughter of an ardent Calvinist minister, “born in the fatal year of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, when Louis XIV undid the glorious work of Henri Quatre, and covered France with persecution and civil war” (116). The mention here of Louis XIV’s banishment of Protestants is worded with passion, as a “fatal year” in which the Sun King, epitome of French fashion, “undid the glorious work” of Henri IV; this “glorious work” refers to the edict of Nantes which granted Protestants many rights in a Catholic country. As a direct result of reversing the edict, Kirby claims, France is “covered in persecution and civil war” and the kind of chaos in which France now finds itself.<sup>15</sup>

To distinguish the honest Philiberts even further from the effeminate French court, the narrator points out that both Pierre and his father have enough “good taste” to discard “perukes and powder although very much in fashion in those days” (38). The masculine Pierre is contrasted with the effeminate flowers of the Friponne, particularly de Péan; with his “white hands, his delicate feet, and irreproachable dress and manner, he seemed not to comprehend that a true woman like Amelie cares nothing for these things in comparison with a manly nature” (378). This elegant aristocrat, although the perfect example of a French courtier, is no match for Pierre, with his sensible military bearing. Colonel Philibert, standing

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<sup>15</sup> Doyle explains that the diplomatic consequences of expelling Protestants were damaging for French affairs abroad as well: “the Calvinist elector of Brandenburg forsook his French alliance, decisively shifting the balance against France in Germany; while the shock to Protestant opinion in England did much to tip the scales against the Catholicizing James II, and so prepare for his replacement by Louis XIV’s arch-enemy, William III” (Doyle 181).

for the honest Frenchman, as English as possible in tastes and religion, is revolted by the Friponne's revels. He immediately sees the dangers to the colony in the festivities, lamenting that they are "rioting in drunkenness when the colony demands the cool head, the strong arm, and the true heart of every man among us! Oh, my country! My dear country! What fate is thine to expect when men like these are thy rulers?" (51). It is unclear whether Philibert means Canada or France, but both will be lost for men such as him due to the rulers' preference for dancing women over manly governance; indeed, his emphasis on the necessary "cool head," "strong arm" and "true heart" implies a lack of such masculine attributes in the riotous Friponne – and by extension, in the court at Versailles.

As Philibert enters the Intendant's palace, the relationship between this echo of Versailles and the original is underlined repeatedly. The lofty ceiling bears a fresco of "the apotheosis of Louis IV," pointing to the melodramatic and idolatrous nature of the Catholic religion as intertwined with its monarchs; the emphasis on the corrupting influence of French dance overshadows any religious concerns here. At the head of the room hangs "a full-length portrait of Marquise de Pompadour, the mistress of Louis XV, and the friend and patroness of the Intendant Bigot; her bold, voluptuous beauty seemed well fitted to be the presiding genius of his house" (53). This "bold" figure, instead of a queen or goddess, rules both the court and La Friponne; her "voluptuous beauty" signals earthy pleasures as opposed to more artistic or spiritual ones, and is reminiscent of the opening description of the deadly Angélique's beauty. Philibert does note other paintings on the walls, including one of the King and Queen, but we should particularly note the array of mistresses portrayed as well: "the dark-eyed Montespan; the crafty Maintenon; and the pensive beauty of Louise de la Vallière, the only mistress of Louis XIV who loved him for his own sake" (53). Mme de Montespan was considered an

ambitious and imposing presence at court, but the “crafty Maintenon,” as Kirby calls her, was even more detested, referred to in song as a “detestable Creole witch / Fatal Maintenon” (qtd. in Kaiser 150). Later Louis XIV’s morganatic wife, it was said that she “held the tiller of France” (qtd. in Kaiser 149), usurping royal control in the same way that La Pompadour did.

La Pompadour’s influence is seen not only in her image presiding at the head of the room, but also in her gifts, including “a massive gold epergne of choicest Italian art,” which represented “Bacchus enthroned on a tun of wine, presenting flowing cups to a dance of fauns and satyrs” (53). This gift suggests balletic decadence, with its Italian origins and Greek themes; as noted, these references can be seen in many court ballets, such as *Les Fées des forêts de Saint Germain*, *La Triomphe de L’Amour*, and *Les Fêtes de Bacchus*. Even the music in the hall holds echoes of the court ballet, as the band of musicians in the gallery “filled the pauses of the riotous feast with the ravishing strains of Lulli and Destouches” (54). As previously noted, the famous composer Lully lived a dissolute lifestyle; he would have been quite at home in the Friponne.

After the unnerving description of the Palace of the Intendant, with its correspondences to the decadent dancing court of Versailles, we are finally offered a fuller description of the Intendant himself, François Bigot. We learn that his lessons in “polished seductiveness” at the court of Louis XV “made François Bigot the most plausible and dangerous man in New France” (54). His very “plausibility” may well make him dangerous; as we have seen in Chapter One, the most hazardous encounter a woman could have was with a man who could control his dancing practices to the point of deception about his true character. If Bigot learnt dancing at the French court, then he would be a much more dangerous figure than a flirtatious Fitzgerald at a country ball, or even a dissipated British

aristocrat at an assembly<sup>16</sup>; his tutelage under the corrupt Louis XV and his mistress La Pompadour has left him “fond of wine and music, passionately addicted to gambling, and devoted to the pleasant vices that were rampant in the Court of France” (54). The term “pleasant vices” would sound relatively innocuous, were it not for the previous descriptions of the vices for which Louis XV’s court was famous, including drunken riots, lewd spectacles, and ballet mistresses.

Indeed, we learn that although Bigot is “finely educated, able in the conduct of affairs, and fertile in expedients to accomplish his ends” – the latter sounding suspiciously self-serving – he “might have saved New France, had he been as honest as he was clever” (54). The inference is that he might have saved the colony from Louis XV’s negligence and disdain for ruling over anything other than the idealized and romanticized courts on the ballet stage. But, as the narrator bluntly declares, Bigot is “unprincipled and corrupt” and “ruined New France for the sake of himself and his patroness, and the crowd of courtiers and frail beauties who surrounded the King, and whose arts and influence kept him in his high office” (54). This condemnation is striking for the direction of the venom; the King, earlier described as the corrupt head of the court, is here denied the power even to lose a colony. La Pompadour, who is Bigot’s “patroness,” and the “crowd of courtiers and frail beauties” are the people at fault here, not the King. Presumably Louis XV is unable or unwilling to defend himself, or to fight through the cobwebs of etiquette and theatricality of Versailles.

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<sup>16</sup> Carl Murphy shows the connections between these sorts of unscrupulous men, arguing that the Intendant is “a successful Audley Sternfield who has reached an all-powerful position in society. His paramour, Angélique des Meloises, is a fallen angel – a corrupt Lucille D’Aulnay” (5).

In case the reader is not yet thoroughly suspicious of Bigot, the narrator points out that he has “already ruined and lost the ancient colony of Acadia, through his defrauds and malversations as Chief Commissary of the Army” (54). This is a concrete consequence of his personal greed and his unprincipled connection with the figure who, by Kirby’s account, is draining the French court of its vitality, masculinity, and – by extension – its possessions overseas. Guy Fregault, in *François Bigot: Administrateur Français*, argues that the historical Bigot, while possessing some real talent, corrupted this talent by vice, voracity, and greed, as well as his lust for Mme de Péan, once Angélique des Meloises. Fregault contends that his legacy is that of “*une figure sinistre, suintant la corruption, la luxure et la cruauté*” (31), and that he made the Palais de l’Intendance “*un petit Versailles ou il reproduisait les moeurs du roi son maître*” (35). The nickname given to him by Kirby, St. Blague, does not do justice to the depths of Kirby’s detestation; in a melodramatic denouncement, he is described as a lord of hell itself, as the “rings of corruption in the Grand Company descended, narrower and more black and precipitous, down to the bottom, where Bigot sat, the Demiurgos of all” (192).

Bigot’s power in the colony is so strong that when Lady de Tilly, Amélie’s aunt, expresses some early doubts about Bigot’s character, her friend is appalled. Madame de Grandmaison, a well-bred lady of good standing, points out that “the Intendant is so powerful at Court” (89) that he ought to be appeased at all costs, intimating that his power rivals the King’s. The worldly Madame notes that Bigot “was a particular friend of Madame d’Etiolles before she was known at Court, and they say he managed her introduction to the King at the famous masked ball at the Hotel de Ville, when His Majesty threw his handkerchief at her, and she became first *dame du palais* and the Marquise de Pompadour” (89). Bigot’s part in the introduction of La Pompadour to the King thus puts him in the role of procurer for the

brash bourgeoisie; there is no historical evidence that he was connected at all in this way, which Kirby either did not know, or, more likely, chose to disregard in order to make Bigot's corruption even more evident.

Discovering his abashed and drunken friend at the Palace, Pierre pulls him away, disgusted with the "disorder, filth and stench of the prolonged debauch" (76); the emphasis on the "filth and stench" of the hall is an effective detail in de-romanticizing the Palace. As Pierre and his charge leave, Bigot claims that "Colonel Philibert rather puts us to the blush, or would do, were not our cheeks so well painted in the hues of rosy Bacchus" (78). The "hues of rosy Bacchus" paint the cheeks of the Friponne in drunkenness, but in their connection to all of the pleasures and vices of Versailles, it is possible to see yet another reference to a Bacchus-related ballet in their revels; particularly in the carnivalesque and burlesque ballets, men and women alike were heavily made up with rouge and other professional makeup. Le Gardeur confirms the connection with the corrupt nature of the French court to Philibert, admitting that "it was the wit, wine and enchantments of Bigot, I suppose, and the greatest temptation of all – a woman's smiles – that led me to take the wrong turn" (80). The reference to "wit, wine and enchantments" is reminiscent of Louis XV's ballet theatricals in the *petits appartements* in Versailles, with their satirical and bawdy ballets, drunken debauches, and a focus on magical or pagan themes; reference to the "greatest temptation" of a woman's smiles, in this case referring to Angélique, brings La Pompadour back to mind.

The next time we see the Palace of the Intendant, dancing plays a prominent role, as Bigot gives a ball, "the most magnificent affair ever got up in New France" (88). While the ball may seem similar to the British balls and assemblies that we have seen in Chapter One, the original debauchery in the same hall taints the morality of this ball; this can be no innocent

Montreal ladies' private event, but a spectacle similar to the court balls in Versailles that often finished an evening of ballet. Susan Au explains that the court ballets were often followed by a ball in which everyone joined, "symbolically drawing both spectators and performers into accord with the ideas expressed by the performance" (13), and this sort of ball would be led by the king and queen – or rather, the king and his mistress – in this case, Bigot and the woman of his choice. Lady de Tilly and Amélie, in fact, seriously contemplate not attending the spectacle, a sign of the mistrust surrounding Bigot's intentions.

Indeed, spectacle is the appropriate description of the event, as we learn from a friend of Lady de Tilly, who informs the lady and her niece that "all Quebec has rung with nothing else for a fortnight, and every milliner and modiste in the city has gone almost insane over the most superlative costumes to be worn there" (88). Not only does this statement reveal the vanity of the participants about their dress, but it also raises some serious doubts about Bigot's devotion to the colony; with British soldiers advancing on the city, should not the most powerful man in the colony be encouraging a sober defense of the walls of Montreal instead of a frivolous and expensive evening? Simonne Voyer and Gynette Tremblay point out that on his arrival in Quebec, Bigot created "*une sorte de petite 'cour', genre Louis XV*" (34) which included grand receptions everyone was desperate to attend; Fregault observes that the ecclesiastical parties in the colony were scandalized by Bigot's evenings of dance. He arrived in New France on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February, 1749, and merely six days later hosted his first elaborate affair. His contemporary critics were outraged at his treatment of the Acadians, whom he left

to die in hunger while he spent money on clothes and balls, much in the manner of Louis XV.<sup>17</sup>

Before the grand affair at the Palace of the Intendant, which is anticipated for most of the novel, we are given a contrasting ball; the fete to honour Pierre Philibert upon his return home from the campaigns in Acadia is a sweetly innocent gathering, where the dancing is almost British in tone. The ball is described as proceeding “with unflagging spirit and enjoyment,” as “the old walls fairly vibrated with the music and dancing of the gay company” (220). This depiction of dancing is very different from the theatrical court ballets, primarily because of its social, democratic nature. The “gay company” is coming together as a community, without overbearing despots creating a spectacle for their own enjoyment, and without dark vices ruining the “unflagging spirit” of the evening. Amélie gives her hand to Pierre for a modest “one or two dances,” which leads to good-natured speculation “as to the probable Chatelaine of Belmont” (220). Amélie and Pierre are adhering closely to the etiquette of social dancing that the British valued so highly, as seen in Chapter One – from the number of dances it was considered appropriate to have with one partner, to the implicit understanding of marriage as the motive behind the dance.

On the gardens and lawns of Belmont is gathered a noble “company of fair women and brave men, the pick and choice of their race” (205); while French fashions are in evidence among the “troops of ladies in the costumes and toilettes of the latest Parisian fashion” (197), they are not the elaborate and decadent court costumes that raise Kirby’s wrath, but instead they “gladdened the eye with pictures of grace and beauty which Paris itself could not have

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<sup>17</sup> Voyer and Tremblay note that Montcalm wrote an indignant letter to his mother on Bigot’s thoughtless extravagance, saying “*malgré la misère publique, des bals et un jeu effroyable*” (36).

surpassed” (197). References to Paris, while usually denoting a lavish obeisance to fashion, are here better than references to Versailles; Paris, at least, is full of the honest bourgeoisie who are being failed by their king. The men at the dance are not slaves to the French fashions, either: the narrator points out, highlighting the innate nobility of these men, that “it is not intellect, nor activity, nor wealth that obtains power over men; but force of character, self-control, a quiet compressed will and patient resolve; these qualities make one man the natural ruler over others by a title they never dispute” (198). These qualities are notably lacking in the officials of the colony and in their ruler; no one could accuse the court of Versailles, or Bigot’s replica of it in New France of possessing “self-control,” “quiet will,” or “patient resolve.” The emphasis on a natural ruler in contrast to the corrupt ruler in France might seem overly democratic for the monarchy-loving Kirby, but it is made clear that these French people never falter in their respect for their King, as they proclaim that “Our first duty is to love God – our next to honor the King! And New France will never fail in either!” (208). The only fault in the connection between these people and their ruler lies in the King’s misuse of the people’s love. Kirby manages to link these brave and doomed people to appropriate British sentiment, by having them sing the royal anthem, “God Save the King,” which became the national hymn of the English; the narrator points out that although the song is no longer heard in France, but was “buried with the people’s loyalty, fathoms deep under the ruins of the monarchy,” it “flourishes still with pristine vigor in New France, that olive branch grafted on the stately tree of the British Empire” (208).

Even in the midst of this hopeful festival, the corruption of the French court is evident, manifested in the colony through Angélique. Disrupting the innocent ball, Angélique sends a note to Le Gardeur, asking him to meet her immediately; the request and his subsequent

acquiescence are extremely disrespectful of the proprieties, since Angélique declined to attend the dance, and Le Gardeur has a duty to his hostess. Amélie begs him to stay, for his own sake and since “she felt keenly the discourtesy to Pierre” (217), but he insists on leaving immediately. Lady de Tilly is furious, and darkly sums up Angélique’s character, saying that “more than one of her lovers lie in a bloody grave by reason of her coqueties. She has ruined every man whom she has flattered into loving her. She is without affection. Her thoughts are covered with a veil of deceit impenetrable. She would sacrifice the whole world to her vanity” (219). This description might seem hyperbolic for a dancing misdemeanour, but Lady Tilly has struck to the heart of Angélique’s overpowering ambition.

When Angélique is thwarted in her attempt to gain control over Bigot’s affections, she is furious at the mysterious Caroline St Castin; interestingly, her fury is made manifest in balletic terms. She forces Fanchon Dodier, a cousin of her maid Lizette, to talk like “the pretty grisette who directed Lawrence Stern to the Opéra Comique” (225). A “griset” was a working girl, often a seamstress or a ballet girl, who also worked as a prostitute; Mme du Barry, the mistress who replaced La Pompadour, was one such, and the Opéra Comique, along with the Comédie-Italienne and the Comédie-Français, performed theatre, operas, and ballets for the court at Versailles on a regular basis, twice a week for over fifty years. Angélique’s impatience is manifested in her feet when we see her “stamping her dainty foot on the floor” (226) and tearing up a note “in a paroxysm of fury, scattering its pieces like snowflakes over the floor, and stamping on them with her firm foot as if she would tread them into annihilation” (227). Her firm stamp might seem foreign to contemporary understandings of ballet, but this understanding is coloured by the Romantic innovations which will be discussed in Chapter Four; instead of a soft and fluttering *ballet blanc*, court ballet often utilized the

Italian and French sharp and stamping movements of folk dances. It is now that Angélique realizes that “the influence of those eyes must be killed, if Angélique des Meloises is ever to mount the lofty chariot of her ambition” (230); it is only a short step from the metaphor of murder to murder itself.

Appropriate dancing, in this case social dancing as opposed to stage or performance dancing, is represented by our hero and heroine, as Amélie and Philibert attempt to distract Le Gardeur from Angélique’s presence. They decree summer revels in the country, in which “the gentlemen shall light fires, the ladies shall make tea, and we will have guitars and songs, and maybe a dance” (267). This innocent kind of dance, in which tea is the beverage of choice rather than Louis XV’s gluttonous preferences, is considered beneficial for the health and well-being of Le Gardeur, restoring him to a simple and natural morality. Robert Stacey notes that “Le Gardeur’s corruption at the hands of the Grand Company reiterates a symbolic contrast between city and country that follows the polarizing tendencies of romance form” (100); the demonic aspects of the city are embodied in Angélique, who – unlike every other significant character in the novel – never leaves her urban environment.

In this country setting, there are “dinners and diversions for the day, music and dancing for the night” (279), and healthy activities for the whole company, such as playing in the “light canoes, which danced like corks upon the water” (288). Here, Amélie’s natural lack of theatricality finds its perfect place. She is described as “so fresh of thought, so free from all affectation, so gentle and winning in all her ways” (286), a sharp contrast to the calculated nature of Angélique and her idol, La Pompadour, whose every gesture is an affected performance meant for the stage of the court. Indeed, Amélie and Philibert create their own idyllic court, where Amélie is crowned queen of the island, and they “held a cour

plenièrre...and made a code of laws for our kingdom of Cosagne during the next eight days” (281), showing that this light-hearted court thinks of its laws first and its pleasure second. The true nobility of the innocent couple is emphasized again when Pierre proposes to Amélie, as they sit in a “gigantic oak forming a rude but simple chair fit to enthrone the king of the forest and his dryad queen” (289). Amélie and Pierre are the true king and queen of the colony, and the prototype of the ancestors Kirby wishes to claim, a heritage of colonists loyal to Canada’s principles; it is no coincidence that they are deemed monarchs of the wood, nature approving of the oak-king and his dryad-queen despite the burst of thunder that foreshadows their coming doom.

It is clear that this kind of dancing and the social relations and values it represents can support the colony in the British-approved form of social connections as seen in Chapter One; the marriage contracted between Amélie and Pierre, the emblematic monarchs of the colony, indicates that the innocent rural gathering is a fitting form of social intercourse. If, as Kirby wrote in his *Annals of Niagara* (1896), Louis XV had listened to the “wise statesmanlike views of Governor LaGalisonniere” and “if French Canadian interests had been conducted with prudence and patriotism in the French court,” the happy and innocent Eden created by Amélie and Pierre might have lasted; Kirby argues that, but for the French court, “there seems little room for doubt in any unprejudiced mind acquainted of the facts of the times but that the vast interior of North America, with Canada, would have been French and not English at the present day” (34).

After this idyllic interlude, we are shown its reverse in the much-anticipated Intendant’s Ball. This “great ball at the Palais” is all the talk of Montreal, and all the women are vying for the “honor of dancing courtly minuets and lively cotillions with the gay

Intendant” (297). Here we see a staged performance, although it takes place in a social dance setting; Angélique’s dancing with the Intendant is in the same vein as the Court ballets in which La Pompadour participated, a blend of the contemporary ballroom setting and a fantasy world. The ballroom would be decorated elaborately; the ball at the Hotel de Ville, at which Jeanne Poisson met Louis XV, had “real palm trees, whose stems were garlanded with roses, and draperies of pink velvet fringed with gold, outlined the buffets which groaned with turkeys, boar’s heads and other delicacies” (Mitford 58). Not only could these intricate balls be overwhelmingly lavish, but they could also be dangerous; like Bigot’s ball, the Hotel de Ville ball was the event of the season, and people were so desperate to attend that “the crowd was so immense as to be almost dangerous...it was alleged that several people had died, of heat, or cold, or fatigue or asphyxiation” (Mitford 58).

As she dances, Angélique is “the acknowledged queen of the Intendant’s ball” (297), the first of many references in this scene to her aspirations to royalty. She is dressed in the highest of court fashion, with “exquisite taste and richness” (297). Bigot leads her through the ballroom, while she smugly knows “the ball had been really got up mainly for her pleasure” (300). Angélique feels as if her dreams of greatness are close to being fulfilled, as she and Bigot move “among the guests, receiving as they passed obsequious salutations, which to Angélique seemed a foretaste of royalty” (303); the “obsequious salutations” she receives in lieu of approval seem to cement her place as Bigot’s mistress. She continues in this role as she demands to escape the heat of the ballroom, leaving the social dancing for a more intimate performance; with “an air of royal coquetry” (299), she takes Bigot’s arm and makes him lead her to the gardens. These gardens are reminiscent of the elaborate gardens of Versailles; Angélique sweeps through them “like a queen of Cyprus through the flower-bordered walks,

brushing the roses and lilies with her proud train, and treading, with as dainty a foot as ever bewitched human eye, the white paths that led back to the grand terrace of the Palace” (305). Again, her “dainty foot” is the tool of “bewitching” men, and her proud “tread” is her best asset.

Since the community does not know of Bigot’s secret mistress hidden in the Palace, the ambitious young women go to great lengths during the ball to win his approval. The “wily girls knew his artistic tastes, and their pretty feet patted time to the music, while they responded with ready glee to the gossiping of the gay Intendant” (307); it is well known that “the Intendant particularly admires a fine foot and ankle in a woman!” (316). Angélique responds to the challenge with both a royal hauteur and a fervent dance performance; she disrupts the “measured tread of feet” of the social dancing, and the music stops and begins a “new strain for the Intendant and his fair partner” (314). This is not the first time she has disrupted a dance, but it is the first time she has forced an entire ballroom to stop dancing to watch her performance. As she dances, “her exuberance of spirits overflowed like a fountain of intoxicating wine” (319), a very different sort of spirited enjoyment than that found in the fete for Pierre Philibert. This dance between her and the Intendant would most likely be as a single couple in the ballroom, performing for the massed spectators, known as a *danse à deux*, very different from the British contradances discussed in Chapter One, and likely performed at the social gatherings in New France.

Angélique’s “voluptuous beauty, lissomeness, and grace of movement enthralled all eyes with admiration, as she danced with the Intendant, who was himself no mean votary of Terpsichore” (319). Bigot, as a “votary of Terpsichore,” a member of the court of Versailles, and La Pompadour’s favourite, would likely have performed in some ballets himself; at the

very least, he is clearly comfortable with the *danses à deux* which follow such a performance. Angélique is “carried away by the spirit of the dance, and the triumph of present possession of the courtly Intendant. Her dainty feet flashed under her flying robe and scarcely seemed to touch the floor as they kept time to the swift throbbings of the music” (319). But her triumph is short-lived, as Bigot tires of the performance, “weary, long before Angélique, of the excitement and breathless heat of a wild Polish dance, recently first heard of in French society” (319). The description of the dance, with its “swift throbbing” and “breathless heat,” are indicative of traditional British mistrust of continental dances and their sexualized nature. This “wild Polish dance” is likely a mazurka, similar to a waltz, often performed in ballets, with stamping movements and military precision.

When Angélique is unable to win Bigot through dance, she turns to a black art traditionally understood in relation to French court intrigue: poison. In the same way that Angélique represents the dangerously ambitious Marquise de Pompadour in Canada, the local witch La Corriveau recalls the sordid and lethal corruption of the French court during Louis XIV’s reign. Kirby takes pains to point out that Louis XV’s decadence had its precedence in his grandfather’s court; the narrator claims that “the long reign of Louis XIV full of glories and misfortunes for France, was marked towards its close by a portentous sign indicative of corrupt manners and a falling state. Among these the crimes of secret poisoning suddenly attained a magnitude which filled the whole nation with terror and alarm” (329). He relates the story of the “aqua tofana,” a deadly poison that swept through the ranks of the court, and links it to Louis XIV’s mistresses, from the famous dancer La Vallière to her rival Mme Montespan.

Lynn Mollenauer, in *Strange Revelations: Magic, Poison, and Sacrilege in Louis XIV's France* (2007), writes of the connections between court intrigues and the loosely knit community of magicians, sorceresses, and renegade priests who formed the nucleus of the criminal underworld of Paris. Mme de Montespan, the king's official mistress, was accused of attempting to poison the king; while the investigation concluded that she was innocent of that charge, it was revealed that she had tried to increase her influence over him through magical means, from love potions to magical rituals;<sup>18</sup> another of Louis XIV's former mistresses, Olympe Mancini, poisoned her husband, and plotted to poison La Vallière.<sup>19</sup> Mollenauer explains that ballets depicting the myth of Medea or Circe were used as cultural scripts for understanding the crime of poison, an "explanatory narrative that linked the practice of poison to women, to magic, to rivalry" (53); between 1553 and 1797, nineteen different court ballets featured the character of Medea, twelve of these productions debuting during the reign of Louis XIV. Angélique, aided by La Corriveau, inherits this narrative; when contemplating the crime, she is described as "gloomy and beautiful as Medea" (503). There are foreshadowings of her role as Medea earlier in the text as well, from the descriptions of her witcheries, enchantments, and "magic power" (157) to Amélie asking Le Gardeur "what maddening philtre have you drunk to intoxicate you" (217). The narrator pities the naive love of Le Gardeur, saying it was "better he had never been born than drunk the

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<sup>18</sup> Kirby claims that "the Court took the alarm, when a gilded vial of the aqua tofana was found one day upon the table of the Duchesse de la Vallière, having been placed there by the hand of some secret rival, in order to cast suspicion on the unhappy Louise, and hasten her fall, already approaching" (331); this is historically inaccurate. As mentioned above, Mme de Montespan was the accused in this case, and La Vallière was among the purported victims.

<sup>19</sup> Most historians now presume that Mme de Montespan's attendant, Mlle des Oeilletts, was probably the real culprit behind the conspiracy to poison the king, apparently in revenge for his refusal to recognize the daughter she had borne him.

poison of her lips” (159), and even the witch La Corriveau says contemptuously that she deserves “to become the mother of witches and harlots for all time” (344); as we have seen, even her dancing is a dangerous enchantment.<sup>20</sup>

La Corriveau, the descendant of the sorceress La Voisin, has inherited both the knowledge of the poisons and the “Italian subtlety of her race” (336); more than that, we can see a connection between this witch and the Italian influence on ballet. Catherine de Medici, the founding mother of ballet in France, and later Marie de Medici were both queens and queen mothers of immense power and calculation; despite her age, La Corriveau is the only other person in the novel besides Angélique whose description focuses on her feet. Her “very trim foot” (338) is described several times in detail, as being “small and well-shod, like a lady’s, as the envious neighbors used to say. She never in her life would wear the sabots of the peasant women, nor go barefoot, as many of them did, about the house” (341). She is clearly proud of the aristocratic background evidenced in her feet, as well as in her inheritance of Italian poisons. We hear that she is “vain of her feet, which would have made her fortune, as she thought with bitterness, anywhere but in St. Valier” (341); this seems to be an allusion to the power of dance to ensnare a man. Kirby’s reference to both La Vallière and Angélique as possessing the power to capture the heart of kings with their feet seems to apply to La Corriveau as well; at least she believes that her feet “would have made her fortune” if she were in France, or even the right neighbourhood of Montreal. She and Angélique keep the

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<sup>20</sup> Alessandro Arcangeli finds specific references to fears of dancing as enchantment in Protestant treatises like that of Jean Boiseul, a reformed pastor in La Rochelle, in his *Traité contre les danses* (1606); he presents dance as the “amusement and rite of witches, to the extent that several times throughout the book dance is accorded a power of ‘bewitching’ (ensorceler): dancers are bewitched, and in their turn enchant the onlookers” (286).

rhythm of the dance in their feet, as they contemplate murder; La Corriveau's "fingers moved nervously, as they kept time with the quick motions of her foot, which beat the ground" (345), while Angélique's "dainty foot marked the rhythm of the tragical thoughts that swept like a song of doom through her soul" (384).

With the murder of Caroline St Castin, Angélique takes her final step to becoming as dissolute and unnatural as the dancing La Pompadour; her maid insists "on a little rouge, which Angélique's natural bloom had never before needed" (451). Her pallor, which could be a result of her guilty conscience, is covered up by a performer's tools, and is shockingly noticeable to the women, if not the men, around her. Louise Roy remarks spitefully that "she paints!" (456) when Angélique is next seen in town. Her connections to court ballet become more evident after the murder as well; she even makes her horse "suddenly pirouette" (456), in a replica of a spinning ballet movement. Bigot's friend Cadet sees her as a ballet dancer when he claims that she "has the lightest heels in the city," and asks of Bigot, "Would you not like to see her dance a ballet de triomphe on the broad flagstone I laid over the grave of that poor girl? If you would, you have only to marry her, and she will give a ball in the secret chamber!" (471). He can easily envision Angélique transforming her triumph into a "ballet de triomphe" on the grave of Caroline St Castin, and giving a ball in the murdered rival's secret quarters to celebrate her victory if she is married to Bigot.

Bigot, however, resists Angélique's dangerous charms, recognizing that "La Pompadour is a simpleton beside Angélique des Meloises" (469) even though he cannot discover proof of her involvement in the murder. He chides Cadet for the foolish suggestion to take her as his wife, saying, "You would send her to the Parc aux cerfs, eh, Cadet? Par dieu, she would sit on the throne in six months!" (472). The "Parc aux cerfs," the deer park, is the

well-stocked home of Louis XV's prostitutes, which most historians connected to La Pompadour; Bigot believes that if Angélique were to enter the Parc, she would depose La Pompadour – and thus, Louis XV – in half a year. He resolutely continues in his habitual debauchery, ordering Cadet to “dance fandangos” (497) with the girls ordered for the gala at the Palace by de Péan, and attempts to outdo the court at Versailles with their riot. The girls “drank, they sang, they danced and conducted, or misconducted, themselves in such a thoroughly shameless fashion” that the “experts of the Court” – that is Bigot and a few of his cronies – “swore that the petits appartements of Versailles, or even the royal fetes of the Parc aux cerfs, could not surpass the high life and jollity of the Palace of the Intendant” (497).

While Angélique waits futilely for Bigot's proposal, Amélie prepares for her wedding. Like the colony itself, however, Amélie's marriage is doomed; the lethal Angélique, desperate to get her own way, coaxes a drunken Le Gardeur into a blind rage and then convinces him to kill Pierre's father in the marketplace. Amélie goes to the Ursulines upon hearing the news, where she eventually dies from consumption, after a touching reunion with Pierre. Le Gardeur flees, and New France falls to the British; Kirby pronounces its epitaph, saying that after “gathering a harvest of glory, such as America had never seen before, [it] fell at last, through the neglect of her mother country” (373). Kirby blames the loss of the colony firstly on La Pompadour, accusing her of “scornfully abandon[ing] it to the English” (373), and secondly on “the corrupt misgovernment of Bigot and Vaudreuil, and the neglect of the Court of France of her ancient and devoted colony” (571). Although these statements diminish the military triumph of the British powers, they do represent the British conquest of the colony as a necessary and unresented move. Kirby claims that the “noblesse and people of New France, all that was best and of most esteem in the land, gave their allegiance loyally and unreservedly

to England, upon their final abandonment by the Court of France. They knew they had been coldly, deliberately, cruelly deserted by their King” (573). These colonists, represented in the novel by the good-hearted Amélie and Pierre, “neither forgot nor forgave the bonfires of Voltaire, nor the flatterers who congratulated La Pompadour, on the loss of those ‘acres of snow in Canada’” (573).<sup>21</sup>

After the mourning of the French colony, we are given a glimpse of the rest of Angélique’s life; she suddenly accepts the hand of de Péan, and immediately becomes the recognized mistress of the Intendant, “imitating as far as she was able the splendor and the guilt of La Pompadour, and making the Palace of Bigot as corrupt, if not as brilliant, as that of Versailles” (576). It is clear that Angélique has no intention of reforming, but instead clings to the decadent life of the court as replicated in Bigot’s company; as Bigot did in Acadia, she “fared sumptuously, while men and women died of hunger in the streets of Quebec. She bought houses and lands and filled her coffers with gold out of the public treasury, while the brave soldiers of Montcalm starved for want of their pay. She gave fetes and banquets while the English were thundering at the gates of the Capital” (576). But all of her fetes and banquets, houses, lands, and charms fail her when the colony is lost; she decides to go to France to try her fortunes when New France is officially conquered, but “La Pompadour forbade her presence under pain of her severest displeasure” (577). The woman she tried to

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<sup>21</sup> Kirby once again reinvents for his novel a more appropriate response; Mitford observes that in the nineteenth century the French could not forgive Louis XV for the loss of their colonies, “but while it was happening they hardly noticed it. Public opinion was entirely against any form of colonization” (251).

imitate for so long, and secretly desired to supplant, still holds the power of the French court and is the means of keeping Angélique in her place.

In Kirby's depiction of Angélique's failed attempts to win a place in the world by imitating the corrupt court at Versailles, we can see how British concepts of appropriate social behaviour inform the novel's representational technique. If dance must be civilized in order to create a nation, as we saw in Chapter One, the implication here is that the French have gone too far, and have corrupted the civilizing influence. Through their obsession with ballet, spectacle, and female power, they deserve to lose New France as a colony; their dancing, unlike the safe British social dances, is dangerous, unstable, and murderously feminine, giving just cause for the British conquest of Canada.

### Chapter Three

#### The Leaping Savage: The Pre-Confederation Native Body in *Wacousta*

If we extend the British equation of dancing with passion, whether appropriately civilized by the English, or corrupted into over-civilization by the French, we can see how the Native becomes figured as the embodiment of passion in its rawest form. In this colonial judgement, the Native body is incapable of anything except dance and, perhaps, warfare; the Native cannot read, write, speak correctly, or communicate well except through dance. In John Richardson's *Wacousta* (1832), a novel set immediately following the British Conquest during the Pontiac Uprising of 1763, the Native body becomes a site of dance that must be colonized and tamed in the same way that Native land must be controlled and civilized. Not only are Native dances – usually viewed as involving “a multitude of savages dancing with hideous gestures and menacing attitudes” (396) – seen solely from a threatened perspective, but Native bodies themselves are referred to exclusively in terms of physical movement, as “dark and pliant forms” (71) that possess the capacity of immense speed and strength. Leslie Monkman, in “Visions and Revisions: Contemporary Writers and Exploration Accounts of Indigenous People” (1987), claims that “to the literary critic, the anthropological truth of a work is less important than how the white writer uses his knowledge of the red man” (4). This is true only up to a certain point; the anthropological truth, in this case about Native dance, can illuminate how the author uses such knowledge to inform the representations of Natives.

As in the previous chapter, the investigation of dance in the novel has been completely neglected, but there is a significant body of research that is helpful to the understanding of the text, particularly postcolonial examinations of historical assumptions about the savagery of

Native bodies. Through these explorations into pre-Confederation (mis)understandings of Native dance, some of the more obscure scenes in *Wacousta* can be illuminated, with particular emphasis on the seemingly out-of-place ballgame that precedes the attack on the fort. The analysis of Native dancing in the novel will show how Richardson highlights the colonial argument for civilized control of subject peoples; British control over the dancing Native body is deemed essential for the health of the new nation.

From the earliest point of contact with Native Americans, Europeans essentialized the image of Natives dancing; as early as 1534, the French explorer Jacques Cartier wrote of meeting Algonquians, who “approached neere unto our boate, dancing and making many signs of joy and mirth...Some of the women who came not over, we might see stand up to their knees in water, singing and dancing” (qtd. in Valaskakis 162). Missionaries, merchants, and militia all recorded observations of Native dancing, with varying degrees of unease ranging from fascination to outright disgust. Early testimony describes the dancing as “a crude jumping about,” “a mere hopping up and down,” “a leaping about in the most comical manner imaginable,” and “a frenzied expression of uncontrolled passion” (Valaskakis 162). George Catlin, the artist who painted many Native dance scenes in the 1830s, making his fortune out of the performances, claimed “some of them [are] so exceedingly grotesque and laughable, as to keep the bystander in an irresistible roar of laughter – others are calculated to excite his pity, and forcibly appeal to his sympathies, whilst others disgust, and yet others terrify and alarm him with their frightful threats and contortions” (qtd. in Smith 21). He also declared that “these exercises are exceedingly grotesque in their appearance, and to the eye of the traveler who knows not their meaning or importance, they are an uncouth and frightful display of starts and jumps, and yelps, and jarring gutturals, which are sometimes truly

terrifying” (qtd. in Valaskakis 163). The key here lies in Catlin’s reference to the “eye of the traveler who knows not their meaning or importance” in contrast, implicitly, with the objective observer who is capable of a deeper understanding. While we may doubt Catlin’s claim to this objective position, the point is worth taking; the European colonist had no way of measuring or comprehending the depth, power, or importance of dance in Native life, and this basic lack of understanding, echoed in the literature of the time, played a large role in the continued separation of two distinct worlds.

In Native North America, both pre- and post-European contact, dance was a significant part of ceremonial and social life; unlike the Europeans, who relied on dance primarily as a means of courtship and social bonding, Native communities used dance not only as a social rite, but also in year-long cycles of religious rituals. Gertrude Kurath notes that the social and religious connotations are interwoven in both function and form, and blur their boundaries; while sacred dances, usually performed in the longhouse as part of a larger ceremony, can be contrasted with the more relaxed social dances, evenings of social dance followed the large ceremonies and can be seen as an essential part of the greater ritual. Although European explorers often viewed Native dancing as an impulsive act, Bernard Mason points out that most dances were performed under edicts of specific ritualized tradition. Some dances were believed to be handed down from the Creator, and could not be changed, while others, as Jason Baird Jackson observes, were more like building blocks for social dances. The dances combined “sameness with infinite variety” (Kurath 129), with ritualized variation instead of free inventions. Although dances varied from nation to nation, the Natives of the Great Lakes region shared many important sacred dances, among them the Feather Dance, the Thanksgiving Dance (also known as the Drum or Skin Dance), the Women’s Dance, Corn

Dance, Stomp Dance (also known as Trotting or Standing Quiver), Bean Dance (also known as Hand-in-Hand or Linking Arms), Striking-the-Pole Dance, and the War Dance.

Calendric rituals followed a cyclic pattern throughout the year, while special events, illness, or war required additional rites. There were eight standard seasonal ceremonies of the Eastern Woodland Natives, the anthropological designation of the Algonquian-speaking language group: the Midwinter Ceremony in January or February, the Planting Ceremony in mid-May, the Strawberry Harvest in mid-June, the Raspberry Harvest in mid-July, the Green Bean Harvest in early August, the Small Green Corn Festival in late August, the Big Green Corn Ceremonies between late August and early September, and the Harvest Festival in October. Kurath observes that the ceremonies, which could be days long, included up to forty dance suites each, with each dance type having a traditional placement within the ceremony. Music was made from turtle shell rattles and wooden waterdrums; Father Le Mercier, a Jesuit writing in Algonquian country in 1637, observed that the drums were made from sections of a cedar log, partially filled with water, and with an untanned piece of deerskin stretched over its top. The high-pitched sound of the drum could be heard at a great distance, and was accompanied by singing and chanting. The dances themselves were usually performed in the round, with dancers alone or paired according to the requirements of each dance; Dean Snow explains that movement was almost always counterclockwise, with specific steps associated with individual dances.

Some Europeans, from early missionaries to later anthropologists, could see the religious implications of Native dance, but viewed this connection with suspicion; David Boyle, an anthropologist in the nineteenth century, claimed that “among primitive folk, dancing is largely a substitute for prayer” (85). George Nelson, in 1823, argued that “dancing,

drumming and singing were intended to communicate with and show respect for the spirits” (qtd. in Valaskakis 163). Indeed, George Catlin, though he never fully understood the dances he recorded, recognized that ceremonies themselves were called “dances” by the Natives, whether they were composed of dancing, singing, and speech, or dancing alone. In 1848, Henry Schoolcraft noted that dance was “interwoven throughout the whole texture of Indian society, so that there is scarcely an event, important or trivial, private or public, which is not connected, more or less intimately, with this rite” (qtd. in Smith 25). Travellers such as Catlin were struck by the omnipresence of dance in the everyday lives of Native people; Catlin wrote that he was “disposed to denominate them [the Sioux] the ‘dancing Indians,’” claiming that “there was scarcely an hour in any day or night, but what the beat of the drum could somewhere be heard” (qtd. in Smith 21).

Anthropologists may have been slow to recognize the power of Native dancing, but missionaries and government officials were not, and they worked in concert in both the United States and Canada to outlaw Native dance rituals. Begun in the 1850s in Canada, the battle against Native religions led to the government’s amendment to the Indian Act in 1884; participation in potlatches or Sun Dances was decreed a criminal offence punishable by fines or prison sentences. In the United States, peyote rituals, the Sun Dance, and the Ghost Dance all met the same fate in 1890. As late as the 1920s, William Graham, senior Indian Department Official, was determined to stamp out Native dancing, and enlisted the RCMP’s help in “combating this vice” (Francis 101). Duncan Campbell Scott implemented changes to the Act which made it an offense punishable by imprisonment for any Native to attend traditional ceremonies or to wear traditional costume in public. Native ceremonies were banned, religious practices disrupted, and sacred objects destroyed or confiscated; in the

United States, Secretary of the Interior Henry M. Teller established the Courts of Indian Offenses in 1883 in order to “eliminate the ‘savage rites and heathenish customs’ of the Indians, including ‘the old heathenish dances, such as the sun-dance, scalp-dance, &c’” (qtd. in Bellin 5).<sup>1</sup> As Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton point out, colonial regimes often focused on this sort of regulation of bodies, the “most intimate colony” (“Postscript” 406); controlling the body and its movement was often considered an essential part of taming the savage in the empire, and stopping the traditional dances in North America (or even in Scotland) was a tool for controlling conquered nations.

Part of the intensely critical reaction to Native dances stemmed not only from a desire to convert Natives to Christianity, but also from the long-standing fear of the war dances of almost every Native nation in North America. The dances performed before and after battles entered the realm of legend for Europeans, and the war dance became synonymous with the savagery of Native peoples. Peter Williamson, a Scots settler on the Pennsylvania frontier, in his memoir *French and Indian Cruelty, Exemplified in the Life and Various Vicissitudes of Fortune* (1758), wrote with horror of his experiences around the fire of an enemy camp, as the Natives “for some time danced round me after their manner, with various offensive motions and antic gestures, whooping, hollowing, and crying, in a frightful manner, as it is their custom” (qtd. in Fulford 52). What most Europeans did not understand, however, was that the so-called war dance was not always a prelude to battle; it was often danced as part of the Thunder Ceremony to appease droughts in the summer, and as part of the Midwinter rites as a cure for a variety of ailments. Nevertheless, Europeans were fascinated by this dance above

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<sup>1</sup> The persecution of the Sun Dance in Canada did not officially end until 1951, when the Indian Act was revamped; in the United States, the prohibition of the dance was partially lifted in 1934, but was not fully stopped until 1978 under the American Indian Religious Freedom Act.

all others, hoping to see it in every performance, and often conflating other dances with this well-publicized form.

The governmental ban on Native religious ceremonies such as the Ghost Dance, the Sun Dance, and the potlatch, was founded on the fear the war dances had engendered; however, this fear was not only the simple terror evoked from hearing about or watching an incomprehensible enemy's ritual, but also a result of shrewd anxiety over the recurrent Native uprisings linked to dance. Beginning as early as the eighteenth century, Native prophets preached what Joshua Bellin calls "revivalist messages of separation, purification, and unification" (140), which called various Native nations to reject white culture and return to the sacred rituals and customs of their ancestors. In every case, these movements were linked with a specific ritualized dance ceremony, a fact that the government duly noted. Neolin, the Delaware prophet whose visions inspired Pontiac and his allies in 1762, called for a prayer dance to the Master of Life. In the Cherokee Ghost Dance movement of 1811-13, several Cherokee prophets created an upswelling of Native resistance through a dance in which participants linked hands and danced in a movement designed to link them with those in the next world. In the United States, Ghost Dance movements erupted a number of times, including in 1852, when the Winnebago prophet Wovoka was instructed in a vision to teach his people a new dance; in 1890, after Native dance had been banned in both Canada and the United States, federal troops killed over three hundred unarmed Sioux at the Massacre of Wounded Knee, fearing an uprising related to the ideology and nationalism of the Ghost Dance.

Richardson's *Wacousta* is set during the first significant rebellion in response to the dance prophet Neolin's message as interpreted by Pontiac; given that Richardson begins his

novel with some background history for his readers, it is perhaps useful to do the same. The loosely allied group of Algonquian of the Great Lakes region, known at the time as the *pays d'en haut*, were the hardest hit by the British Conquest of 1760; the alliance between the French and the Native peoples had endured, as Richard White points out, not because Algonquians had been reduced to dependency on the French but because of the creation of an elaborate network of political, cultural, economic, and social ties between them. The French could not dictate terms to the Algonquians of the Great Lakes, particularly the Huron-Petons and the Ottawas and Michilimackinac, because the Native nations could always turn to trade with the British; as long as that risky alternative remained, the Algonquians could maintain relative autonomy. But the British victory over France destroyed the precarious balance of power, as General Amherst's vision of the *pays d'en haut* was simply that of a conqueror. White argues that General Amherst, not interested in conciliation, "blundered into Indian affairs with the moral vision of a shopkeeper and the arrogance of a victorious soldier" (257).<sup>2</sup>

The new and harsh British trade policies, coupled with famine and epidemic, caused the British to be seen as a malevolent enemy; calls for revolt against the conquerors increased. The religious ferment produced by Neolin's dream vision of 1762 spread rapidly; while Neolin's exhortations concerned returning to ancient sacred ways and avoiding European temptations such as rum, Pontiac focused on the political implications of the message as a call to arms. As Richardson's Pontiac claims, when the British "came weak, and were not yet secure in their strong holds, their tongues were smooth and full of soft words; but when they became strong under the protection of their thunder, they no longer treated the red skins as

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<sup>2</sup> It is possible that Colonel de Haldimar is based not only on the figure of Amherst, but also on Governor Frederick Haldimand, who harshly governed Quebec after the American Revolution, where he dealt closely with Loyalists and the Six Nations. He was promoted to Colonel by Amherst in 1762, but was later removed from the position.

their friends, and they laughed at them for letting them come into their country” (198). The resentment that came from this treatment, as well as the clear-eyed recognition of the Native nations’ new position in the British empire, lent credence to Pontiac’s call for rebellion.

John Richardson was born on October 4, 1796 in Queenston, Ontario to Scottish parents; he grew up in a dynamic borderland between Canadian, Native, and American territories. David Beasley claims that Richardson’s maternal grandmother was a Native of the Ottawas, but notes that there is no evidence that she was from the Ottawa nation, “save that she would have had her children only amongst her own people, thus accounting for the births in the central Ottawa town” (298). Michael Hurley observes that though Beasley, Reaney, Woodcock, Pacey and others assert this version of Richardson’s lineage, others remain unconvinced. To a certain extent, Richardson’s ancestry can be disregarded; his grandmother died before he was born, and the grandmother that “used to enchain [his] young interest by detailing various facts connected with the siege” (536) was his step-grandmother, a Frenchwoman whom his grandfather later married. However, if Richardson was indeed a quarter Ottawa, that might help to explain his attention to Native people in his fiction. Indeed, Monkman asserts that “no writer of nineteenth-century Canada more fully explored the literary potential of the Indian than Major John Richardson” (“Richardson’s Indians” 86). His other influences were a potent mixture of what Duffy calls the “British-Amerindian Great Lakes system of fur trade and frontier settlement” (*A World Under Sentence* 12); his uncle John Askin was a fur trader, and in the war of 1812, the sixteen-year-old Richardson fought to preserve the border of that system.

*Wacousta* was first published by T. Cadell in London in 1832; within four months it had been pirated by Adam Waldie in his Philadelphia journal *Waldie’s Select Circulating*

*Library*. In 1851, Richardson's New York publishers Dewitt and Davenport brought out another edition. Though the novel was neglected from the earlier nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century in Canada, while famous abroad, today, Richardson is seen by literary critics as one of the most significant Canadian writers in the canon. Hurley dubs him "the Father of Canadian Literature," and points out that he is the centre of a Canadian tradition mapped out primarily by Northrop Frye, Margaret Atwood, D.G. Jones, John Moss, Dennis Lee, and Linda Hutcheon. Part of the focus on Richardson stems from his own explicit desire for a national Canadian literature; *Wacousta*, his most important novel, is often seen as a literary project of nation-building, addressing the difficult but necessary stage of military colonialism in forming the Canadian nation.

*Wacousta* is set in the turbulent time of 1763, directly after the French signed the Treaty of Paris ceding Canada to the British. The French habitants are inciting the Native nations to rebel against the British, who are now occupying the forts at Detroit and Michilimackinac. The tenuous British peace is broken suddenly and shockingly by the entrance of an unknown man into the Detroit fort, into Colonel de Haldimar's very room; the gothic atmosphere of secrecy and shadows is set up from this instant, and the mystery of the dark man is left unsolved for much of the novel. De Haldimar, a stern and cold disciplinarian, is clearly unnerved by his night-time visitor, and by the fact that his eldest son, Frederick, is missing from the fort; Frank Halloway, a young soldier, is accused and tried for illegally aiding both Frederick's exit and the assailant's entrance into the fort. In a travesty of justice, Halloway is condemned to death, despite his loyalty to the family of de Haldimar; he is marched to the Bloody Bridge, and shot in full view of the fort, the Native camp, and his wife Ellen, who screams a prophecy of death for the de Haldimar family, and flies, insane, into the

wood.

Ellen's dire words come back to haunt de Haldimar, as Pontiac's Ottawas and allies, led by a gigantic figure named Wacousta, besiege the fort, which withstands Native guile. The fort at Michilimackinac, where Clara de Haldimar and her cousin Madeline reside, is likewise attacked, in this case falling to the Native massacre. Wacousta is revealed to be an Englishman named Sir Reginald Morton, de Haldimar's closest friend in the Old World before de Haldimar betrayed him by stealing his beloved, Clara Beverley; after this betrayal, Morton joined the Scottish Highlanders against the British, then fought for the French in Canada, and now allies himself with Pontiac to wage war on the man who destroyed his happiness. A merciless figure of vengeance, he captures and later kills Clara de Haldimar as well as her brother Charles, though he is eventually killed himself. The story ends with Frederick and his cousin Madeline marrying, and creating a peaceful community of British and Natives.

Before peace can be imagined, however, Richardson emphasizes the separation of the Native and non-Native worlds, with one very literal bridge linking the British fort and the Native territory. Hurley argues that the exact centre of the "Bloody Bridge" is repeatedly emphasized as the violent point of interaction between the rigid military-social order of the garrison and the spontaneous, seemingly non-rational life of the Natives. Monkman notes this separation, pointing out that although Richardson affirms his admiration for Native peoples, he consistently separates the two cultures into distinct orders, presenting Natives "only within the context of savagism" ("Richardson's Indians" 86). But the two cultures do connect, and in the middle ground between the fort and the Native encampment, communication is plentiful.

Little emphasis is placed on Native language when the two cultures communicate; all dialogue is rendered in perfect English, and all officers seem to have a perfect command of the

Native tongue – in this case, presumably a dialect of Algonquian. Indeed, the English officers have no problem communicating in the Native language.<sup>3</sup> The elision of linguistic difference is partly due to the authorial dilemma of how to depict Native speech in the novel; as Louise Barnett argues, the “heavy accent, ungrammatical constructions, simplicity of utterance... can reduce the character to the level of farce” (78). Richardson, like many authors, rejected verisimilitude as aesthetically objectional in favour of language that is patently artificial. Following Cooper, who is credited with creating this mode of speech, Richardson adopts the compromise of a formal, figurative style, which was believed to convey Native thought patterns.<sup>4</sup> Thus the reader is to assume that the British soldiers all understand the Native tongue as it is fictitiously rendered.

But it is also noteworthy that although these educated British listeners are capable of understanding, Native speakers rarely communicate through words. Wacousta, eventually revealed to be an upper-class Englishman, provides most of the “Native” dialogue, while Pontiac, the historically renowned speaker, remains largely silent. Even his one important speech, in which he persuades the Native nations to go to war against the British, and details the plan, is rendered as mere third-person description by Frederick de Haldimar rather than recorded in first-person direct quotation. In fact, Pontiac gradually lowers his voice as he explains his plan, so that “undistinguishable sounds alone reached the ear of the excited

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<sup>3</sup> Richardson makes a point of noting the difficulty that the disguised Frederick de Haldimar and Sir Everard have with the patois of the Canadians due to the bastardization of the pure French tongue, making it “impossible...to converse together without betraying the secret of their country” (172), despite long residence rendering the language familiar.

<sup>4</sup> Scholars had been praising the oral poetry of the Indians since the early 1700s. Tim Fulford notes that such views “reflected a fashion for the primitive, with American Indians crucial because they seemed to be one of the few remaining living examples of an oral culture, in which all men were poets and in which body and words were united. Soon, Britons at home assimilated the Indian into the figure of the ancient bardic poet” (129).

officer” (250), a fact that turns the eloquent Native speaker into merely another incoherent creature. When the Natives do speak to the British soldiers, their language is often reduced to inarticulate grunts and shouts. Monkman observes that Richardson shifts uncomfortably between the “eighteenth-century conventions of Pontiac’s ‘Indian oratory’ and epithets such as ‘interjectional ugh,’ ‘assentient ugh,’ ‘expressive ugh,’ and ‘ejaculatory ugh’” (“Visions and Revisions” 81). These grunts seem to deny the Native the capacity for rational language; although they may be “expressive,” these ejaculations are also described in the text as “assentient,” or a-sentient, without sense. The great orator, Pontiac, is prone to these outbursts of savage incoherence, as they come “from his chest without any apparent motion of the lips, much in the manner of a modern ventriloquist” (192). According to this description, Pontiac is not even ascribed the capacity to create these animal noises, merely being the vehicle through which they are emitted. The frightening nature of the Natives’ alien cries is echoed at length in the novel, with the Natives described in distinctly evil terms, as “fierce and distant yells” echo from a “legion of devils (56), or “whooping hell fiends” (400).

The British, in fact, regard speech – as opposed to movement – as the only legitimate means of communication; the text is replete with vivid descriptions of tone and pitch, and British characters are judged on the basis of their ability to speak clearly and well. We know how delicate and beautiful Charles de Haldimar is before we hear any physical description, judging simply from his “accents of almost feminine sweetness” (33). It is the “candid, fearless, and manly tone” (94) that convinces Frank Halloway’s interlocutors at his trial of his nobility of character; indeed, Halloway claims that changing his language was part of his disguise, as he was “determined to adopt the phraseology and manners of those with whom an adverse destiny had so singularly connected us” (85). The disguise has been successful, in

large part due to this change in language, as no one has previously questioned his status as a simple private soldier, a singular feat for an aristocrat. His “singular and touching language” (93) moves the soldiers, although it does not change Colonel de Haldimar’s calcified mind. The height of this fascination with the voice in the novel can be seen in descriptions of Madeline de Haldimar; her voice is deemed her greatest attribute, even though she is a beautiful woman. Although her “womanly attributes” are “attractive, or rather winning...her principal power lay in her voice, -- the beauty, nay, the voluptuousness of which nothing could surpass” (294). Calling a voice “voluptuous” might seem a startling description of tonal quality, but it indicates how significant verbal communication is among the British, especially when contrasted with the inarticulate nature of the Natives. Madeline de Haldimar’s voice, then, as her “principal power,” is a power which is denied to the Natives.

Instead of communicating through speech, Native people in *Wacousta*, as in many pre-Confederation-era texts, communicate through the body in movement. The British soldiers rely entirely for their perception of the Natives on body language. Dance anthropologist Drid Williams notes that nineteenth-century social Darwinism posited that people who live in societies lower on the evolutionary scale are compelled to resort to these sorts of nonverbal systems of symbolization. Of course, even with the best interpreters, communication between Natives and early explorers had to necessarily include some gestural sign language. Gordon Sayre, in *Les Sauvage Américains: Representations of Native Americans in French and English Colonial Literature* (1997), points out that the “savage” was by definition ignorant of writing and higher abstract concepts; he notes that Europeans were frequently surprised and scandalized when Natives showed “a strong faculty for abstraction and representation” (193) in gestural communication.

The early explorer Sagard wrote that when he was unable to understand the Native peoples he encountered, they would explain to him “by figures, similitudes, and external demonstrations, sometimes in speech, and sometimes with a stick, tracing the object on the ground as best they could, or by a movement of the body; and they were not ashamed to make very unseemly movements in order to be able the better to make me understand by means of these comparisons” (qtd. in Sayre 193). It is noteworthy that although Sagard seems to appreciate the patient explanations of the Natives, he is uneasy with their body language, referring to their “very unseemly movements,” and implying that it is unusual that they are “not ashamed” to perform these movements as a means of communication – he seems to feel that a European would be ashamed in the same situation.

Such gestural language abounds in *Wacousta*, with the vast majority of the Natives expressing themselves through their bodies, often in mass synchrony, with all bodies acting together as one. When the British and Natives meet under a flag of truce, the “Indians made a simultaneous movement expressive of their satisfaction” (186), showing both the British observer’s tendency to judge bodily communication, and the British perception that the massed Natives move together as one body. The British soldiers deem the movement to express Native “satisfaction,” without any doubt about their ability to evaluate meaning in this type of communication, and there is a similar acceptance that the Natives are fully capable of making sense through their bodies. When the Natives move, it is usually in one overwhelming and threatening manner; for example, we see how, from one moment of calm, “in the next instant more than a hundred dark and hideous savages sprang simultaneously to their feet within the bomb-proof” (66). These “dark and hideous savages” have no distinguishing features, no differing characteristics, and are terrifying in their agility.

The British impression that the Natives move together en masse is repeated throughout the novel, as the Natives – with the exception of the seldom-named Pontiac, Oucanasta, and her never-named brother – are seen not as individuals, but as part of “the crowd of gesticulating Indians” (407). Indeed, several critics have commented on the puzzling anonymity of Oucanasta’s brother. For a Native who shows such striking individual decision-making, betraying his race to save the British soldiers on several occasions, he is perplexing. He does not merit a name, only referred to by his familial relationship with Oucanasta; perhaps, as in Pontiac’s case, Richardson felt that names would detract from the focus on Wacousta. In fact, the only difference between the Native leaders and the rest of the Natives is in the quality of their “certain haughty carriage and commanding gesticulation” (184). We never hear about distinguishing characteristics such as dress, hairstyle, facial features, or personal behaviour; instead, the Native leaders are simply part of the mass of agile and physical beings who surround the forts.

Attributes such as agility play a large part in the perception of the Native, part of what Natty Bumpo calls “red gifts” (Cooper, *The Deerslayer* 24): physical strength, speed, and agility were considered a natural part of Native characteristics, regardless of the individual. Francis Parkman, one of the most popular of nineteenth-century historians, articulated one prevailing European view of the Native, claiming that “Nature has stamped the Indian with a hard and stern physiognomy. Ambition, revenge, envy, jealousy, are his ruling passions; and his cold temperament is little exposed to those effeminate vices which are the bane of milder races” (41). This account of the Native body and temperament links physical abilities with a hyper-masculine sensibility – far different from the “effeminate vices” which we have seen linked with the French in Canada. Father Le Jeune, a Jesuit priest writing in 1634, maintains

the same opinion, claiming that the Natives are “tall, erect, strong, well proportioned, agile; and there is nothing effeminate in their appearance. Those little Fops that are seen elsewhere are only caricatures of men, compared with our Savages” (qtd. in Laubin 21). The masculine passions of the Native can still be dangerous, according to Parkman, who claims that these traits can overthrow his limited reason, occasionally leading him to “abandon himself to a very insanity of recklessness; and the habitual self-restraint which throws an impenetrable veil over emotion is joined to the unbridled passions of a madman or a beast” (40). Wacousta’s unhinged passion works in the text as this figure, although Richardson complicates the issue, since the most masculine and passionate madman only pretends to be Native.

Fulford notes, in *Romantic Indians: Native Americans, British Literature, and Transatlantic Culture 1756-1830* (2006), that another popular view of Natives assumed them to be necessarily weaker than their conquerors; it was argued that the influence of North America’s enervating climate turned its Native people into “a degenerate species of the human race, cowardly, and lacking mental capacity. Indians’ relative scarcity in the vast continent was attributable to their lack of virility and fertility, as evidenced by their supposed smallness and lack of body hair” (84). Samuel Morton’s *Crania Americana*, published only a few years after *Wacousta*, in 1839, alleges that Natives were a separate and subordinate species, not humans of the same kind as Europeans.

After the American wars, the romantic view of Natives turned to a focus on their ignoble and bestial characteristics. The standard Native physical abilities are seen in detail in *Wacousta*, as the Natives are described in terms of their “dark and pliant forms” that move “with almost incredible rapidity” (71). Their “quick leaping” (367), in particular, is emphasized by Richardson, a shockingly large movement that conveys the depths of their

savagery. These people are not prone to simple and civilized movements that characterize British dance manners, such as bows, tipping a hat, and promenading, but to huge and threatening displays of bodily power. Rarely are they seen leaping for the sake of travelling alone, but in conjunction with aggressive warlike actions, as they “bounded, and leaped, and yelled, and brandished their own weapons in the most appalling manner” (270). This leaping, then, echoes the dangerous and barbaric war dance that fascinates the British soldiers. The actions of “more than a hundred dusky warriors, brandishing their tomahawks in the air, leap[ing] along the skirt of the common” (191), follow the pattern of the war dance, or at least the war dance as perceived by Europeans. The war dance literature emphasizes the brandishing of weapons, particularly tomahawks, and grandiose physical displays. Although war dances were carefully structured dances that usually had only a handful of men dancing at a time, the European image of the ritual envisioned exactly such numbers as Richardson’s “more than a hundred dusky warriors” (191) dancing all at once, in a confusion of noise and movement.

If large and aggressive movements such as leaping, then, can be linked with both war and dance, the natural ability of Natives for effortless physicality is allied with another phenomenon as well – a frightening ghost-like manifestation. Renee Bergland, in *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (2000), argues that American literature has been haunted by ghostly Natives for more than three hundred years; in *Wacousta*, Natives are often seen as “demonic manifestations of an internalized psychic struggle” (Bergland 1). These apparitions are often described in the language of ghostliness; the forests in *Wacousta* abound with the “rapid gliding of spectral forms” (276), with the ability to “glide from them almost as imperceptibly and swiftly as they had first approached”

(68). Part of this emphasis on the perceived ability of Natives to appear and disappear suddenly and mysteriously is allied to the previously mentioned “red gifts” of physicality and woodcraft. But another part of the European perception of Natives, as a demonic and agile Other, implies that Natives are a ghostly race ultimately doomed to vanish; Bergland notes that “both their sudden materializations and dematerializations emphasize the Indians’ insubstantiality” (86). Francis emphasizes that the belief that dominated thinking about Canadian Natives during the second half of the nineteenth century was that they would not be around to see much of the twentieth; Cooper’s “last Mohican” was considered a symbol for all Natives on both sides of the border. In Richardson’s novel, the Natives often appear as these doomed specters, but the sheer physicality of their movements reinforces their demonic aspect to a greater extent; instead of being seen only as the ghostly fragments of a continent’s psyche, they more often appear as threatening mystical figures, “bounding and leaping like so many devils broke loose from their chains” (397), who must be vanquished by military action.

The Natives are considered to be such barbarians that they are often described not just as devilish figures who possess the capacities of animals, but as physically resembling animals as well. They are seen “bound[ing] and leap[ing] like a deer of the forest” (155) or “fly[ing] with the speed of an antelope” (490), two descriptions that simply use the image of the animal to describe the speed and strength of their movements. Their movement also sounds, to the British, like that of animals; as Frederick de Haldimar and Sir Everard follow Francois to his home, they mistake Wacousta’s footsteps for “some wild animal in search of its prey” (167). Frederick again hears Wacousta’s motion in the orchard, “resembling that of one lightly leaping to the ground,” but immediately dismisses the sound as being “produced by the sullen fall of one of the heavy fruits it [the wind] had detached in its course” (170). In this case,

Wacousta's physical movements are mistaken for the natural movement of flora, a trope that is continued later as he passes through a crowd of Natives, and the British see it "like the waving of a field of standing corn, through which some animal rapidly winds its tortuous course, bending aside as the object advances, and closing again when it has passed" (230). Here the Natives are seen as the corn, and Wacousta as the animal winding its way towards the British fort. In this view, then, even the land threatens the besieged soldiers.

The agility of movement seen in these animalistic, demonic Natives is also significant in that the British believe that the Natives' movement reveals aspects of their character. Although they are usually perceived as a haughty and impassive race, movement betrays their thoughts to keen British observers. Richardson describes a meeting between Colonel de Haldimar and Pontiac, pointing out this trait, when "in spite of the habitual reserve and self-possession of his race, the haughty warrior could not repress a movement of impatience at the bold and taunting language of his enemy, and for a moment there was a fire in his eye that told how willingly he would have washed away the insult in his blood" (189). Pontiac is prey to his Native essence; despite his "habitual reserve" – a reserve which is not his individual characteristic, but perceived as a racial quality – he is unable to repress his emotions, betraying his thoughts to the British. The same betrayal occurs in the Shawanee and Delaware chiefs during the calumet dance, as they "betrayed, by their vehemence of gesture, the action of some strong feeling upon their minds" (203). The British believe that the savage nature of the Native is embodied in the physicality of his being, and cannot ultimately be repressed. The officers can see that Pontiac "appeared to command the deference of his colleagues, claiming profound attention when he spoke himself," but Richardson reduces his spoken eloquence to movement by showing him "manifesting his assent or dissent to the apparently

expressed opinions of the lesser chiefs, merely by a slight movement of the head” (185). This depiction of Pontiac is especially interesting given the historical information we have about this Native leader, who was renowned for his articulacy. Richard Middleton, in *Pontiac's War: Its Causes, Course and Consequences* (2007), comments that he was an accomplished speaker, an essential quality in a Native leader, and that both Ottawa and Potawatomi nations “told him that he had only to speak and they were all ready to do what he demanded of them” (Middleton 67). In Richardson’s novel, Wacousta is the more powerful speaker, and Pontiac’s leadership role is reduced mainly to enacting certain dance ceremonies, such as the calumet and ball-game dance, which we will examine later.

The British military men believe that Natives betray themselves by their childish incapacity to control their movement, and credit themselves as trained observers of this movement. Colonel de Haldimar, in particular, is proud of his ability to see through the treacherous schemes of the Natives; although “no immediate overt act of hostility had for some time been perpetrated by the Indians,” Colonel de Haldimar is “too sensible of the craftiness of the surrounding hordes to be deceived, by any outward semblance of amity” (25). His belief is confirmed when, in the summer of 1763, “the whole of the western tribe of Indians, as if actuated by one common impulse, suddenly threw off the mask, and commenced a series of the most savage trespasses upon the English settlers” (26). Note that here, again, we have a multitude of Natives all described as moving in one simultaneous gesture, “as if actuated by one common impulse” that betrays their true feelings.

Robert Lecker observes that while the British are obsessed with penetrating disguise, they are themselves often caught up in the arts of camouflage and deception; Colonel de Haldimar justifies deception as necessary in this precarious time. Before any hostile acts

occur on either side, he “affected to confide in the sincerity of their professions, and, by inducing his officers to mix occasionally in their councils, and his men in the amusements of the inferior warriors, contrived to impress the conviction that he reposed altogether on their faith” (25). He “affects” and “contrives” to maintain his position of power. It is worth noting that these “councils” and “amusements” generally refer to physical activities, from dance rituals to exhibitions of wrestling, foot-races, and games of skill and chance; the soldiers have few opportunities to judge Natives by their ability to speak, but ample occasion to learn their physical behaviour.

While Colonel de Haldimar and his officers believe that they are skilled observers of Native movement, both in war and in dance, Richardson takes pains to undermine and qualify their abilities. Colonel de Haldimar and his men believe that “those who understood the workings of an Indian’s spirit could not have been deceived by the tranquil exterior of the men,” as opposed to “an indifferent observer, or one ignorant of these people” (194). Presumably, the British feel that the “Indian’s spirit” is one of treachery and craftiness, masked by the “tranquil exterior” that is often seen as haughtiness. They read the Native’s body, observing “the rapid, keen, and lively glance – the suppressed sneer of exultation, the half start of surprise – the low, guttural, and almost inaudible ‘Ugh!’” (194). Yet again we hear the “almost inaudible ‘Ugh!’” which denotes an inarticulate but arrogant passion, confirming the British opinion of the warlike Natives.

To a certain extent, British powers of observation are well-trained; however, since most of their observation is based on stereotypes of Native physiognomy and movement, it falls short of a genuine understanding. Describing the Natives’ battle-cries, sounded in what might be a war dance in the Native camp, Richardson notes that “by one unaccustomed to

those devilish sounds, no distinction could have been made in the two several yells that had been thus savagely pealed forth; but those to whom practice and long experience in the warlike habits and customs of the Indians had rendered their shouts familiar, at once divined, or fancied they divined, the cause” (56). Richardson’s caveat is significant – the British only “fancy” they divine the cause. They are confident in their presumed knowledge, but are frequently taken by surprise, often fatally, in misunderstanding Native communication. Colonel de Haldimar, for all his presumed perception, orders Frank Halloway shot on the mistaken assumption that the young soldier is calling out to his Native confederate; in reality, the running Native is Colonel de Haldimar’s son, Frederick, who could corroborate Halloway’s testimony, but Colonel de Haldimar is not willing to see past his son’s disguise. He sees a Native in movement, and judges instantly, and incorrectly.

Colonel de Haldimar’s focused attention on movement and dance is not surprising, given the significance of dance in councils between chiefs and officers, and in the amusements given for soldiers; historically, dance was the site of most of the major communication between Europeans and Natives. One of the most important ceremonies between the two peoples, which plays a significant part in Richardson’s novel, is the calumet dance. The calumet was a large pipe made of red, black or white catalanite, with a long quill, made of reed or cane and adorned with feathers; there was a pipe for peace and one for war, as well as others for different purposes, all distinguished by the colour of their feathers. Colonel de Haldimar clearly knows the ceremony well, as he is capable of recognizing the import of the changed pipe “decorated with numerous feathers fancifully disposed” (195), realizing that Pontiac has brought the pipe for war and not for peace.

White argues that one can hardly overstate the importance of the calumet ceremony,

claiming that “it formed a part of a conscious framework for peace, alliance, exchange, and free movement among peoples in the region” (21). Richardson’s own knowledge, as a British officer, is not therefore surprising, but his basic sketch of the ceremony is lost on many readers today, who have little idea that he is even describing a ritual that includes dance. Pontiac and the chiefs enter the room, all taking seats “upon the matting in the order prescribed by their rank among the tribes, and their experience in council” (195); this would be in one line facing the line of British officers, also in a line of descending order of importance. Pontiac, as the head of the Ottawa, sits “at the near extremity of the room, and immediately facing the governor” (195); after the men are seated, the pipes are filled, and the ceremony of recounting exploits begins. The Natives boast of their war deeds, and count their scalps. As part of the ceremony, each chief would have the chance to dance after reciting his accomplishments; Richardson does not go into detail here, perhaps preferring to focus on the consequences of the dance instead of its actions.

According to historical accounts, Pontiac and forty men of the Ottawa nation came to Fort Detroit on the first of May, to “ask permission to enter and dance the calumet dance, before the officers of the garrison” (Parkman 209). As in Richardson’s novel, Pontiac’s plan was to use the performance to distract the officers while other warriors inspected the garrison’s defences; he did perform the dance for Gladwin and his officers, the dancers beating a post and relating their warlike exploits. The Navarre Journal claims that “from time to time they leaped about the Commander-in-Chief and the accompanying officers who were watching the Indians perform” (Quaife 19). The fictional Colonel de Haldimar, then, is more aware of the significance of the dance’s language than his historical source, since he catches the substitution of the wrong pipe, and calls an end to the ceremony, noting that “the pipe and

all its ornaments are red like blood: it is the pipe of war, and not the pipe of peace” (204).

Of course, the war dance, as we have seen, was probably the most fascinating of the danced ceremonies for the British; although Richardson never shows this dance clearly to the reader, it is omnipresent in the text. Pontiac is connected with it, as he “steps as firmly and as proudly within reach of our muskets, as if he was leading in the war-dance” (187); the physicality and elasticity of his movements instantly bring dancing – specifically the most famous of the dances – to the mind of the British soldiers. Later, in the council chamber, the governor grimly notes that “the red skins would have danced their war-dance round the scalps of his men” (231), again showing how the British connect any violence with the dance. In fact, the war dance would not be danced after a victory, as it was only performed before a battle; the Victory, or Scalp, dance would be danced on the triumphant return to camp, although the Feast of the Dead, if there were slain warriors, would take precedence.

The one time that a war dance does take place in *Wacousta*, it is performed beyond the clear vision of the garrison, in the forbidden region of the Native camp. The soldiers can just make out a fire and “the forms of a multitude of savages dancing round it with hideous gestures and menacing attitudes” (396). Lieutenant Johnstone identifies the performance, saying, “They are dancing their infernal war dance” (396), while Captain Blessington seeks to show his knowledge of the Native dance ritual, observing that “it is an unusual hour of their war dance,” noting “my experience furnishes me with no one instance in which it has not been danced previous to their retiring to rest” (397). Interestingly, Captain Blessington is incorrect; as Jackson notes, most sacred dances were performed in the morning, finishing at noon, while the social dances often went into the night. Richardson may or may not have known this; if he did, this is another example of the military mistakenly believing in their ability to read Native

dance language.

One of the most puzzling scenes of movement in the novel is the botched attempt to take Fort Detroit by surprise; through careful reading of the novel, and the historical documents of the actual attack, as well through an understanding of the Native game of lacrosse, we can read this scene as a significant dance moment, one that has been misread both textually and historically. Pontiac arranges with Colonel de Haldimar, during the calumet dance, for the Native warriors to “play at ball upon the common, to amuse his young men, while the chiefs sit in council with the chiefs of the Saganaw” (205). To placate the fears of the soldiers, Pontiac adds that “the red skins shall come naked, and without their rifles and their tomahawks; and even the squaws of the warriors shall come upon the common to show the Saganaw they may be without fear” (205). The warriors gather en masse, each individual carrying a “stout sapling of about three feet in length, curved, and flattened at the root extremity” (220) for playing ball, and run races with each other “or indulged themselves in wrestling and leaping” (220).

As the British soldiers look over the walls at this very physical performance, the ball game commences. The players move from the centre of the common towards the front of the fort, while Pontiac and the other chiefs enter the garrison square; suddenly, and “without any visible cause for the accident” (222), Pontiac stumbles, and yells a battle-cry, the signal for the ball-players to bring the ball nearer to the fort, and launch it over the walls. Now armed with short guns and tomahawks that had been hidden under the women’s dresses, the warriors charge the fort, only to find that the British have been prepared for the scheme, and meet them with armed resistance. Although this plan of treachery fails at Fort Detroit, it is successfully repeated at the unprepared Fort Michilimackinac, resulting in a brutal massacre.

In the Introduction to the 1851 edition of *Wacousta*, Richardson appends a short clarification of this scene, explaining that during a temporary truce, Pontiac arranged for simultaneous lacrosse games to be played on the commons in front of the Forts Detroit and Michilimackinac. During the game, the players were to approach the drawbridge of the fort and “accidentally” throw over the ball; permission would be asked to regain the ball, and then the warriors would “make a general rush, and, securing the arms concealed by the women, massacre the unprepared garrison” (533). It is only in this introduction that Richardson clarifies the scene as a lacrosse game; nowhere in the text is it called by name. In fact, it is arguable that the historical moment that Richardson reenacts was not a lacrosse game at all; it is possible that the British audience misunderstood the Natives’ movements, and that subsequent historians have interpreted the stories with a mistaken assumption regarding lacrosse and dance.

To explain this misconception, and Richardson’s use of it in the novel, it is necessary to examine his historical sources. Alexander Henry’s *Travels and Adventures in Canada and the Indian Territories, between the Years 1760 and 1766* (1809), which describes the massacre at Michilimackinac, was one of the most useful documents for Richardson’s construction of the scene, with his grandmother’s stories to fill in colour. Parkman’s *The Conspiracy of Pontiac and the Indian War after the Conquest of Canada* (1851), published the same year as Richardson’s second edition, makes use of the same travellers’ manuscripts, including Parent and Meloche as well as Alexander Henry, and his version is still the accepted one for most historians. He claims that “at an early hour the open common behind the fort was thronged with squaws, children, and warriors, some naked, and others fantastically arrayed in their barbarous finery...in apparent preparation for a general game of ball” (223). Weapons with

shortened barrels were concealed under blankets and brought into the compound by the Ottawa women, but the scheme was betrayed by “a disaffected Ottawa named Mahiganne” (Middleton 68). The same plan was undertaken at Fort Michilimackinac, where it succeeded.

What is interesting is the difficulty in matching up details; the forts were not attacked “simultaneously,” as Fort Detroit was attacked on May 7, 1763, and Fort Michilimackinac on June 4, although more than one nineteenth-century historian claims June 2<sup>nd</sup> for the latter attack. Richardson himself changes the date from late spring to the Indian summer days of September. The anonymous French writer of the Navarre Journal claims that Pontiac’s lacrosse game was played between Huron, Potawatomes, and French Canadians, and lasted till seven o’clock in the evening, when everyone went home; other accounts claim the game was played between the Ottawa and French Canadians, or between the Delaware and Shawanee, and virtually all other accounts have the game lasting only until noon. The Michilimackinac game was supposed to have been between the Chippewa, or between the Sauk and Ojibway, or among other Algonquian nations. Even though all the writers admit Pontiac’s plan was betrayed to the British by an Ottawa man named Mahiganne, editors of the documents insist on telling apocryphal stories of Gladwin’s alleged mistress Catherine, or other women, which almost certainly led to Richardson’s use of Oucanasta. There were only two eye-witness survivors at Fort Michilimackinac, and Alexander Henry – our most reliable historical source – was not one of them.

The only eye-witness account of the massacre and the preceding Native plot belongs to Captain Etherington, the commandant of Fort Michilimackinac; he wrote that “they played from morning till noon; then, throwing their ball close to the gate, and observing Lieutenant Lesley and me a few paces out of it, they came behind us, seized and carried us into the

woods. In the mean time, the rest rushed into the fort, where they found their squaws, whom they had previous planted there, with their hatchets hid under their blankets” (qtd. in Parkman 275). Although Etherington describes the ball as being thrown only “close to the gate,” most historians prefer the more dramatic image of the ball being “lobbed...over the gate of the compound” (Middleton 92). The massacre was not nearly as bloody as Richardson makes it; sixteen soldiers and one trader were killed, and the rest of the garrison were taken prisoner.

Besides the historical confusion of dates, times, and specifics of this Trojan-horse plan, there are other striking disparities between the accounts and those of traditional lacrosse games. The Jesuits, who gave the game its name of *la crosse*, understood that the game was connected to Native religious beliefs, as a highly ceremonial religious expression. Thomas Vennum, in *American Indian Lacrosse: Little Brother of War* (1994), explains that before a game of lacrosse, players were required to observe a taboo against sexual intercourse, undergo fasting, and perform ritual cleansing. Men whose wives were pregnant were isolated from the team and given special medicines, certain foods were prohibited, and in some nations, shamans ritually scratched players with instruments sharp enough to draw blood.<sup>5</sup> There were four reliigiomagical connections related to games, Joseph Oxendine claims, focusing on mortuary practices, healing sickness, climatic conditions, and fertility. The Jesuits were suspicious of the game for these reasons, citing an example in 1637 in which Hurons played lacrosse to ward off adverse weather conditions in the same manner as the infamous rain dance was performed in the southeastern United States.

Although trickery and deception were accepted behaviour in certain games, Oxendine

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<sup>5</sup> As in the Sun Dance, in which the participant’s flesh is pierced and torn as part of his vows, the intention of the painful ordeal is a demonstration of bravery as well as containing a magical purpose.

maintains that it is unlikely that guile would be used in the midst of a lacrosse game, due to its spiritual nature. For the same reason, it is extremely improbable that the Native women would be part of the scheme to hide weapons for the lacrosse players under their blankets, as one of the strongest taboos connected to the game had to do with the players' contact with women; in some nations among the Algonquians, even a woman's touch on a lacrosse stick could render it unfit for use (Oxendine 11). Lacrosse games were rarely if ever played in the morning, as Hewitt notes, in "Iroquois Game of La Crosse," but instead began in the afternoon, lasting until night, when there was feasting and social dancing; the accounts of the lacrosse game stopping at noon at both Fort Detroit and Fort Michilimackinac make it clear that the Native stratagem began early in the morning.

Most of the British had never witnessed anything on the scale of a true lacrosse match between nations; the most they would have seen was an occasional game between children, or a moccasin game. Vennum points out that the commandant of Fort Michilimackinac would have assumed that the exhibition game would be similar to the small scrimmages with a few players that the Ojibway had engaged in the week before the attack. As with the war dance and the sun dance, the British and American governments were wary of the import and significance of lacrosse; Kendall Blanchard notes that the Spanish outlawed ball games in their territories in 1684, the Shawnee game was banned in 1874, and the Mississippi Choctaw were forbidden to play in 1900. Indeed, even Richardson, almost a century after the massacre at Michilimackinac, would probably not have seen a real lacrosse game. In 1834, two years after the publication of *Wacousta*, the first exhibition match was played for the general European public, with two seven-man teams comprised of players from Caughnawaga and Akwesasne putting on an exhibition match at Ville St Pierre, Quebec. It was not until 1851,

when Richardson's second edition of *Wacousta* was published, that George Catlin's vivid and fanciful paintings of lacrosse brought the game alive visually for Europeans in a blend of fact and fantasy.

It is clear, then, that the British soldiers at Forts Detroit and Michilimackinac might have mistaken the Native attack as part of a lacrosse game; what they saw might have been a ball-game dance instead, designed as a ceremony prior to battle. In this dance, which is related to the game of lacrosse in its movements of ball throwing, catching, and running, both men and women participate, to weaken the enemy and strengthen their own forces. The dancers go down to a stream or river – in Richardson's case, the Bloody Bridge would serve perfectly – where the shaman purifies them. Vennum notes that ordinarily, these ceremonial dances would take place in longhouses, but would have to be moved outside to a large field or common if the crowd was too large, as in this case, where the dance takes place in front of the fort. The single goal post of the Great Lakes region (as compared to the customary two posts of other nations), set up on the lacrosse field, could serve as the post for a war dance. The dancers stand in a line, as in the war dance; Frank Speck, in *Cherokee Dance and Drama* (1983), explains that the dancers then “charge in the direction of the opponents’ settlement, brandishing ball sticks like weapons and whooping defiance” (58).<sup>6</sup>

Richardson's fictional description, copied from multiple historical sources, can easily be read in terms of this ball-game dance, instead of lacrosse. At Pontiac's signal, the warriors “prepared themselves for the trial of mingled skill and swiftness” (221). At first, they form “a dense group in the centre of the common” (221), by the single goal post, which acts as a dance

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<sup>6</sup> Vennum notes the connection between the triangle of dance, war, and lacrosse, pointing out the strong resemblance of the drumstick, lacrosse stick, and war club, particularly in the Algonquian nations.

post, the proper place to start the dance. Then, “diverging in two equal files both to the right and to the left of the immediate centre” (221), the Natives form “an open chain, extending from the skirt of the forest to the commencement of the village” (221). This is a clear description of a ball-game dance, which begins in two lines, and then moves from the camp towards the opposing settlement; the pattern which makes little sense for a rousing game of lacrosse suddenly becomes clear when seen through the lens of dance.

Whatever the real source, Richardson’s description of the game/dance-turned-attack demonstrates the combined fear and fascination provoked by Native movements during this period. Understood as essentially fierce and irrational, movements associated with recreation seemed indistinguishable from those associated with lethal attack. Native power and agility, and especially their racial tendency to move in a mass as one body, as we have seen, made them particularly terrifying – though also, for Richardson’s gothic purposes, particularly engrossing – as enemies. The rapidity with which they are transformed, in the ballgame scene, from harmless players to ferocious attackers, underlines their depth of savagery.

In the novel, British prejudice extends from Native dancing to the movements of the French Canadians who live in close contact with the Natives. We have seen the British perceptions of French dancing in the previous chapter; in Richardson’s novel, we also see some evidence of such views. While Richardson takes pains to point out that the French Canadian feeling of hostility “eventually died away under the mild influence” (19) of the British government, he blames the French Canadians for “sowing the seeds of distrust and jealousy in the hearts of natives” (17), frequently allying the villagers and huntsmen with the Natives. As the troops sent to execute Frank Halloway draw near the French Canadian village, the inhabitants are described in terms of physicality, as they have a “vivacity of

language and energy of gesticulation that would not have disgraced the parent land itself” (134). The natural state of French physicality is connected here to the Native physiognomy, particularly through the approval of *Wacousta* by Francois’s daughter: the “tall and picturesque form” of the warrior in his Native garb, as well as his “active and athletic limbs,” appear to “engross her whole admiration and interest” (138). This reaction is far different from the civilized horror the British ladies – Clara, Madeline, and Ellen – feel upon meeting the savage giant. Richardson also points out that the French Canadians speak the “Indian tongue, with which it was well known most of the Canadians, both male and female, were more or less conversant” (234); this is an interesting observation to make, since the British officers also know the Native language. Perhaps it is the level of skill that renders the French Canadians suspicious, an example of how close to the Natives they are linguistically as well as physically.

There is a difference, here, between the previous chapter’s disapproval of effeminate and corrupt courtly dancing, and the discomfort with the lusty movements of a poor villager; the European French and the French Canadian – usually just called “Canadian” – are separate entities in the minds of the British, and possess distinct forms of dance. Parkman, in the nineteenth century, argued that the “restless, roving Canadians” (63), more interested in the fur trade than in agriculture, descended all too often into Native habits, among them dance. He claimed that these French Canadians were no better than Natives: “in the evening dance, his red cap mingled with the scalp-locks and feathers of the Indian braves; or, stretched on a bear-skin by the side of his dusky mistress, he watched the gambols of his hybrid offspring, in happy oblivion of the partner whom he left unnumbered leagues behind” (Parkman 49).

Parkman’s disapproval of miscegenation has echoes in *Wacousta*, where Richardson makes it

clear that there will be no Native-British offspring between Frederick de Haldimar and Oucanasta; the Native maiden may be in love with the British soldier, but she understands her place, and helps save Frederick's more appropriate lover. Historically, the French colonists had a more intimate relationship with the Native nations than did the British, and Parkman was disgusted at their willingness to meet "the savage half way"; he accused Count Frontenac of being "plumed and painted like an Indian chief, danc[ing] the war-dance and yell[ing] the war-song at the camp fires of his delighted allies" (Parkman 75). In *Wacousta*, by contrast (but drawing on the same discourse of dance), Colonel de Haldimar has only amused contempt for his Native allies and their dances.

If the French Canadian colonists have a connection to the Natives, the Scottish have an even stronger one in the novel; the energetic and agile figure of Wacousta, really the nobleman Sir Reginald Morton, represents the contemporary concept of the Scottish highlanders as a form of primitive much like the North American Native. W.J. Keith notes that the novels of Sir Walter Scott, an acknowledged influence on Richardson, created a vision of untamed Highlanders representing "a contradictory but nonetheless powerful balance of the primitively heroic and the politically threatening" (39); the ancient Scots were discursively linked to modern Natives, "warriors and hunters, rustic and patriarchal, flourish[ing] in the vast wilderness" (Fulford 8). Even the music of Scotland was connected to Native chants; Boyle claims that the dance-songs and ceremonial chants resemble "songs and lullabies of the Scottish Highlands" (143), and quotes Alexander Cringan, musical superintendant of Toronto Public Schools, that the Native melody is based on a pentatonic scale employed by such ancient and alien cultures as the "Chinese, Japanese, Hindoos and Celts" (145). In *Wacousta*, a residual Scottish nationalism is safely displaced onto a more clearly savage enemy. Terry

Goldie notes that it is Wacousta's Cornish heritage and Scottish experience that make it possible for him to join the Native nation, as a "child of nature" perverted by British intrigues.

In describing his early life, Wacousta emphasizes his physical attributes, highlighting his agility and strength, characteristics similar to the Natives' "red gifts"; he claims that he accustomed himself to "athletic exercises" (441), such as climbing cliffs and rowing in tempests, in the same manner as a young Native warrior. His own description of his physical characteristics, his "buoyancy and elasticity of limb" (443) sounds strikingly like the "firm but elastic" (222) body of Pontiac and the other Natives. Wacousta's physical stature, emphasizing a descent into savage physicality, is "considerably beyond that of the ordinary race of men, and his athletic and muscular limbs united the extremes of strength and activity in a singular degree" (137), and his features, which are described as "marked and prominent" (137), allow him to pass as Native. Indeed, even his expression, "repellent and disdainful" (137), is remarkably similar to the air of haughtiness described of the Native warriors.

Hurley, in *The Borders of Nightmare: The Fiction of John Richardson* (1992), emphasizes the power of Wacousta's motion, as "unlike the static de Haldimar, he is always moving. Moving across continents and oceans, he aligns himself with the fluid realm of wilderness and nomadic Indian, a world constantly in movement" (89). Like the Natives, his emotions betray themselves in his movement, for he is often "tapping the earth" (509) with his foot, or "stamping violently" (510). In fact, Richardson asserts that "so far from exhibiting any of the self-command of the Indian, the constant play of his features betrayed each passing thought" (138).

Even in his aspect as an ancient Scot, Wacousta/Reginald is closely associated with movement; in fact, it is possible to see in his courtship of Clara Beverley a traditional

Highland dance known today as the Cakewalk. This dance, now often confused with the jazz-age dance of the same name, is a courtship dance performed as a duet. Its origins are unknown, but are believed to date from around the Jacobite era, a detail which would account for the fact that the dance is known by both Clara Beverley, the daughter of a reclusive Jacobite, and Wacousta, a soldier in the Rebellion of 1745. Wacousta spies the girl while he is out hunting, in “strictly Highland” (444) dress, and describes his wooing in explicit detail that sounds uncannily like the dance, as he starts his appeal

on knee, and raising my clasped hands, inclined them towards her in token of mingled deprecation of her anger, and respectful homage to herself. At first she hesitated, then gradually and timidly retrod her way to the seat she had so abruptly quitted in her alarm. Emboldened by the movement, I made a step or two in advance, but no sooner had I done so than she again took to flight. Once more, however, she turned to behold me, and again I had dropped on my knee, and was conjuring her, with the same signs, to remain and bless me with her presence. Again she returned to her seat, and again I advanced (450).

This passage echoes the Cakewalk’s movements, from the man’s beckoning gestures while on bended knee, to the woman’s repeated advance and retreat. The Scottish Dance Teachers’ Alliance, in the handbook for the Scottish National Dances, records the *retirées* and *bourrées derrière* that mirror Wacousta’s courtship of Clara, a dance which is still performed today in Highland dance (14).

Wacousta is not truly “Native,” however, until he is betrayed by British treachery; he tells Clara de Haldimar that in Scotland, while he had been “of surpassing strength....and fleet of foot,” he had not yet attained his “present gigantic stature; neither was my form endowed

with the same Herculean rudeness; nor did my complexion wear the swarthy hue of the savage; nor had my features been rendered repulsive, from the perpetual action of those fierce passions which have since assailed my soul” (454). After de Haldimar’s duplicity, Wacousta submerges himself in attempting England’s ruin, fighting first with the Scottish Highlanders in ’45, then with the French in Quebec, and finally with Pontiac in the Native rebellion. As he becomes more embittered, his barbarism becomes plain through his body, until, as Captain de Haldimar thinks, “he had never gazed on any thing wearing the human shape half so atrociously savage” (251). He has descended from a young Cornish god through the stages of savagery, from Scottish Highlander to French Canadian, all the way down to Native warrior, until now he only “wears” the human shape, instead of being human himself, his vengeful passions expressed in his bounding and leaping movements.

In direct contrast to Wacousta and the highly physical Natives, the majority of the British soldiers are feeble in their movements.<sup>7</sup> Himself a soldier, Richardson seems to disapprove of the “principles of the old school” on which Colonel de Haldimar bases his command, and which allow him to exercise “an orthodox despotism” (411). He implicitly argues that excessive military discipline, without the enlivening influence of women and of cross-cultural friendship, has made the British unfit for the colonial enterprise. Instead of simply casting the Natives as rude versions of British manliness, Richardson points out the fragility of the colonial enterprise by emphasizing the weak bodies of the British soldiers.

Sir Everard, “with all his dandyism and effeminacy of manner” (33), and the gentle and girlish Charles de Haldimar provide the most evident contrast to the lithe and vigorous

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<sup>7</sup> The exception is Frederick, who is honoured by Pontiac for his speed in escaping the Native camp. He appreciates Frederick’s manner of “flying down the height with a rapidity proportioned to the extreme peril in which he stood” (152).

Native bodies. While the young baronet Everard conceals a “manly heart” (100), he is an “ephemeral character” who has an “innate and...instinctive horror of drills and early rising” (100); decked out in scarlet and gold, Sir Everard is no physical match for the Native specimens of manhood. Charles, who faints upon hearing of his brother’s supposed death, has a “delicate frame” (61) and the beauty of a “frail and delicate woman” (111). Indeed, even the manlier brother, Frederick, has a “hand as white and as soft...as Miss Clara’s herself” (73). While these men may be worthy servants of Britain, Everard and Charles are not equipped to endure in Canada’s savage setting. Although Richardson claims that Sir Everard is “of a high and resolute spirit” (33), his love for Clara, engendered through his love for the beautiful Charles, does not survive the tale’s end. Charles himself is too delicate to live in the world, with his “retiring, mild, winning manners, and gentle affections, added to extreme and almost feminine beauty of countenance for which he was remarkable” (61). Their physical abilities are simply not sufficient to combat the hostile inhabitants and create a British oasis in the dense forest. Only Frederick, standing in direct contrast to his father’s cold “rigidity of manner” (53) which cost him his children, is physically and mentally capable of sustaining a family; he is the future of Britain in Canada, and it is his fruitful marriage with Madeline de Haldimar that closes the novel.

The British soldiers in the ranks are also figures of weak physical performance; they are no match for the agile Native warriors. Their movements are described as “languid and almost mechanical” (58) when digging graves, and even their march, a “tramp” that moves “heavily and measuredly,” shows their “character of reluctance” (132). Their strength is diminished by the constant vigilance needed in the garrison as well as by the toll taken by Colonel de Haldimar’s insistence on rigid and unbending authority, and Richardson highlights

that they “had gradually been losing their energy of spirit” (209). Without the spirit to motivate them in the garrison, the pressures of being besieged turn the soldiers into automatons. In the other fort at Michilimackinac, the young officers there are not described in warlike terms, but as sensitive men, particularly the “dark-eyed and elegant Baynton and the sonneteering Middleton” (113). Both of these cultured men, one an artist, the other a poet, are killed in the massacre; if they had been dancing a country dance in the urban colonial setting, they would have been ideal partners, but in this fierce environment, their physical natures are simply not strong enough to survive. The British sailors on the schooner, as they try to escape Lake Huron after the massacre, are also touched by physical weakness, with Richardson noting that “there was none of that buoyancy of movement and animation of feature to be observed which so usually characterize the indomitable daring of the British sailor” (318). In this savage land, only the Natives are capable of being lively and lithe physical creatures, and even the ordinarily robust British sailors shrink and wither.

Through the course of the narrative, Charles de Haldimar degenerates into shock, his “attenuated person” bearing “traces of languor and debility, but too plainly marked the abstractness and terror of his mind, while the set stiff features and contracted muscles of the face contributed to give an expression of vacuity” (209). His father’s insistence on subduing Charles’ natural, if womanly, passions is too much for the young man’s body. Even the strong young Frank Halloway is broken under de Haldimar’s inflexibility, as he walks to his execution, “almost mechanically...tottering and embarrassing himself at every step” (145). His wife, Ellen, on seeing his execution, also “tottered, rather than walked, through the group of officers” (129). When we see her next, in the company of Wacousta, her mind is so destroyed that her movements are “altogether mechanical” as she is seen “rocking her body to

and fro with an undulating motion that seemed to have its origin in no effort of volition of her own” (426). Like the British sailors and soldiers, Ellen is reduced to a robotic and unconscious figure, moving without reason. The endless and unreasoning nature of her movement echoes the British perception of Native dance; her mad retreat into the forest turns her into a shadow of a Native. Hopelessness and isolation seem to be the culprits, aided by Colonel de Haldimar’s stiff-necked insistence on the forms of military rigidity.

We have seen, in Chapter One, the important role of dance in a colonial society; in the homosocial world of the garrison, dance is impossible. The only three women described in the novel – Clara, Madeline, and Ellen – are all removed from their partners; Clara and Madeline de Haldimar are locked up in Fort Michilimackinac, and Ellen Halloway is torn from her husband’s side to go mad in the woods. Without women to participate in some form of community life, including social dancing, the men of the forts cannot create social ties, find partners, or strengthen the new colony with children. Richardson appears to criticize the rigid and measured life to which the men are reduced; homosocial dancing – while acceptable in Native ritual dance – was never an option in British social dance. The British soldiers reject Native women as dance partners, as well as French women, and have no access to women of their own race and class; alone in the garrison, their community withers and weakens.

The only link the military ritual has to dancing is an ominous one; drums were intricately associated with Native rituals, and Richardson often mentions the use of the drum in military ceremonies and events. At Halloway’s trial, the adjutant enters the room, “followed by a drummer, bearing his instrument” (42), and the trial itself is referred to as “a drum-head court-martial” (44). As Halloway is marched out, after Colonel de Haldimar coldly reads the sentence of death, “the clanking sound of his chains” (47) is reminiscent of

the measured drumbeats. The implication seems to be that despite significant differences between Native and British techniques of warfare, a strain of ferocity runs through both. The “low and monotonous beat of their [Native] drums in the death-dance” (389) sound a great deal like the “first drum for parade” (504), where the “monotonous roll of the *assemblée* now summoned them” (508).

In contrast to the Natives’ physical power, which is expressed through dance, the British must fight the stifling rigidity of an outdated military structure. Colonel de Haldimar’s cold and calculating discipline weakens his men, making them vulnerable to the vital physicality of Wacousta and the Natives. As outposts of British civilization in the dark wild forests of the colony, the British soldiers must overcome their own physical weakness in order to tame and control the savage character of Native and Nature. Richardson occasionally inserts paeans of praise to the “fertility of cultivated nature” (131), contrasting the “inhospitable and unproductive woods” (16) to the “continuous chain of neat farm-houses...the luxuriant and bending orchards, teeming with fruits of every kind and of every colour; the ripe and yellow corn vying in hue with the soft atmosphere, which reflects and gives full effect to its abundance and its richness” (131). From his tributes to the agricultural advances of the British settler, we can see Richardson’s approval of the colonial plan; however, he does not argue, like Colonel de Haldimar, for an extreme disciplining of the Natives, nor does he find the British military to be without fault. Frederick de Haldimar, the only survivor of that family, ends the novel with the hope of civilization, as he and his wife Madeline bring in a new era of communication with the Natives; when Wacousta, the man so consumed by revenge that he crosses barriers separating civilized and savage order, is finally killed, Pontiac arranges for peace with the British garrison. As Monkman notes, the

“malevolent savagism of Wacousta gives way to the benevolent savagism of the young Indian who slays him” (“Richardson’s Indians” 90). Oucanasta’s brother, still nameless, becomes the new chief, and instructs Frederick’s sons “in the athletic and active exercises peculiar to his race” (531).

With this final benediction, the Native physicality of dance is allied to the British controlling and civilizing impulse, and there hope returns to the young colony. Indeed, this was a foregone conclusion, since Richardson opens his novel by asserting that the Natives have “been gradually weaned from their first fierce principle of hostility, until they have subsequently become as much distinguished by their attachment to, as they were three quarters of a century ago remarkable for their untameable aversion for, every thing that bore the English name” (19). Frederick de Haldimar and Oucanasta’s brother, as heads of the new leading families, have secured the peace of the colony. The primitive dancing of the Native is tamed and brought within the bounds of British civilization, as Oucanasta and her brother usher in a new era of peaceful “athletic exercises” rather than the savage war dance. The Native body and its warlike movements are transformed to create a community of healthy colonizers, and the stifled coldness of military life is warmed and civilized by Madeline’s presence in the fort.

## Chapter Four

### Syphilis and the Sylph: The Ballet Chorus in *A Daughter of Today*

As we move into the Confederation period, the discourse surrounding dance changes as theatrical dance evolves. Romantic ballet, a movement that developed later than its Romantic counterparts in literature and visual art, held England, France, and North America in its thrall from the 1830s. Although it was in significant decline by the late Victorian period, the themes and images of the Romantic ballet still played a major role in dance; the fin-de-siècle discourse about art, women, and disease uses these balletic images to represent the problems facing urban society at the turn of the century.

In Sara Jeannette Duncan's 1894 novel *A Daughter of Today*, the rebellious young American Elfrida Bell goes first to Paris, and then to London, trying to find a means of expressing herself as an artist; she finally settles on journalism, writing pieces of social analysis and some art criticism for a periodical called the *Decade*. She eventually goes undercover as a ballet girl to gain material for an autobiographical novel, with tragic results. The contemporary discourse about ballet and disease, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and continuing into the beginning of the twentieth century, plays a role that has never been explored in the narrative of Elfrida's ruin. Many of Elfrida's actions and the reactions of her peers, long unexplained, are readily understandable through the application of dance history. Elfrida's bold decision to join the ballet chorus, the shock and dismay of all those who know her, and even her eventual death can all be read in light of turn-of-the-century discourse about dance and disease, and show how Duncan was working within long-established, but now largely forgotten, discourses of fin-de-siècle degeneracy in relation to women's sexualization

through dance.

Ballet had changed since its days in Louis XIV's Versailles court, although France was still the cradle of Europe's premier dancers. Descended from the old court ballet, the new ballets explored new methods of creation and narrative with the *ballet d'action*, a style that privileged unity and coherence over the spectacle of the traditional *ballet d'entrée*. The eighteenth century witnessed the rise of the star dancer – the prima ballerina – and the innovative choreographer, and the Paris Opéra Ballet School ensured a steady supply of professional dancers. But it was not until the nineteenth century that ballet achieved its modern identity, or at least acquired many of the characteristics that are now equated with it in the public mind, especially “the pointe technique...the bouffant skirt called the tutu; the desire to create an illusion of weightlessness and effortlessness; and the association of the female dancer with ethereal creatures of fantasy, such as sylphs and fairies” (Au 45).

Lisa Arkin and Marian Smith note that pre-nineteenth century ballet was considered a primarily dramatic genre, like opera and spoken theatre, as dance was not yet considered an independent art. Less than a year after the July Revolution of 1830, the Paris Opéra ceased to be a court property and became a private enterprise with a government subsidy, split into an opera house and a ballet theatre. Most ballets still incorporated song into the performance, with prima ballerina Carlotta Grisi herself singing as well as dancing, but during the nineteenth century, the ballet became established as a genre independent of opera and theatre, excluding speech. Deborah Jowitt observes that the new director of the Paris Opéra, Dr. Louis Veron, focused on the new middle-class audience, shrewdly analyzing contemporary trends of boulevard theatre; the confident bourgeoisie were flocking to see fairy spectacles and pantomimes, craving exoticism and mystery. Two aspects of Romantic art, what Jack

Anderson refers to as “a concern for the colourful things of this world and a hankering after the nonrational and supernatural” (44), united in Romantic ballet, as choreographers emphasized the emotional and intuitive; ballets about elves, fairies, and naiads became popular, as did ballets about madness, sleepwalking, mesmerism, and opium dreams.

Three of the early Romantic ballets, each performed well into the late Victorian period, stand out as clear examples of their type. *La Sylphide*, usually considered to be the first major Romantic ballet, was premiered at the Paris Opéra in 1832.<sup>1</sup> Sally Banes and Noel Carroll argue that its themes of the supernatural, exotic folklore, and the quest for the ideal served as a template for the period; as the French dance critic Theophile Gautier remarks, the Opéra “was given over to gnomes, undines, salamanders, elves, nixis, wilis, peris” (qtd. in Banes and Carroll 91). The story of the ballet concerns the choice between humanity and the inhuman; James Reuben, dozing by the fire on his wedding day, has a vision of the Sylphide and is enchanted with her inaccessible and airy beauty. He chases after her, leaving his fiancée Effie behind and entering the dangerous and misty forest, where the witches live. When he does finally catch the Sylphide, he kisses her, making her wings fall off; this act of capture kills her, and the witches are triumphant.

On one hand, *La Sylphide* operates broadly as a cautionary tale, warning that sexual passion outside one’s social circle is dangerous; on the other hand, as Banes and Carroll note, the ballet indulges forbidden wishes, allowing James “to gambol with the woodland sylphs for the best part of the second act before he is killed” (102). The Sylphide’s death expresses the danger of the erotic; Erik Aschengreen, in *The Beautiful Danger: Facets of the Romantic*

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<sup>1</sup> This ballet was originally choreographed by Filippo Taglioni to music by Jean-Madeleine Schneitzhoeffter.

*Ballet* (1974), points out that it is no accident that her death – and James’ subsequent death as well – are bound up with direct erotic contact. This ballet also begins the omnipresent trend associating demonic forces with the female: while the sylph may seem pure, she is also a dangerous temptress.

The “Ballet of the Nuns” in *Robert le Diable* (1831) echoes these concerns, and takes them to extremes; Jowitt relates that when Hans Christian Andersen saw this ballet in 1833, he was “overwhelmed by the thrilling atmosphere of death, misty female sexuality, forbidden pleasures, and religious blasphemy” (37). A critical and popular success, the ballet sequence was set in a ruined cloister, where the ghosts of lapsed nuns emerged from their tombs to dance by moonlight. In his own words, Hans Christian Anderson was fascinated and appalled:

the sarcophagi open, and the dead nuns rise up. By the hundred they rise from the graveyard and drift into the cloister. They seem not to touch the earth. Like vaporous images, they glide past one another. Suddenly their shrouds fall to the ground. They stand in all their voluptuous nakedness, and there begins a bacchanal like those that took place in their lifetimes, hidden within the walls of the convent. Two of them throw dice on their coffins, one sits on the sarcophagus and dresses her long hair; a host of them clink glasses and drink, while others lower the rope ladder in order to call the lover to the profane rendezvous. (qtd. in Aschengreen 15)

This portrayal of immoral women, let loose in their own demonic bacchanal, intensifies the image of the ballerina as sexually provocative and defiant of social rules and mores; although the dancers are merely playing this role, it seems likely that the audience would conflate the

two images of dancer and immoral temptress. Indeed, there is more discussion in Anderson's account of the "voluptuous nakedness" involved in the dead nuns' gauzy costumes than of the dancers' technical abilities.

*Giselle* (1841) is, of course, the quintessential Romantic ballet, with its connections between women, dancing, and disease. Giselle is a peasant girl courted by a local aristocrat, Albrecht, who visits her village disguised as a peasant; when his identity is revealed, Giselle goes mad, dancing furiously until she drops dead. In the second act, she is resurrected as one of the Wilis, spirits of women who have been betrayed by their lovers, and is forced to entice Albrecht to her grave in the forest. Giselle must seduce him into the forest, but pleads for his life before the Queen of the Wilis; she delays long enough for his servant and friends to arrive to stop him from dancing to death. Felicia McCarren, in *Dance Pathologies: Performance, Poetics, Medicine* (1998), explains that *Giselle* contains what would become the staples of the *ballet blanc*, including the tragic results of love, the transformation of the woman into a white-bodied supernatural being who is removed into a fantastic realm, and her quintessential inaccessibility for the man who longs to possess her. These aspects would rule the ballet world throughout the nineteenth century, with the 1895 version of *Swan Lake* extending the image of ideal females symbolized by flying creatures who cannot be controlled by mortal men.

The erotic nature of dancing women is also emphasized in *Giselle*, from Giselle's courtship by Albrecht to the Wilis' seductive dance of revenge; the sexual aspect is bound up with anxieties about the women involved. McCarren points out that although the dancers are idealized as beautiful, they are not real women, but frightening figures of ambition, deviance, and revenge. They promise pleasure, but at the same time, hold the threat of death; Jody

Bruner notes that the Wilis are “both seductive women and repulsive corpses” (110).<sup>2</sup> In fact, the word “wili” is derived from the Slavic word for vampire, and the supernatural danger of the Romantic ballerina is emphasized in many of the ballets. Giselle’s adagio in the second act is a display of erotic power, but is also disconcerting in her mania for self-absorbed, insane dancing. *The Morning Herald* described the Giselle of Fanny Elssler, one of the most famous of the Romantic ballerinas, in frightening terms: “a smile lightens her features – but it is the smile of a gathering insanity, the fitful and unearthly calm of an unhinged mind. She is seized with the Wili fever, and dances wildly and incoherently, mingling with her motions many little touches of feeling eminently beautiful and pathetic. She regards her lover with a glance of admiration and devotion, and caresses him with a playful tenderness – then she repulses him as a serpent” (qtd. in Guest, *Fanny Elssler* 198). Giselle, like many of the figures of the Romantic ballet, is seen as both an unreachable goddess and a treacherous seductress.

The airy sylph’s other side, then, is the passionate, earthy aspect of Romanticism, and the audience’s obsession with the spiritual maid of the mist was just as strong for her provocative, eroticized sister. The ballerina’s powerful duality of saint and seductress was

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<sup>2</sup> Significant research in dance studies has focused on the performance and staging of disease in ballet, particularly in *Giselle*. In this ballet, a complex web of connections is woven between women, dancing, ill health, and madness. Although *Giselle* was first debuted in 1841, revivals of the ballet were staged in the 1870s and again in the 1890s, including parodies of it all over London. The social commentary embedded in the ballet’s narrative is not simply about dancing but about dancers; McCarren claims that *Giselle* is “an allegory that stages social and sexual issues” (*Dance Pathologies* 69) about the ballet-girls themselves. The Wilis embody many popular nightmares about female sexuality; the supernatural creatures are femmes fatales, representing the dangerously erotic potential of women. McCarren argues that the mythic power of the Wilis, to dance men to their deaths, identifies their vengeance with the sexual revenge of the pox: the transmission of syphilis from lower-class women to married men, who would then infect their wives, was widely conceived as a kind of revenge. In this reading, then, Prince Albrecht would “represent a dandy of the Jockey Club, who comes to the Opera to choose a mistress as he would choose a race horse” (McCarren, *Dance Pathologies* 71).

captured most potently by Theophile Gautier, whose ballet criticism was available to British balletomanes in translation. His most famous summation of the dichotomy is in his championing of two women to become the inspiration for the dual Romantic aspects of ballet, Marie Taglioni and Fanny Elssler; alluding to their very different roles on stage, he refers to Taglioni as a “Christian dancer” and Elssler as a “pagan dancer” (Gautier 431). Indeed, Elssler’s dances were openly provocative, focusing on national and character dances like the Polish Cracovienne, the Italian Tarantella, and the Spanish Cachucha. The Cachucha shocked audiences at first, with its “contortions, the movements of the hips, the provocative gestures, the arms that seemed to be seeking and embracing an absent lover, the mouth crying out for a kiss, the thrilling, quivering, twisting body, the captivating music, the castanets, the strange costume, the shortened skirt, the low-cut, half-open bodice” (Guest, *Romantic Ballet in Paris* 274). Elssler also led the wave of Oriental ballets that featured the woman of the harem, the figure Jowitt calls “the sylph’s more accessible cousin” (“In Pursuit of the Sylph” 49).

Romantic ballet flourished internationally, from Naples to New York, Buenos Aires to St. Petersburg, for much of the nineteenth century; however, as the century wore on, standards declined, and it “foundered in an excess of unreasonable spectacle and glamour” (Jowitt, “In Pursuit of the Sylph” 31). Elaborate stage effects began to dominate productions, and the ballets degenerated into mere entertainment built up around the person of the star ballerina. Dance critics complained that the London audiences were demanding “legs, not brains” (Anderson 60), and the stages in the music halls began to produce more and more ballet spectacles that focused on the sexual aspect of the female dancer. In fact, with the ballerina’s rise in popularity, the male dancer was evicted from the stage; for critics such as Gautier, the ballet was not simply a showcase of femininity, but “an art whose subject is woman, an art

that seeks to define femininity and is defined by it” (McCarren, *Dance Pathologies* 57). The male dancer was eliminated from all but character roles on all dance stages outside Russia, Denmark, and some countries of eastern Europe, and men’s roles were performed by the *danseuse en travestie*, and women began to dance the parts of sailor boys, hussars, and toreadors. Ballet was quickly becoming less a serious art, and more an appendage of the luxury trade.

With artistic decline came a decline in conditions for the dancers. Ivor Guest notes that at the Paris Opéra Ballet, while the stars of the opera successfully demanded higher salaries, and the musicians of the orchestra had the right to send in substitutes, the budget for dancers remained static for years. Janina Pudelek explains that if a dancer joined the *corps de ballet* at sixteen, she would be ineligible for a pension unless she remained on the payroll until the age of fifty-one, an almost impossible feat; only two feasible solutions remained for her – to make an advantageous marriage or to find a well-to-do protector. Many turned to the members of the Jockey Club or the bloods of London, who frequented the green room and backstage areas in search of accessible young women. Guest describes these gallants as “young men-about-town...who acquired the habit of looking on the coulisses [wings] of the Opéra as their private seraglio” (*The Paris Opéra Ballet* 25), and Alberic Second, in *Les Petits Mysteres de l’Opéra* (1844), observed: “The Opéra provides them with their amorous pleasures, just as the Pompadour stud-farm provides them with their equestrian pleasures; they consider it as a storehouse for remounts, no more” (qtd. in Meglin 83). The state of Romantic ballet was declining, but its powerful hold on the cultural imagination was still strong. Molly Engelhardt notes that the fetishizing of ballet was not limited to those who actually attended performances, but was extended to anyone who could read the dailies; indeed, images of

professional dancers were reproduced everywhere, from popular journals and piano sheet music borders, to sandwich board advertising and playbills – even pornography.

At the same time that ballet was sliding into decadence in Europe, Sara Jeannette Duncan was born in Brantford in 1861; she lived in Canada, the United States, England, and India, and travelled the globe writing as a journalist, travel writer, and novelist. She worked as a journalist for the *Brantford Expositor*, the *Toronto Globe*, the *Montreal Star* and the *Washington Post*. Marian Fowler points out that no woman had ever worked in the office of a major Canadian newspaper before Duncan's position with the *Toronto Globe*; while "a few genteel ladies scribbled columns from the safe sanctuary of their plush parlours....male reporters even covered the social events, the receptions and balls and weddings, and described, in wildly inaccurate prose, the ladies' dresses and adornments" (Fowler 47). Although she was later to turn to novels, Duncan's ground-breaking work in journalism lent Elfrida's character a strong basis in reality.

Duncan's first book, published in 1890, *A social departure: how Orthodocia and I went around the world by ourselves*, documented her travels around the world, from Vancouver, to Japan, Ceylon, India, Cairo, and England. In India she met her future husband, Everard Charles Cotes; after their marriage in 1891, she spent the rest of her life with him in India. She published twenty-two books, including two volumes of personal sketches and a volume of short stories. Literary criticism has focused overwhelmingly, as Anna Snaith points out, on her 1904 novel, *The Imperialist*, which has been read as both her most Canadian and most politicized novel, although there has also been some interesting research on her Indian

novels.<sup>3</sup>

*A Daughter of Today* was published by Chatto and Windus in a one-guinea, two-volume library set in June, 1894. A New Woman novel about a modern girl who refuses conventional roles, it has been criticized as delegitimizing female ambition because of the novel's moralistic ending, in which the New Woman character pays for her desires with her life.<sup>4</sup> Many critics feel that the novel betrays an uneasy mixture of admiration for and condemnation of the character; Misao Dean claims that Duncan "could not be an unqualified

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<sup>3</sup> See David Tough, "Civilization had given him a vote: Citizenship and the Ballot in Sara Jeannette Duncan's *The Imperialist*"; Janice Fiamengo "Susceptible to no Common Translation: Language and Idealism in Sara Jeannette Duncan's *The Imperialist*."

<sup>4</sup> The sexually independent New Woman, alongside the decadent dandy, "by now fully enrolled in the fin de siècle bestiary as the sphinx, the androgyne, or the ballet girl" (Dowling 48), was accused of setting a dangerous example for both her sex and her class. The spectre of the "mannish" woman also threatened gender barriers, as the New Woman was represented as "simultaneously non-female, unfeminine and ultra-feminine" (Pykett 140). Interestingly, she was also persistently represented as a hysteric whose unchecked emotionalism was the root of her problems. Like the ballet dancers, the New Woman "was also the nervous woman" (Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy* 40); an epidemic of nervous disorders including anorexia, neurasthenia, and hysteria – all disorders connected to dancers – were linked with changes in women's ambitions. It seems that if a woman resisted the dominant definitions of femininity, then she could be seen as either unwomanly or ill. Elfrida is the prototype of the New Woman, a brash young American living in the dangerous urbanity of Paris and London. She refuses to get married, announcing to Janet that she abhors the "commonplaceness, the eternal routine, the being tied together, the – the domestic virtues! It must be death, absolute death, to any fineness in nature" (158). Although, as a New Woman, she believes that a woman should seek her own sexual gratification, she dismisses the physical aspect of love in marriage, describing the "exaltation you impute to the race of a passion it shares with – with the molluscs. It's pure self-flattery" (158). Despite feeling drawn to Kendal, Elfrida denies any desire for a relationship with him, and turns down Laurence Cardiff's offer of marriage with a laugh, claiming that "marriage is so absurd!" (200). She claims that the principle of her independence has "too deep a root in her being; to tear it up would be to destroy her whole joy in life" (200), and refuses to leave the Peach Blossom Company to be married. Those around Elfrida can see her role as New Woman; when Laurence and Janet Cardiff meet Elfrida for the first time, Laurence's verdict is "fin de siècle" (118), and Janet agrees, saying "Perhaps...a little fin de siècle" (118). Even the editors at the *Illustrated Age*, where Elfrida contributes her columns, believe that "Miss Bell was dangerous; there was no telling what she might be up to if they gave her the reins" (163).

feminist because she finally accepted patriarchally imposed definitions of the female” (6).

Although Duncan was herself a working woman who was able to live independently from her earnings as a writer, she believed in compromise; in an article for the *Toronto Globe* in 1885, she argued that “loss of the least womanly grace means loss of power. Recognizing this, let us with the wisdom of serpents and the anti-thetical innocence wear not one glove-button or yard of embroidery the less, tolerate not the least diminution of courtesy or disregard of conventionality because of these latter-day privileges of ours” (qtd. in Fowler 118). *A Daughter of Today* reflects this tension between conformity to the respectable traditions of feminine behaviour and rejection of them altogether.

Elfrida Bell, a headstrong young American girl, born and raised in Sparta, Illinois, is desperate for artistic success. As a young girl, she is convinced that she is destined to live an artistic life; after a year at art school in Philadelphia, she goes to Paris to study painting with Lucien, a famous Parisian artist. Although she is painting to the best of her ability, she falls short of expectations, forever seeing her friends receive the praise she craves and is secretly sure belongs to her. When her father’s business can no longer support her expenses, Elfrida is faced with the choice of returning to Sparta or supporting herself with her art. Finally admitting her lack of ability in painting, Elfrida impulsively decides to become a journalist; she is still convinced that her natural artistic talent needs only a proper outlet. Unable to find a position in Paris, and faced with her friend Nadie’s success, Elfrida flees to London, where she secures regular freelance work.

For a while, Elfrida enjoys some success, surprising her painter friend John Kendal with her ability, and making friends with another young writer, Janet Cardiff, and her father Laurence. She feels drawn to Kendal, although she recognizes that Laurence seems to be

falling in love with her. In search of material for a book to boost her reputation as a writer, she decides to go undercover as a ballet-girl in a music hall. Her friends are appalled, and try to get her to see the degradation of her decision; Laurence even proposes marriage, partly in order to bring her home, but she refuses. Convinced that her book will earn her fame, she is devastated when Janet's book is published to acclaim and her own manuscript rejected; she commits suicide, and her book is published posthumously.

Elfrida's decision to join the ballet dancers is not out of character. Her theatrical nature is evident at an early age; she lives a self-consciously artistic life, always aiming for effect. In fact, the narrator claims boldly that her "self-consciousness was a supreme fact of her personality" (15). Like the typical New Woman associated with "obsessional interiority" (Pykett 41) and sometimes depicted "kissing [her] mirror image" (Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy* 10), Elfrida takes pleasure in her own performances. We see her in Sparta as she "paused before the looking glass, and wafted a kiss...to the face she saw there" (16). Just as ballet dancers were often criticized for their self-absorption (Bruner 111), Elfrida takes self-conscious pleasure in her beautiful actions. By the time she is a young teenager, she has "drawn a vague and many-shaped idea of artistic living" (15), in which she "saw truth afar off and worshipped, and as often met falsehood on the way and turned raptly to follow" (15). From this mocking reference, we can see that although Elfrida is instinctively drawn to the arts, she has no real understanding of them, longing for an "artistic" life – as "vague" as she sees it – rather than actually creating something of value. Indeed, she apparently has less talent than ambition, following falsehood "raptly" instead of the truth she "worshipped".

Elfrida's visions of an artistic life are superficial, pertaining more to effect than substance; she hopes to be considered something special, and "shudders at the mere thought of

what it meant to be an ordinary person” (14). She believes that the artistic quality of her life requires an audience, finding it “entirely preposterous that a young woman should kneel at an attic window in a flood of spring moonlight, with her hair about the shoulders of her nightgown, repeating Rossetti to the wakeful budding garden, especially as it was for herself she did, nobody else saw her” (16); Elfrida believes that it is “preposterous” that such a picturesque scene should be staged without anybody witnessing it. Without an audience to see her efforts, she is – for now, at least – content to play the part herself, finding “absorbing and critical interest in the very figment of her being” (16). Elfrida is encouraged by her mother in these artistic pursuits, despite her father’s attempts to curb her enthusiasms and her teacher Miss Kimpsey’s delicate remonstrances. Miss Kimpsey provides one of the early views of Elfrida’s tendency to theatricality, noting that Elfrida’s photograph reminds her of “Rachel the actress” (8).<sup>5</sup>

After a year spent in Philadelphia to study painting, Elfrida escapes the small-town air of Sparta to the *Quartier Latin* of Paris, where she embraces the Bohemian lifestyle. For a year she lives in “that intoxicating life” where she feels that “it had become treason to believe existence supportable under any other conditions” (24). This artistic life includes lessons in painting at Lucien’s studio, a friendship with Nadie Palicsky, who refuses to marry her lover, and a small Bohemian flat. Paris suits Elfrida’s flamboyant nature, allowing her not only to pursue her art, but also to create her own artistic self; she finds it “easy, in Paris, to invest her striking personality in a distinctive costume, sufficiently becoming and sufficiently odd, of which a broad soft felt hat, which made a delightful brigand of her, and a Hungarian cloak

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<sup>5</sup> It is possible that this “Rachel” refers to Elisabeth Rachel Felix, better known as Mademoiselle Rachel, born 1821, died 1858. She was a great Parisian actor, mistress of Louis Veron, director of the Paris Opéra Ballet.

formed important features” (26). She costumes her self-consciously created persona, and performs on the stage of the Parisian streets, in clothing that is carefully “becoming” as well as “sufficiently odd” to make her stand out.

Although her English friend Kendal believes that part of Elfrida’s problem lies in the Parisian lifestyle, finding that “he could not take life seriously where the emotions lent themselves so easily” (42), Elfrida does not modify her behaviour when she moves to London. She retains her Hungarian cloak, her Oriental decorations, and her self-conscious motivation, an ambition that Kendal sees through, telling her that “it is not achievement you want, but success” (51). That desire for success, which seemed to suit the *Quartier Latin*, is out of place in grey London; Kendal finds “her personality, her ideas and her effects, to be damaged by London” (119). It is significant that the young American has been tainted already with French mannerisms; Janet and Laurence Cardiff notice “all the little poses and expressions and reserves which are commonly a feminine result of considerable social training” (123) which, in Elfrida, have been amplified to a theatrical excess.

Elfrida acknowledges her own theatricality, and refuses to apologize for it. She baldly informs Kendal that her “egotism is like a little flame within me...it is so clear that I see everything in its light. To me it is most dear and valuable – it simplifies things so. I assure you that I wouldn’t be one of the sloppy unselfish people the world is full of for anything!” (126). Her egotism enjoys witnessing the effect of her appearance on her audience; in a typical example of how much more important is dramatic effect to Elfrida than content, she makes, in conversation with Kendal, “a little theatrical movement of her head to listen, and Kendal’s appreciation of it was so evident that she failed to notice exactly what he answered” (169). She is so engrossed with her own physical display and her audience’s reaction to it that

she loses track of the conversation.

In Paris, Elfrida had consorted not only with the disreputable painters of Lucien's studio, but also with other inhabitants of Bohemia, including dancers. She goes with Kendal to "first night at the Folies Dramatiques" (45), among other shows. The Folies Dramatiques, like the later famous Folies Bergères, provided music-hall dancing for a middle-class audience; Elfrida's later decision to join the Peach Blossom Company in London is understandable when we remember her early exposure to such theatrical dancing in Paris. In fact, while Elfrida is an American dancing in England, the root of her dancing is French. England had countless music halls of its own, but the dances that were seen on those stages were often specifically French in the nineteenth century; theatrical dancing in general, including the Romantic ballet, was considered an import from the decadent stages of Paris.

Guest points out that London regarded ballet as a "fundamentally French art in much the same way as it looked to Italy as the source of opera" (*Paris Opéra Ballet* 45), and English dancers would often assume a French stage name. The appearance of the cancan on the London stage after the 1860s bolstered the image of Paris as the centre of licentiousness, as the height of French exotic and erotic dancing. David Price notes that the stars of the Paris Opéra balls, Clodoche and Finette, visited London to perform in music-hall productions to great crowds. The Francis Parisian ballet troupe, which included a cancan programme, was a subject of a police investigation in Brown's Music Hall in Glasgow in 1879; the police report detailed the skimpy costumes and lewd high kicks of the dancers, claiming that the ballerina

wears a dress which consists of a flashy blue silk body with light trimmings & skin tights disclosing the form of her legs & thighs up to her hips, in fact the skirt scarcely

comes down to her private parts but is quite modest as far as the upper part of her body is concerned. She appears to be a model in a figure & in her performance she throws up her legs in such a manner as to cause an impression on the minds of her audience that it is done for the purpose of showing off her figure to the best possible advantage, & gains great applause. In my opinion her conduct is very unbecoming of her sex. As regards her sister Helen, she is dressed in a short skirt reaching to the knee in the same style as ballet girls are dressed at Pantomimes. (qtd. in Kift 134)

This kind of naughty spectacle – a pseudo-balletic cancan – caused the Alhambra in London to lose its licence in 1870, but it didn't stop the popularity of the dance, as music halls presented a number of new ballets containing some form of the cancan in the 1890s, including *Round the Town* (1892) and *La Frolique* (1894).

British anxieties over the music-hall productions were not engendered only by the appearance of the cancan; Dagmar Kift, in *The Victorian Music Hall: Culture, Class and Conflict* (1996), explains that reformers targeted the very atmosphere of music halls, charging them with the worst of Bohemianism and prostitution. Music halls in England spread quickly in the second half of the nineteenth century, with London containing between two and three hundred small music halls and thirty large ones with an average capacity of between 1,500 and 3,500 by 1866. By the start of the 1870s, the traditional rows of tables were being replaced with fixed rows of seating, with the refreshment rooms separated from the entertainment auditorium. In the 1880s, two shows an evening had become the norm in the halls, which now not only catered to a lower-class audience, but attracted citizens from all walks of life. As Barry Faulk notes, however, the commercial zenith of the London music hall was roughly between 1890 and 1919, the period in which Elfrida dares to join the music-hall

dancers.

As the imagery of British music halls grew in the public mind, fed by essays, poems, and paintings, they were linked with all that was flamboyant and daring; Karl Beckson argues that for avant-garde artists and writers “avidly searching for new subject matter, the music hall was an absorbing subject for artistic expression and aesthetic discussion” (112). Singers, dancers, and other performers were seen, on stage, to be challenging Victorian standards of respectability. The wildly disparate practices of the music hall included everything from the opulent spectacles of romance-saturated ballet to the notorious high-stepping Lottie Collins, whose skirt dance in 1892 caused riots. R.H. Gretton, in *A Modern History of the English People* (1899), gives an outraged description of Collins’ “Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay” as it “overran the streets of our towns...it was such an affront to English respectability as had never yet been administered, not only because it flaunted a vision of a high-kicking dancer on a music-hall stage, but because the very sound of the tune was jeering, as well as ludicrous” (qtd. in Faulk 17).

Ballet performances at first belonged solely to the repertoire of larger British music halls such as the Alhambra in London, not appearing in the regions until later in the nineteenth century due to the expense involved in the elaborate performances. The theatrical nature of these dance performances was, in fact, an ongoing concern; the 1843 Theatre Act, originally introduced to regulate internal conflicts in the theatre world, drew a line between theatre and pub entertainment, but its vague phrasing led to continuous demands for revision, which did occur in 1866 and again in 1892. Theatres objected to the *ballet d'action* – ballets with plots – which were felt to compete with traditional dramas. A ballet such as *Giselle* would fall into this category, and thus be forbidden to be performed in music halls; however, halls continued

to present all aspects of ballets, regularly being brought before the courts and let off with small fines. In fact, as Kift observes, the ballets presented at the Alhambra, the most famous of London music halls, were almost exclusively *ballets d'action*.

From an early period of her time in London, Elfrida is connected with the Alhambra in an intimate fashion; she not only considers the performances part of the Bohemian atmosphere to which she belongs, but she actually penetrates backstage. On one occasion, she turns down an invitation from her friend Janet, saying airily that she is going to “sup with some ladies of the Alhambra to-night – it will make such lovely copy” (161). At this early stage in her London life, she is already seeking theatrical and scandalous backstage scenes as material for her writing, and understands the significance of engaging in social intercourse with the ballet-girls of the music hall. She enjoys shocking Janet, whose admiration she desperately craves, but she also has a shrewd business eye open towards gaining “lovely copy” for her newspaper columns. Sex and dance sell, Elfrida knows, and even by dining with the “ladies of the Alhambra,” she will gain access to a delightfully forbidden segment of backstage life. Given that social mores would have prevented most middle-and upper-class girls from attending the theatre and public dance halls, as Ann Wagner notes, Elfrida’s connection with the dancers of the Alhambra is quite risqué.

The Alhambra, indeed, was London’s most famous ballet-oriented music hall, which employed up to four hundred ballet dancers at a time. An evening program might include three ballets: a comic ballet at 8:45, a light ballet at 9:45, and a grand spectacular ballet at 10:45 with a culminating transformation scene. In *The Alhambra Ballet* (1959), Guest points out that each new ballet production attempted to outshine its predecessors, “not so much by the brilliance of its choreography as by the splendour of its scenery and the ingenuity of its

effects” (8). A hundred and fifty tons of water, stored in tanks above the stage, was often used to exploit the hot weather in fountain, river, and bath scenes. The choices of subject varied widely, with ballets about butterflies and birds and fish playing beside Spanish, Barbaric, Turkish and Japanese ballets, as well as Carnival ballets, Amazon ballets, and military ballets. Spectacle was the important consideration, with the *corps de ballet* – Elfrida’s dancers – frequently employed in great processional scenes, although the more classical Romantic ballets such as *Swan Lake* and *Sleeping Beauty* were also performed throughout the 1880s and 1890s.

After losing its license in 1870 due to a police investigation regarding the morality of the dancing – a fairly common reason for denying a dance license – the Alhambra turned to regular theatre for a year, but quickly returned to the more popular dancing, regaining its music and dance license in 1872.<sup>6</sup> Moralists denounced the Alhambra as the “Alcedama of licensed vice, the festering spot of all London” (Guest, *Alhambra Ballet* 7), but they were not able to stop the public from flocking to the theatre; in fact, the precarious popularity of the ballet was growing by the end of the century, and the Alhambra gained a serious rival in the Empire Theatre on the north side of Leicester Square. By 1887, the Empire billed itself as “the Home of Ballet,” which the Alhambra countered by announcing itself as “the Original Home of Ballet” (Guest, *Alhambra Ballet* 37).

The moralists’ anxiety about the music-hall ballets stemmed not only from the

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<sup>6</sup> Kift points out that magistrates were wary about stage dancing in any case, noting that in 1868, the magistrates “refused to renew the dance licence for the London Pavilion because of a can-can performance ‘which a Mr. Inspector Bacon thought indecent’. The Oxford Music Hall which finally received a dance licence in 1868, lost it again in the same year, and the Alhambra suffered the same fate in 1870” (140).

depiction of the sexualized female body on stage, but also from the connection of ballet-girls to prostitution. McCarren explains the early tradition of dancer prostitution at the Paris Opéra; although dancers did not belong to the group of prostitutes who were required to register with the French police, “the habit of finding a mistress in the coulisses [wings] of the Opéra was common knowledge” (*Dance Pathologies* 75). The Russian ballet schools in Warsaw and St. Petersburg were widely acknowledged breeding grounds for prostitutes; Pudelek argues that Tsar Nicholas I and many government officials viewed the ballerinas as personal property, and the young dancers themselves were made familiar with the idea of prostitution from the age of fourteen. While, as Price points out, it would be a mistake to assume that every dancer was a prostitute, the conventional view of late-Victorian dancers was that they were all tainted with the possibility of illicit sexual activity. Ever since Veron allowed the more important French gentlemen access to the Foyer de la Danse as an irresistible attraction at the Paris Opéra, prostitution was a problem in the dance world. The promenoir of the Folies Bergères was notorious as a market for prostitutes, as was the promenade of the Alhambra; in such theatres, among many others, where ballets were an integral part of the programme, patrons could walk about on the promenade, located at the rear of the dress circle on the second level, where they could “encounter a different class of prostitute from that of the common streetwalker” (Beckson 111).

In London, particularly, the disputes surrounding the music halls centred around the question of how much the halls were encouraging debauchery, both in their alleged tolerance of prostitution and in their provocative dance performances. London was especially notorious; Beckson notes that although the number of prostitutes plying their trade in London in the late nineteenth century varied, estimates ranged as high as 60,000-80,000 prostitutes in

the metropolis. The music halls of the 1880s and 1890s, from the elegant Pavilion to the Alhambra, attracted a wide range of patrons, and the “high-class houses” of prostitution often frequented the halls to extend the range of their contacts. The National Vigilance Association attacked the Empire Theatre for its alleged encouragement of prostitution, while the Argyll gained an infamous reputation as the meeting-place for the cream of London’s prostitutes. Kift claims that by the 1870s, it was the general policy of magistrates to regard unaccompanied women in the halls as prostitutes, “reason enough for them to withdraw the licences from certain music halls” (137). Rumours swirled so thickly around the music-hall dancers, that one even claimed that a secret underground passageway connected the Lyceum Theatre in Wellington Street with a brothel.

Duncan’s Elfrida is not unaware of the reputation of the dancers of the Alhambra; her ever-so-casual announcement that she is going to dinner with the “ladies of the Alhambra” is smug in the knowledge of its shocking nature. She is fully cognizant of the cultural discourse that connects ballet dancers to prostitution, particularly at music halls like the Alhambra, and is also aware of its selling point in newspapers, claiming that “it will make such lovely copy” (161). Indeed, while the dancers themselves could provide a journalist with a treasure-house of salacious information, the dinner – Elfrida’s connection with the dancers, which she will describe to her readers – is even more of a draw. As an outsider, but one with a Bohemian passport to the backstage dramas, she is able to capitalize on the conventional Victorian equation of ballet with illicit sexuality; as she tells Janet Cardiff, Howells – the American realist novelist – would write better novels if “he would stop writing about virtuous sewing girls...he is too much afraid of soiling his hands, that monsieur; his bêtes humaines are always conventionalized, and generally come out at the end wearing the halo of the redeemed” (114).

As Dean notes, Elfrida's view of art "not only includes the immoral but also thrives upon it" (77); she argues for transmitting the gritty, real truth from behind the scenes, although Janet disagrees, claiming that "pure unrelieved filth can't be transmuted into literature" (114). From this interchange, as well as Elfrida's early association with the dancers of the Alhambra, it is clear that her venture into the Peach Blossom Company is not as unexpected as her friends may have believed. Instead, her decision to interact with the dancers in their music-hall circuit as one of the dancers herself is a product of her desire to make an impact on her readers, using the conventional view of ballet dancers as prostitutes in order to gain dramatic effect.

As an American, Elfrida was also familiar with the conventional discourse about ballet dancing in America; if anything, stage dancing was condemned more fiercely in America than in England. The Romantic ballet had invaded America with Fanny Elssler's triumphant American tour of 1840 and 1841. She performed to rave reviews in New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore, Richmond, Charleston, New Orleans, and Providence. Foreign ballet stars had come from Europe for short tours since the late eighteenth century, but neither the United States nor Canada had ballet companies of its own.<sup>7</sup> Ballet was considered entirely European; it is not surprising that Elfrida would have to go first to Paris, and then to London, in order to dance, following the path of ballet's evolution. Elssler, as the first great ballerina to come to America, fixed many of the notions of Romantic ballet in American minds – it is interesting to speculate what the reaction would have been if it had been Taglioni, the "Christian" dancer, instead of the earthy Elssler. In Washington, Congress adjourned on the day of one of Elssler's appearances, and a number of items were christened after her,

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<sup>7</sup> In America, the first professional company was the Atlanta Ballet Company established in 1929; in Canada, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet was not started until 1938.

including “boats, stocking, garters, corsets, shawls, parasols, fans, shoe polish, shaving soap, and champagne” (Anderson 51).

Although there is no specific record of Duncan seeing a ballet performance, she could not have been unaware of ballet’s presence in both America and Canada even before she travelled to London. Her time spent in Washington and New Orleans, where ballet productions were plentiful, as well as in major Canadian cities like Toronto and Montreal, would have given her the opportunity to see performances. Mary Jane Warner notes that British dancers such as Anne Fairbrother Hill performed in Canada as early as the 1840s, dancing *La Cachuca*, *Pas Espagnole*, and another Elssler dance, *La Smolenska*, in Montreal in 1842, and then touring Woodstock, London, Chatham, Brantford, Paris, Galt, Guelph, Hamilton, Toronto, Belleville, Cobourg, Port Hope, and Kingston through 1846 and 1847. By the time Duncan was travelling as a young journalist, music halls in the major cities were hosting their own touring companies.

Reactions to ballet in North America were mixed; while Ralph Waldo Emerson called the experience of Elssler’s dancing “religion” (Wagner 143), ballet drew the ire of clergymen. The Reverend Henry Ward Beecher denounced the fact that “we cannot pay for honest loans, but we can pay Elssler hundreds of thousands for being an airy sylph!” (qtd. in Wagner 141). *The Black Crook*, performed for the first time in New York in 1866 by the Great Parisienne Ballet Troupe, solidified the image of the foreign – and particularly French – dancer. Critics deemed Paris to be the “polluted fountain” from which rose all forms of vice, including immoral stage dancing. The Reverend J.R. Sikes preached in 1867 about the origins of dancing in Paris, and the “wretched females” there who worked in brothels and music halls (Wagner 202). Ladies were advised that public and private dancing skills were vastly

different; dancing masters pointed out that “it is the ambition of the artiste to astonish and delight; the lady who joins in a quadrille aspires only to glide through the figure with easy and unobtrusive grace” (Wagner 130). It was considered dangerously bad taste for a dancer in the ballroom to imitate the flashy embellishments of the stage dancer.

As the music halls grew in America during the 1870s and 1880s, condemnation grew with them; larger establishments had choruses of six to twelve girls, a smaller version of the chorus of the Peach Blossom Company. In fact, Price notes that the chorus-line form of choreography of the can-can almost certainly first appeared in the United States. These chorus dancers – the *corps de ballet* – were deemed to be little better than prostitutes. Wagner, in *Adversaries of Dance: From the Puritans to the Present* (1997), cites an unnamed police chief in New York who claimed that three-fourths of the abandoned girls in New York were ruined by dancing. The stage was considered to be the first stop on the way to sexual sin for the “vast army of naive and sweet girls brought into the ballroom and then sold to the brothel” (Wagner 243). The number of “soiled doves” in America was said to be growing at an unstoppable pace, with claims that “there are 5,000 girls lost every twelve months in Chicago.... A careful survey of all of these girls was made and they are asked to tell frankly the cause that led them into this life. This survey revealed that 68% or 375,000 attributed their downfall to the modern day dance” (Wagner 273). The rhetoric of moral panic even had certain ministers charging that liquor and the dance-hall were responsible for fifty percent of the murders of America. Although these statistics were clearly inflated, the concert-hall girls were, like their counterparts in Europe, often prostitutes on the side; if anything, there may have been more need to turn to prostitution for a young American dancer, due to her lack of solid ballet training. As a young and poor chorus girl, the American dancer had little chance

of achieving any professional success in ballet, and would of necessity have to seek money from another source.

In addition to gaining “lovely copy” from dancers, Elfrida is determined to gain inspiration for a book on the gritty real life of the dancers. She secretly joins the Peach Blossom Company, a travelling company of ballet-girls, in London, and goes with them to Cheynemouth’s music halls. The director of the company is unaware of Elfrida’s intentions, believing her merely to be another London girl down on her luck and enamoured of the stage; indeed, he congratulates himself on finding someone who he hopes will “embrace the burlesque stage seriously” (210). Elfrida, with her Paris-trained eyes, affects to see no impropriety in joining the company. She claims that she is delighted “to be of the life – the strange, unreal, painted, limelighted life, that goes on behind the curtain” (198); however, her argument has a note of defiance in it that belies her seeming indifference to convention. She admits, at least to herself, that this world is “curious, tawdry, fascinating, revolting” (210). Although she finds the backstage world of the dancers to be “curious” and “fascinating,” perfect material for an enterprising young journalist, she also cannot deny its “revolting” and “tawdry” aspects.

Janet’s father Laurence Cardiff journeys to Cheynemouth with the express purpose of persuading Elfrida to give up the scheme; he tries to reason with her, even going so far as to propose marriage to change her course. In response to Laurence’s argument that he “cannot associate it with you...it is impossible that you should do it” (197), Elfrida firmly tells him that “it is not a mere escapade, you know” (197). Clearly, Laurence does not know her as well as he has thought if he “cannot associate” her with theatrical dance, assuming that it is merely a mad “escapade.” Although Elfrida claims to see nothing wrong with wanting “to be of the life

– the strange, unreal, painted, limelighted life, that goes on behind the curtain” (198), the fact that she feels the need to defend herself at all contradicts her Bohemian air of unconcern.

Her fin-de-siècle rebellion wavers a little when Laurence threatens to watch her in the show “if you go on stage to-night in the costume I see so graphically advertised” (201), but she boldly tells him of her intimate contact with the dangerous class of ballet-girls:

I am quite one of them – one of the young ladies of the Peach Blossom Company. I am learning all their sensations, their little frailties, their vocabulary, their ways of looking at things. I know how the novice feels when she makes her first appearance in the chorus of a spectacle – I’ve noted every vibration of her nerves. I’m learning all the little jealousies and intrigues among them, and all their histories and ambitions.  
(198)

Elfrida’s description of her careful observation sounds much like the reports of Victorian anthropologists who studied dancers’ lives, such as Albert Smith’s *The Natural History of the Ballet Girl*, published in 1847. Elfrida emphasizes her close contact with the dancers – her claim that she is “quite one of them” is perhaps the most alarming statement for Laurence, but is in keeping with her anthropologist’s scrutiny of the tribe. She “notes” every aspect of the ballet-girls’ life, including learning a new “vocabulary” and “way of looking at things,” as well as performing the role herself.

Elfrida defends the dancers to Laurence, claiming that “they are more moral than you might think,” but admits that “it is not the moral one who is the most interesting” (198). This admission makes clear her journalistic ambitions; she is not interested in presenting a portrait of dancers to show their innocence or morality, but to mine the commercial potential of

sensationalist writing. She declares that “the – others – have more colour in the fabric of their lives, and you can’t think how picturesque their passions are” (198). Her hesitation before deciding to name the immoral dancers speaks to her knowledge of how Laurence will react. She has reason to hesitate, as Laurence is aghast at Elfrida’s audacity, and declares that “such a book as you propose writing would be classed as the lowest sensationalism. People would compare it with the literature of the Police Court” (199). Elfrida is furious at the comparison to the tawdry scandals of the Police Court literature, and is almost in tears as she says, “You may go too far!...There are some things that may not be said” (199).

However, Elfrida has reason to fear such a classification of her novel, since she explains that “‘one of the chorus girls has two children...She brings their little clothes into my bedroom to make. Though there is no need, they are in an asylum. She is divorced from their father,’ she went on coolly, ‘and he is married to the leading lady!’” (198). Divorce was still a scandalous subject in 1894; the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 provided for men to divorce their wives for adultery, while women had to prove both infidelity and cruelty or desertion in order to divorce their husbands. This Act remained the basis for divorce until 1909, and it is unsurprising that Elfrida is hesitant to tell Laurence of the divorced dancers and their abandoned children. Dancers’ children were, in fact, a topic of much scandalous discussion; Jowitt notes that given the lack of birth control, it is unsurprising that many dancers became mothers, with ballerinas dancing well into their pregnancies until claimed injury or illness took them off the stage for a few months. Elssler had two illegitimate children, and even the saintly Taglioni danced while pregnant; the birth of her daughter was never made public, and Taglioni herself referred to the girl as “my knee injury”(McCarren, *Dance Pathologies* 239).

Elfrida’s entrance into the backstage world of the ballet dancers resembles not only

that of an anthropologist, but also another enterprising Victorian, the female spy. The penetration into the interior area of the music-hall backstage was attempted in the 1890s by a series of women, both reformers and journalists. Faulk, in *Music Hall and Modernity: The Late-Victorian Discovery of Popular Culture* (2004), argues that the image of the female spy in contemporary late-Victorian discourse was “a convenient counter to, and apparently a more accommodating image than, that of the female professional...she stands as a cautionary case of unrestrained self-assertion” (93). In this rhetoric, Elfrida’s desire to “look into another world, with its own customs and language and ethics and pleasures and pains” (193) is suspect; instead of being seen as a professional journalist, she can be condemned as a woman whose self-interested pursuit of material is out of control. Elfrida’s unconscious desire, according to the traditional view of the female spy, might be seen as what it partially is, a degenerate wish to join the ballet-girls in their decadent lifestyle.

Elfrida’s friend John Kendal, too, is appalled at Elfrida’s decision to join the company; like Laurence, he sees her interaction with the dancers as humiliating for her and dangerous. In fact, both men seem to feel that Elfrida’s decision somehow reflects on their masculinity, perhaps as a result of their inability to control her.<sup>8</sup> While Laurence confronts Elfrida, urging her to reconsider her choice, Kendal decides to actually watch the show without telling Elfrida that he is present. He purchases tickets for the pits, preferring the anonymity of the lower-class section of the theatre to upper-class box seating. The performance is sold out, and Kendal is glad for the full house, realizing “how very much he would prefer that Elfrida

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<sup>8</sup> Her ultrafemininity is proved by the ballet, yet it is also possible to see her as masculine. As she rebuffs Laurence Cardiff’s second marriage proposal, she walks beside him in a mannish fashion, swinging “Cardiff’s light walking-stick as they sauntered” (226). Indeed, in what might be a moment of emasculation, Cardiff returns sheepishly to Elfrida, saying “I had to come after you...I’ve let you carry off my stick!” (232).

should not see him there” (204). Kendal’s desire to avoid Elfrida indicates the depth of humiliation he feels for her; although Elfrida is titillated by the exciting underworld of the dancers, Kendal hopes to evade notice from his peers as well as from Elfrida. He wonders if he will be able to recognize her on stage, and what part she will play, assuming that she will be performing only a small piece, “for so far as he knew she had had no experience of the stage – how she could have been got ready in the time to take even a small one” (204). He assumes that without previous dance instruction, Elfrida will at least only be performing a light role; however, he underestimates Elfrida’s inherent talent, as well as her natural inclination for theatrical pursuits.

When the curtain rises, Kendal searches the stage “more eagerly than the presence there of any mistress of her art had ever induced him to do before” (205). This statement is interesting, as it implies that he is accustomed to scanning the stage for other “mistresses” of ballet. Although he scans “one insistent figure and painted face after another,” he cannot see Elfrida. The emphasis here is clearly on the “pagan” kind of ballet, as opposed to that of the sylph; the “insistent” figures demand attention, and the reference to painted faces instantly casts suspicion on the theatrical dancers. The curtain goes up again:

...to a quick step, to clinking steel, and the sound of light, marching feet. An instant after forty young women were rhythmically advancing and retreating before the footlights, picturesquely habited in a military costume, comprising powdered wigs, three-cornered hats, gold-embroidered blue coats, flesh-coloured tights, and kid top-boots, which dated uncertainly from the Middle Ages. They sang as they crossed their varyingly shapely legs, stamped their feet and formed figures no drill-book ever saw.  
(205)

The *corps de ballet* of the Peach Blossom Company is relatively large for a touring company, with forty dancers, but they conduct a fairly standard music-hall performance, singing as well as dancing. Their dance, a light-hearted and flirty chorus line, involves more “figures” than flight; the crossed legs, stamped feet, and rhythmic “advancing and retreating” indicate that these ballet dancers are engaging in two of the Romantic ballet’s biggest trends: the military dance, and the travesty.

In Taglioni’s *Le Revolt au Serail* (1833) – the Revolt of the Harem, or the Revolt of Women, as it was sometimes called – the harem captives of Mahomet don warrior garb to fight for their freedom. Lynn Garafola notes that the military manoeuvres performed by the ballet’s Amazon regiment were hugely successful, launching a genre that persisted on the music-hall stage into the twentieth century. The Hungarian or Polish dance known as the Cracovienne was an especial favourite, and one of Fanny Elssler’s most famous dances. Arkin and Smith describe it as “one of those eccentric, wild, playful, semi-masculine pas, in which the danseuse sports a military hat and boots, and goes through soldier-like gestures” (31); the *London Times* provides a vivid description of one of Elssler’s performances, writing, “there she comes with her little military jacket, and her soldier’s cap, and her long plaited tails which dangle down her back, and her neat little boots, and the little brass heels which click so prettily to the music – and her entree is a triumph!” (qtd. in Warner 41). Gautier acclaimed it “the most coquettish, roguish costume imaginable. Fanny’s trim figure was encased in a white tunic, sparkling with three rows of buttons and gallons of silver braid, which enhanced the bright colors of her blue silk skirt and scarlet boots with their metal heels and tiny gold spurs” (qtd. in Cass 121). The dance emphasized the rapidity and daring of the movements, and the titillating male costume set off the dancer’s bodies.

Elfrida's troupe is clearly performing a Cracovienne, or a close relative of that dance; the "clinking steel" is likely from the spurs they would be wearing to match the "picturesque" military costume. The stamping, marching motions showcase the dancers' "shapely legs," much to the audience's approval. Laurence Cardiff sees a poster or a playbill advertising the performance, with the "costume...so graphically advertised – an Austrian hussar, isn't it?" (201). The dancers' "military costume" in this case is a shoddy approximation of the more expensive costumes used for the larger companies like the Alhambra or the Paris Opéra Ballet; the dancers wear "powdered wigs" and "three-cornered hats" from one era, but also "kid top-boots, which dated uncertainly from the Middle Ages" (205). The important aspect of the costume is, of course, the "flesh-coloured tights" that show off the dancers' legs. It is worth remembering the "distinctive costume, sufficiently becoming and sufficiently odd" (26) that Elfrida wore in Paris, which included "a Hungarian cloak" (26), possibly foreshadowing her performance of the Hungarian Cracovienne.

Such military dances were just one of the many forms of ballet dances that required ballerinas to wear male clothing; by the mid-nineteenth century, the device of the *danseuse en travestie* – female dancers in male costumes – become popular. In order to give the influential subscribers in the boxes of the Opéra ample views of legs, Jowitt notes, management often placed female *corps* members in disguise. By 1870, the *danseuse en travestie* was no longer simply a *corps de ballet* trick; even the prima ballerina donned male attire, as a woman named Eugenie Fiocre played the youthful hero, Franz, in the ballet *Coppélia*, confirming the sexual focus on women. Male dancers were eliminated in theatre after theatre; Burt, in *The Male Dancer* (1995), examines the problematic male dancer in the Romantic ballet, observing that he would "undoubtedly have got in the way of erotic appreciation of female display" (27).

Male spectators were freer to enjoy the erotic spectacle of ballet when male dancers were eliminated and their roles replaced by women dancers *en travestie*. Jowitt argues that “a woman in travesty, her curves revealed by tight breeches, was a feast for the eyes of a jaded sensualist” (59), particularly when we remember that the conventional dress for a Victorian woman went to extreme measures to avoid revealing any part of the nether limbs.

One of the best known denunciations of the male ballet dancer, by Gautier, claimed that “nothing is more distasteful than a man who shows his red neck, his big muscular arms, his legs with the calves of a parish beadle, and all his strong massive frame shaken by leaps and pirouettes” (qtd. in Burt, *The Male Dancer* 27). Gautier’s argument seems to emphasize that masculinity is out of place on the feminine stage dedicated to the display of the female body. At best, a male dancer would disrupt the constructed staging of the ballerina, and at the worst, he would be condemned as emasculated himself. Burt points out that there was no evident decline in the number of men participating in social dance at the same time, so it was clearly an issue of theatrical display; female dancers on stage were accepted, although socially denigrated, while male dancers began to be discouraged.

Elfrida and the rest of the Peach Blossom Company, in their performance of the military Cracovienne in their daring men’s costumes, clearly take part in this late Victorian development of Romantic ballet. From the beginning of the Romantic ballet, costumes were used as part of the seductive nature of the dance. Ballet tights were of supreme importance to the ballet’s success; their function was to cover and reveal at the same time. They were considered so significant to a ballet’s performance that Lola Montez, a ballerina famous for her liaison with King Ludwig of Bavaria, was fired for refusing to wear them. Janin, a ballet critic writing in 1832, notes that the bouffant – the bellling out of a gauzy skirt – is another

ruse from the early days of ballet. He points out that pirouettes were adored by a male audience, since the “pirouette begins in a lively way and then wanes, so that the tulle dress of the goddess balloons up; intense attention is paid to this by the orchestra boxes and the front rows of the parterre...The bouffante never fails to have an effect; it is usually followed by a murmur of approval, it saves mediocrity, it protects genius, it removes years and wrinkles, it is the goal of all ballet” (qtd. in McCarren, *Dance Pathologies* 79). The use of flesh-coloured tights and gauzy skirts keeps the focus on the legs of the dancer; although this costume does allow a better view of the technical abilities of the ballerina, it also fulfills its role as part of an undeniably erotic spectacle.

The *corps de ballet*, with Elfrida at its head, plays on the erotic possibilities of male clothing; as they sing and dance, the dancers accompany their performance with “a smiling flirt of their eyes over their shoulders and a kick to the rear as they wheeled, which evoked the unstinting appreciation of the house” (205). The “kick to the rear” would be emphasized by the tight-fitting military clothing and the flesh-coloured tights, and their teasing glance “over their shoulders” indicates how the choreography takes advantage of the enticing relationship between dancer and audience. This flirtatiousness is part and parcel of ballet, not only in the decadent music-hall era, but from its earliest beginnings; Louis Veron, the shrewd director of the Paris Opéra, wrote in his memoirs that along with pliés and pirouettes, teachers gave instructions in elegance and seduction:

They insisted on provocative smiles, poses and attitudes that were almost immodest and shameless. One was often heard telling his pupils, “My dears, be charming, coquettish; display the most alluring freedom in every move you make; you must inspire love both during and after your ‘pas’ and make the audience and orchestra

desirous of sleeping with you!” (qtd. in Cass 107)

In the Paris Opéra, then, the dancers are not only to be spectacles of abstract beauty, but specifically the focus of sexual desire; the students are instructed in inspiring “love” during the dance, as well as engendering lust in both the “audience and orchestra.” The ballet dancers were to “play coquettishly with the desirous gaze of the audience” (McCarren, “The Symptomatic Act” 757) as a commercial means to sell ballet. Indeed, the Paris Opéra engaged in rigorous institutional control of its dancers, igniting and fanning desire through a carefully controlled visual presence. Gautier maintained that a dancer’s “true husband...is the audience” (qtd. in McCarren, *Dance Pathologies* 88); the staged seduction of the ballerina is merely part of that relationship between a female dancer and a male audience.

The high kicks of the Peach Blossom Company emphasize their “smart masculine attire” as it contrasts starkly with the “distressingly feminine outlines of their figures” (205). It is interesting that Duncan refers to the seductive dancers’ bodies as “distressingly feminine”; indeed, Kendal betrays disgust at the sight, claiming that “the girls had the unvarying pink and white surfaces of their profession, but under it they obviously differed much, and the age and emaciation and ugliness amongst them had its common emphasis” (205). These dancers are not lofty sylph-like maidens, but are instead the sylph betrayed by the dancer’s common physicality. Instead of being young and rounded nymphs, they reveal a wide range of body shapes. Kendal’s mention of “age,” “emaciation,” and “ugliness” renders the *corps de ballet* generally unattractive. He goes still further, observing that he “should have thought it impossible to make a woman absolutely hideous by a dress that revealed her form, as the jingling and the dancing and the music went on in the glare before him” (206). Apparently, the spectacle proves him wrong. In the display of female bodies on stage, Kendal

finds the contrast between the revealing costumes and the dancers' feminine bodies upsetting, especially when combined with the "jingling" and "glare" of the theatrical scene. The modernity of the dance, from gaslights to decadent costumes, makes it difficult for Kendal to find the dancers sexually desirable.

Kendal's uneasiness with the bodies on stage is not unusual for the time period; simultaneously with the championing of the ballerina as a sylph-like figure of inaccessible beauty went the contrasting reality of the dancer portraying the sylph. Champsaur, in *L'Amant des danseuses* (1888), points to the growing trend of seeing past the illusion of the ballerina to the reality underneath, describing the dancer "in the splendour of her somewhat artificial beauty, in her glorification under electric lights...breathless with fatigue, her features sagging, the muscles of her calves and thighs bulging, the lines of her body graceless and almost brutal" (qtd. in Reff 219). Like the dancers in Degas' work, the ballet-girls – the *corps de ballet* as opposed to the prima ballerina – are often embodiments not of feminine charm but of the lower-class woman's struggle for survival; Theodore Reff notes that reports of brutal training that deformed young dancers' limbs were circulated throughout London. The erotic message conveyed by the dance was thus undercut by the vulgarity of the working-class body as seen through the eyes of the bourgeois man.

Kendal's distaste for these working-class girls, however, vanishes when he recognizes Elfrida, not in a small role, but as the leader of the chorus, "that tall girl with the plume and the sword, who manoeuvred always in front of the company – the lieutenant in charge" (206). He decides that "she wasn't absolutely hideous" (206), a very backhanded compliment, but soon believes that she is "comely every way, slight and graceful; and there was a singular strong beauty in her face which was enhanced by the rouge and the powder, and culminated in

the laugh in her eyes and upon her lips – a laugh which meant enjoyment, excitement, exhilaration” (206). Elfrida stands out among the other dancers; despite the mention of rouge and powder, usually designed to call the reader’s attention to the artificial nature of the woman in question, Elfrida’s beauty is “enhanced” by this stage makeup. Instead of being “emaciated” like the other ballerinas, Elfrida is merely “slight and graceful,” and her delight in the theatrical moment is evident in her expression and her laugh.

Elfrida’s own dramatic nature finds its true expression in the ballet; now no longer obviously self-conscious and overly dramatic in the grey streets of London, she shines on a stage where she is expected to be creating an effect in every movement. Kendal realizes that “none of the chorus-girls approached Elfrida in the abandon with which they threw themselves into the representation – that all the others were more conscious than she of the wide-hipped incongruity of their role” (206). Elfrida believes her own illusion, while the other dancers remain aware of the physical contrast between impoverished dancer and airy sylph or saucy militia – that “wide-hipped incongruity.” As Kendal sees her “in an absolutely new world of light and colour and coarse jest, it seemed that she was perfectly oblivious of any other, and that her personality was the most aggressive, the most ferociously determined to be made the most of on the stage” (206). Eschewing crude reality, she is “perfectly oblivious” of any world other than the one created on stage. She does not seem to even notice the “coarse jest[s]” in this world, throwing herself into the role as “aggressive[ly]” and “ferociously” as possible. This is not healthy behaviour for a young girl who should be dancing sedately in ballrooms; neither the physically demanding movements nor the heated emotions are appropriate for a woman of her class.

It is worth pointing out that literary critics have ignored or been unaware that this

scene refers in any way to ballet as opposed to a theatrical production of a chorus line.

Because Elfrida refers to the dance as the “chorus” instead of the French word “*corps*,” critics without a working knowledge of contemporary ballet have easily missed Elfrida’s connection to the ballet altogether. The Peach Blossom Company is clearly a ballet troupe, performing a Hungarian Cracovienne in a typical music-hall production, and Elfrida’s decision to infiltrate the ballet-girls’ ranks makes sense in the historical context of the sensationalist stories that grew up around the exotic backstage scenes; dance studies allows a new and fascinating lens through which to view Elfrida’s excursion onto the stage. Her great moment of public performance, we realize, is highly charged.

Even Elfrida’s living spaces, with their Orientalist themes, evoke images of the ballet. Oriental images had been allied with ballet since the mid-eighteenth century, when Noverre choreographed *Les Fêtes Chinoises* at the Paris Opéra in 1754; the performance was considered so wonderfully exotic that the British actor David Garrick invited him to produce it at Drury Lane the following year. The Oriental nature of subsequent Romantic ballet not only derived from the early obsession with Chinoiserie, but extended to the whole of the Middle and Far East. Jowitt notes that whether she was Persian, Indian, Moorish, or Spanish, the “Oriental” ballerina often belonged to a harem, or a temple, fighting for her chastity and her right to choose her partner; ballets ranged from Taglioni’s *The Revolt of the Harem* in the early 1830s to the late-century *The Moorish Woman in Spain*. The themes and motifs provided a backdrop for intrigues, opium dreams, disguises, and, as in so many Romantic ballets, the death of the ballerina herself.<sup>9</sup> For the male spectator, the Oriental heroine’s blend

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<sup>9</sup> Jowitt notes that the backdrops were modelled after paintings by minor Orientalists, but the music was thoroughly European.

of “boldness and submissiveness” (Jowitt, “In Pursuit of the Sylph” 58) added the thrill of imagining the domination of a woman so potent; several of the ballets that featured Oriental themes involved this kind of duality. The veiled woman stood as a figure of sexual secrecy, an inaccessible woman who held an erotic potential, and she was often seen both as a submissive slave and as an Amazon who rebelled against the men who held her captive.

Elfrida chooses to surround herself with the trappings of this kind of Orientalism; her apartment in Paris is redolent with references to the East, and even in her hasty flight to London, she ensures that every exotic piece travels with her. Her rooms in Mrs. Jordan’s boarding house hold artefacts that include an “Indian zither,” a “Japanese screen,” and an “Afghan prayer carpet” (58). Her windows are “hung with Eastern stuffs,” presumably the fashionable silks and fabrics that decorated ballet sets and costumes; a “Roman lamp” rests on the mantel, and a “Koran-holder” holds Omar Khayyam’s book (58). Her only true confidant is the little bronze Buddha who sits by her bed, and Nadie’s Spanish, or Algerian, dagger is a prized possession. In a conversation with her neighbour, she reveals her melodramatic plan for suicide; in a Persian “clumsy silver ring, square and thick in the middle, bearing deep-cut Sanskrit letters,” she keeps a little lump of poison as “a dear little alternative” (66). Laurence Cardiff recognizes the picturesque quality of Elfrida’s living space, as “the queer Orientalism of the little room made its picturesque appeal” to his senses (179); later, when he tries to entice Elfrida back from her dangerous sojourn with the ladies of the Peach Blossom Company, he notes the similarities in the ladies’ drawing room, with its “lithographs of mellow Oriental scenes” (195).

Elfrida’s delight in the picturesque Orientalism that permeates the ballet is evident not only in her material possessions, but also in her relishing of Rattray’s idea of gaining material

for a novel. He suggests that she “go on a walking tour through Spain by yourself, disguised as a nun or something” (187), a suggestion that enthralled Elfrida’s imagination; a “score of situations rose before her, thrilling, dangerous, picturesque, with a beautiful nun in the foreground” (187). Elfrida sees the situation as a theatrical scene, from the striking backdrops and exotic locations to the star figure of a nun, a figure common to the Romantic ballet. Spanish dancing, in particular, was extremely popular in themes of the late-century ballet; it was believed to derive from the Moors, and Spanish dances were seen as perfect vehicles for ballerinas to display erotic and flashing dance movements. The poet Arthur Symonds claimed that Spanish dance in ballets is “almost equally a dance of the whole body, and its particular characteristic – the movement of the hips – is due to a physical peculiarity of the Spaniards, whose spines have a special and unique curve of their own. The walk of Spanish women has a world-wide fame” (qtd. in Faulk 57).

Elfrida’s landlady in London provides yet another significant connection between the young Bohemian and the fate of the ballet-girl: Mrs. Jordan mutters to herself that “I only ’ope I won’t find ’er suicided on charcoal some mornin’, like that pore young poetiss in yesterday’s paper” (64). Although this could be a heavy-handed foreshadowing, reinforcing the melodramatic stereotype of the hysterical female artist Elfrida so ardently embraces, or a reference to an actual event, such as Veronica Micle’s suicide in 1889, it can also be seen as another allusion to the dangers of the ballet world.<sup>10</sup> Mrs. Jordan’s muttering is interesting not only in her assessment of Elfrida as a potential suicide, but also in its reference to “charcoal”; charcoal burning was a danger in the small closed bedrooms of dancers like Elfrida. In fact, fire of all sorts were an omnipresent threat for the dancer, as a large part of the Romantic

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<sup>10</sup> Veronica Micle, an imperial Austrian-born Romanian poet of the Romantic school, committed suicide by arsenic.

ballet's revolution involved the new open flame gas-lighting; theatrical sorcery was easier to conjure, with flickering contrasts of brightness and gloom appropriate to the spectacles of nocturnal or supernatural landscapes. However, the dangers of this lighting were immense, not to the audiences, but to the ballerinas themselves. The gauzy tutus were dangerously flammable; Gaynor Minden notes that ballerinas hated skirts made of safer fabrics such as muslin since they were heavy and dull-looking, and fireproof coating made costumes lose their billowy, diaphanous qualities.<sup>11</sup>

Elfrida's decadent life causes anxiety for her friends as well as her landlady; although literary critics have noted the severity of the reactions to Elfrida's dancing, most have simply attributed it to claims of impropriety. As we have seen, understanding the stage dance as ballet opens up a significant cultural discourse that enables readers to grasp a range of material and social realities associated with Elfrida's dancing. If ballet-girls were linked with prostitution, through the institution of the patrons on the promenade and in the green rooms, Victorian thought also centred on a consequent problem: venereal disease. In the nineteenth century, a public furor arose over the sexual epidemic of syphilis, which intensified as the

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<sup>11</sup> Taglioni's protégée, Emma Livry, seen as the heir to the sylph, was ignited backstage in a rehearsal for *La Sylphide* in 1862; she was badly burned and suffered horribly for eight months before dying. Clara Webster caught fire in *The Revolt of the Harem* in 1844, rushing offstage in a blaze of screams, while the horrified audience watched, as no one thought to close the curtain; she died three days later. Although there were dozens of other fatalities and injuries, these two dancers seemed to symbolize the dangerous fate of ballerinas, as they flew like moths literally too close to the flame. Indeed, Emma Livry's horrible death was seen as a direct consequence of her vanity and sacrifice to her art, as she was requested to coat her costume in fireproofing, but refused; she even signed a waiver releasing the Paris Opéra from any responsibility. Elfrida's theatrical dependence on her costumes, her determination to sacrifice all to her art, and her eventual suicide, all link her not only with Romantic poets, but with the blazing deaths of the ballet-girls.

century drew to a close.<sup>12</sup> Medical estimates of the syphilis infection rate were alarmingly high; Elaine Showalter, in *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (1990), points out that in the early 1880s, Dr. Charles Mauriac calculated that there were 5,000 new cases a year in Paris, while experts estimated that by the turn of the century the percentage of infected men was as high as 20 percent, with the number of contagious syphilitics in France at a million. Although syphilis was incurable until the twentieth century, the rates of the disease were actually beginning to decline in the 1890s; nevertheless, hysteria over the disease rose steadily throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Victorian nerve specialists complained of rampant syphilophobia among male patients.<sup>13</sup>

The rhetoric of moral panic extended to the ballet-girls and their form of prostitution. Dancers were often seen as *fragile* and ill, partly as an extension of the role of sylph, but more from the physical exhaustion of their work. In his 1847 examination of ballet dancers, Smith

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<sup>12</sup> Elaine Showalter, in *Sexual Anarchy*, highlights the similarities between the fin-de-siècle discourse of sexuality, the theatrical body, and disease regarding syphilis and the twentieth-century hysteria over AIDS.

<sup>13</sup> Despite the fact that more men carried syphilis than women did, the spread of the disease was deemed principally to be the result of unregulated prostitution. The major source of infection, men were told, was the body of the prostitute; she was “the agent of corruption and contamination, whose putrid body bred stench and disease” (Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy* 193). In a pattern common to many countries, the foreign-born prostitute became the alleged source of this contagion; in England and North America, this foreign figure was almost exclusively seen as French. Indeed, Price notes that many French prostitutes moved to London, where they could ply their trade with less official harassment. The controversial Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869, primarily intended to control the spread of contagious diseases in the armed forces, highlighted the fact that women were seen as the problem; all prostitutes and women who were assumed to be so – the latter having to prove that they were not involved in prostitution – were compelled by law to undergo medical examinations, with the possibility of nine months’ detention in hospital. The Acts were repealed in 1885, but prostitutes – either foreign-born or of the lower classes – were still sources of anxiety. The major crisis in class relations at the turn of the century led to many condemnations of the netherworld; particularly in London, the lower class “was seen to live in slums, breeding disease, ignorance, madness, and crime, problems some eugenicists felt were so intractable that the poor should not be allowed to reproduce” (Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy* 5).

observed that the rigours of training, the abuse of the body in performance, and the poverty of the profession showed on the dancers' bodies when they were still very young, noting that "the effects of this artificial existence are usually painfully visible. Their lips are parched and fevered; their cheeks hollow and pale, even in spite of the daub of vermillion hastily applied by the dresser; and their limbs nipped and wasted" (19).<sup>14</sup> McCarren comments on Smith's account, pointing out that it reflects the popular connection of ballet dancers with illness, including emotional illness. We have seen, in Chapter One, the concerns with the medical dangers of ballroom dancing; the dangers of theatrical dancing were elevated significantly, with social reformers looking for signs of prostitution in dancers, such as "deplorable hectic flush...great prevalence of sunken eyes, drawn features, and thin lips" (Engelhardt, *Seeds of Discontent* 137). It is interesting that a "sign of prostitution" would, in this case, be seen through illness; if a woman is diseased, then she must therefore be engaged in prostitution.

In fact, a network of associations in the nineteenth century linked "dance performance to prostitution, to syphilis, and to hysteria, both on the level of practice and on the level of theory" (McCarren, *Dance Pathologies* 12). Dance and madness had long been linked in medical discourse and in the popular imagination, which saw "hysteria" (by definition a disease of women) as a particularly performative form of madness and was fascinated by narratives of dancing mania, of girls driven to madness and death by dancing. Dance and madness, in fact, have been long linked in medical history, dance history, and the cultural imagination. Indeed, the traditional link between dance and madness was reinforced in the medical terminology, which referred to various forms of hysteria as "choreas," because they

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<sup>14</sup> There is much research done on the contemporary issues of anorexia in dancers in today's ballet companies, an inheritance from the Victorian age; see Judith Hanna. The incidence of anorexia nervosa runs as high as seven percent in professional dance schools in North America and Europe.

resembled dancing. McCarren notes that the history of hysteria is tied to a conception of hysterics as theatrical.

The fears that connected dancing with prostitution, and prostitution with syphilis, were common in America; Wagner notes that the tone and substance of later nineteenth-century arguments against stage dancing charged that it contributed to “prostitution, venereal disease, the development of the modern woman, and the breakdown of the family” (394). Duncan would have grown up well aware of the discourse surrounding the nature of the stage, and her character Elfrida is no less conscious of the supposed dangers. Elfrida is exactly the kind of foolish young girl at risk for hysteria; her past indicates a nervous predisposition that makes unsurprising her foray into dangerously dramatic dance. Her father tries to regulate her reckless behaviour, wanting her to stop reading and painting after eleven o’clock, but Elfrida insists on “developing her character” late into the night. To this statement, Mr. Bell “usually replied that whatever she developed, he didn’t want it to be headaches and hysteria” (15). At an early age, Elfrida is understood – at least by her more solicitous parent – to be prone to the feminine ailment of hysteria.

She continues this pattern in Paris; when she hears her friend Nadie’s news of a painting’s success, her jealous emotions boil up inside her, resulting in a “sick headache” which causes her to eject her friend from her apartment with “almost hysterical imperativeness” (52). Elfrida’s excessive emotions – interestingly linked to artistic success – are associated by the narrative with hysterical behaviour. In diagnosing Elfrida’s character, Kendal is said to be “thinking of the extra drop of nervous fluid in Americans he had been reading about in the afternoon, and wondering if it often had this development” (127). He is appalled at her audacious statement of egotism, and is searching for a means of understanding;

this “extra drop of nervous fluid” – here attributed to Elfrida’s nationality – allows him to diagnose her rampant vanity and theatricality.<sup>15</sup> At the end of the novel, the success of Janet’s novel has a “hysterical” (214) effect on Elfrida, and it is this, combined with her own seeming artistic failure, that contributes to her suicide. Although Elfrida does not die from syphilis, it is significant that her predisposition to the hysterical aspects of the disease is aggravated and deepened by her time spent with the ballet dancers; her suicide marks the end of her tragic dabbling in the art of ballet, with all of its attendant emotional and medical dangers.

*A Daughter of Today* is what Ann Ardis calls a “boomerang” novel, in which the New Woman fails in her experiment of an alternative lifestyle. As Linda Dowling notes, in “The Decadent and the New Woman in the 1890s” (1996), such novels were intended by their authors to portray the New Woman’s dangerous limitations, and are both useful and interesting as significant expressions of pervasive cultural anxiety. Dean observes that Duncan, unlike the stereotypical New Woman – in this case, Elfrida herself – assumes that most women are formed for marriage, and will choose the maternal role as the most attractive and natural path. Elfrida’s fate, as a ballet dancer who is inevitably led to seduction, rejection of married life, and hysterical suicide, speaks volumes; though her book is published six months after her suicide, her death is an implicit acknowledgement that her chosen path is not acceptable.

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<sup>15</sup> Dean notes that Duncan’s criticism of the United States, as expressed in her American characters, “is similar to that of other Canadians of her time. Many Canadians felt that because the US constitution centred on qualities such as personal freedom and individualism, it fostered an unstable personality and chaotic community” (127).

Duncan's exploration of women's experiences in the working world and as artists is complicated by its international dimensions; Elfrida is an American living in Paris and then London, in a novel written by a Canadian who ultimately ended up in India. Although Elfrida is an American, Canadian readers would have seen Elfrida's North American identity as significant to Canadian concerns; the Old World/New World was a primary dynamic in which both Canada and the United States understood their national development, as we have seen in earlier chapters, and the impact of Old World decadence on a dangerously impressive heroine was also relevant to Canadian readers. By sending an American girl back to the Old World, Duncan explores the urban decay of the fin-de-siècle cultural centres of Paris and London in contrast to the American focus on individualism and progressive ideals. Indeed, Misao Dean points out that Duncan takes full advantage of Canada's status as the middle ground between Britain and the United States; she suggests that it is "perhaps in this tension between the conventional Victorian Janet and the shockingly modern Elfrida lies the most 'Canadian' aspect of the novel" ("Introduction" x), as it follows the motif that appears in many Canadian novels, including *Wacousta*, that sets up a triangle of opinion represented by the US, England, and a middle ground between them (by implication, Canada).

The disease-ridden ballet, linked with the problematic modernity of the music hall, allows Duncan to discuss the North American New Woman as a dancer. The health of the nation – any nation – is dependent on the physical health of its citizens; Elfrida's experience in the *corps de ballet*, her unchecked hysteria, and her subsequent death, all point to a warning for a Canada now in its Confederation era. As the young nation moves towards the turn of the century, Duncan provides its citizens with a cautionary tale, using a brash young American caught in the Old World webs of decadence and decay.

## Chapter Five

### Nature's Healing Dance: Isadora Duncan, Delsarte, and L. M. Montgomery

As the dangerously decadent 1890s came to a close, a new vision of dance was being formed in North America, one which would attempt to counter the connections between dance and illness; modern dance, as envisioned by dancers such as Isadora Duncan, would create a nation of healthy, strong bodies. Indeed, modern dancers advocated dancing as the means to moral and spiritual health in addition to physical freedom. The discourse surrounding freedom and artifice in dance, as modern dancers rebelled against the strictly regulated movements of ballet, led to a discussion of the importance of movement in its most natural form. This philosophy of dance was addressed almost exclusively to women, and became inextricably linked with women's social and political reforms. The physical, mental, and spiritual health of women could be accessed and strengthened through rejecting the formal hypocrisy of nineteenth-century movement, and returning to the creative, instinctive movement of nature.

The vision of a creative, empowering nature permeates L. M. Montgomery's fiction, and has been commented on by many scholars. What has gone unremarked thus far, however, is how this vision is articulated through the contemporary language of dance and movement. The repeated emphasis on "Anne's dancing feet" (*Anne of Green Gables* 63), and her almost spiritual desire for artistic expression, Valancy's need for an outlet, through movement, from her family's oppression in *The Blue Castle*, and Emily and Ilse's "moonlit revels" (*Emily of New Moon* 206), provide just a hint of the fascination Montgomery appears to have had with the capacity of movement to free the soul. Through examining *Anne of Green Gables*, the

*Emily* series, and *The Blue Castle*, we can see that contemporary ideas about the freedom of dance and the inspirational power of nature are integral to Montgomery's texts.

Isadora Duncan was born in 1877 in California; she was fond of saying she first danced in her mother's womb. Certainly, she was dancing from a very early age, starting to teach neighbourhood children to wave their arms gracefully in what the six-year-old Duncan informed her mother was her "school of dance" (Terry 20). As a young adult dancing in private salons and small theatres, Duncan took her audiences by storm. The reactions of other dancers and artists were astounding: Edith Wharton claimed "that first sight of Isadora's dancing was a white milestone to me. It shed a light on every kind of beauty," the dancer Ruth St. Denis maintained that "For Isadora, I would do battle. To reject her genius is unthinkable," and the sculptor Auguste Rodin asserted that Duncan was "the greatest woman I have ever known...sometimes I think she is the greatest woman the world has ever known" (qtd. in Gottlieb 550). These reviews were typical of the ecstatic superlatives bestowed on Duncan throughout her life; while some traditionalist ballet critics denounced her style, even her most bitter detractors did not attempt to deny the level of impact she had on the artistic community.

Duncan hated the artificial constraints of classical ballet, claiming in her autobiography that "I am an enemy to ballet, which I consider a false and preposterous art, in fact, outside the pale of all art" (*My Life* 521). Watching the great Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova, whom she admired despite her mode of dance, Duncan observed that "the whole tendency of this training seems to be to separate the gymnastic movements of the body completely from the mind. The mind, on the contrary, can only suffer in aloofness from this rigorous muscular discipline" (*My Life* 522). At the Russian Imperial Ballet School, she

watched the young dancers going through “those torturing exercises...like so many victims of a cruel and unnecessary Inquisition,” and was more than ever convinced that ballet “is an enemy to nature and to Art” (*My Life* 523). Lillian Loewenthal explains that by the beginning of the twentieth century, new forms and ideas were already emerging in the other arts, while “ballet alone remained a complacent, insular institution of archaic forms and constraining movements floundering in a maze of intricate artifice” (4). Duncan believed that ballet ignored art’s highest mission, to express the inner soul; she deemed exterior physical action without interior motivation unacceptable for a true dance art.

Not only did she view ballet as antithetical to a modern dance form, but she also recalled nineteenth-century arguments against ballet, as seen in the previous chapter; ballet’s causal relationship to ill health became one of her primary cases against it as a violation of the human body. She passionately denounced the crippling of the dancers’ bodies, claiming that the audience

see no farther than the skirts and tricots [tights]. But look – under the tricots are dancing deformed muscles. Look still further – underneath the muscles are deformed bones. A deformed skeleton is dancing before you...the ballet condemns itself by enforcing the deformation of the beautiful woman’s body! No historical, no choreographic reasons can prevail against that! (qtd. in Kurth 31)

Duncan, like Sara Jeannette Duncan before her, thought that ballet’s physical influence on the dancer’s body could only result in harm. Her emphasis here, on the deterioration of a specifically female body, is significant; Duncan’s philosophy was almost exclusively directed towards women.

While Duncan was not as deeply concerned as other commentators with the immorality of ballet, she did recognize a spiritual lack that exacerbated the physical damage for the dancer. She wanted to free dance from its fetters of artificiality and excess, and return it to a state of natural movement; Andre Levinson, a ballet critic who deplored many of Duncan's innovations, softened his tone after her death to describe her form of dance, noting that she represented the theme that has so often captured "humanity in dark hours: the return of the golden age, the promise of paradise regained, that 'state of nature' which had been fallacious fiction when imagined by J.J. Rousseau" (541). He points out that Duncan deplored hypocritical constraint – both in dance and in life – and that her dance sought to free one's natural instinct from civilization's stifling control. Instead of submitting to ballet's rigorous discipline, she "would dance as the bird sings, according to her heart's impulses, the emotion of her body, the inspiration of the hour that passes, and without knowing how, listening to nothing except her spirit" (540).

Duncan believed that this kind of instinctive, natural movement would provide humanity with a connection to the natural world that had been lost. In an essay from 1902, she asserts that the movement of "the free animals and birds remains always in correspondence to their nature, the necessities and wants of that nature, and its correspondence to earth nature. It is only when you put free animals under false restrictions that they lose the power of moving in harmony with nature, and adopt a movement expressive of the restrictions placed about them" (qtd. in Kurth 104). Through the years, in both her writing and her speeches from the stage, Duncan pointed to a wide array of nature-based influences on her creative vision, claiming that "my inspiration has been drawn from trees, from waves, from clouds, from the sympathies that exist between passion and the storm" (qtd. in Kurth xii);

other sources included Botticelli's *Primavera*, certain composers – Schubert, Beethoven, and Chopin in particular – poetry, and “the free glad gold of the oranges and the California poppy” (qtd. in Kurth 21). Duncan recognized that the natural occurrences of waves, winds, and plants had their own rhythms, and she sought to create a dance form that harmonized with those rhythms.

Although Duncan advocated naturalness, Susan Au observes that she did not intend to abolish formal structure or order; instead, she believed that the forms of natural objects reveal design. Some critics charged that her dance portrayed only mindless self-expression, but Duncan claimed that “even in nature you find sure, even rigid design. Natural dancing should only mean that the dance never goes against nature, not that anything is left to chance” (qtd. in Jowitt 76). Not all dance critics have been kind; Lincoln Kirstein, cofounder of the New York City Ballet, claims that Duncan “introduced a form of narcissism into dance, the ‘curse of Isadora,’ promoting the idea that dance was all about the self-expression of the moment rather than an art form that took professional training from others in the field” (Bradley 84). But Duncan did advocate a dance discipline, and a technique that could be taught; she simply wanted the discipline to be a healthy, natural exercise, and the technique to be based on innate rhythms.

Children, she believed, would be most receptive to this technique; according to Joseph Mazo, Duncan wanted to teach children to dance “by making them feeling human beings who would express their emotions in movements natural to them” (48). Since she rejected the tension and artifice of society, Duncan's dance necessitated a return to “such basic patterns as walking, skipping, running, falling, and turning” (Foster, *Reading Dancing* 154) – movements which were performed naturally by children. Duncan's aim, in her own dance, was to

replicate the innate movements of the child; she observed her young niece dancing by the sea and realized that the child's dance

seems to me to contain in little the whole problem on which I am working. It seems to reflect the naturally beautiful motions of the human body, in the dance. She dances because she is full of the joy of life. She dances because the waves are dancing before her eyes, because the winds are dancing, because she can feel the rhythm of the dance throughout the whole of nature...can the dancer suggest all this and remind men of it in winter time, in cities? (qtd. in Terry 57)

The youthful joy in natural movement suggested, to Duncan, a means of recapturing the essential harmony of life lost in decadent urbanism.

Duncan was not interested in creating theatrical performers, but spiritually rich and healthy children; she argued that instead of forcing dance technique on young dancers, one must first "teach little children to breathe, to vibrate, to feel and to become one with the general harmony and movement. Let us first produce a beautiful human being" (qtd. in Loewenthal 35). She founded a succession of schools in Europe, in Germany, France, and Russia, in which students were taught an alternative physical training method. She believed that "the healthy, mentally and physically alert child must have a holistically regulated environment" (Loewenthal 36), including fresh air, clean surroundings, wholesome food, medical check-ups, supervised academic activities, and an exercise regimen. The students at her schools were exclusively female; as Amy Koritz points out, while Duncan would occasionally comment on the appropriateness of her instruction for boys as well as girls, her theories of dance and education were based on the assumption of the dancer as female. She

legally adopted and supported some thirty or forty children during her life; the six Isadorables, her premier students who toured the world with her, were among them.

Her own two children, Deirdre and Patrick, born out of wedlock, were drowned in the Seine in 1913; the world, which had been shocked by her outspoken defense of her unmarried state, poured out its sympathy. Indeed, Duncan's occasionally scandalous personal life helped her to become a figure of the women's rights movement; in impassioned essays and speeches, she argued for the connections between the freedom of dance and women, claiming that

The dancer of the future...will not dance in the form of nymph, nor fairy, nor coquette, but in the form of woman in her greatest and purest expression. She will realize the mission of woman's body and the holiness of all its parts. She will dance the changing life of nature, showing how each part is transformed into the other. From all parts of her body shall shine radiant intelligence, bringing to the world the message of the thoughts and aspirations of thousands of women. She shall dance the freedom of woman. (qtd. in Kurth 105)

Modern dancers, from Duncan to her contemporaries like Ruth St Denis, Loie Fuller, and Maud Allan – as well as the next generation led by Martha Graham – struggled to find new forms to express humanity's experiences through the dancing female body; it is significant that the first dissenters from the techniques and narratives of ballet were women.<sup>1</sup>

Felicia McCarren notes that Duncan's position as a leader for women's liberation was tied to the feminist educational impetus in North America, in which dance became associated with health, dress reform, and women's education. Duncan faced the problem of establishing

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<sup>1</sup> Maud Allan was born in Canada in 1873, but raised in California; like Duncan, she danced barefoot in a Greek tunic. She relied heavily on the London elite for patronage, and focused on an Oriental-themed dance; however, her *Salome's Dance* effectively ruined her career, as its overt sexuality alienated her audience.

the body as a legitimate form for artistic expression at a time when, as we have seen, female display of the body was immoral, and staged dance performance of the body could be connected to prostitution; Koritz observes that Duncan was able to “neutralize the pervasive association of public dancing by women for pay with sexual display” (51) by refusing to dance in music halls, and by drawing on the highly valued visual arts, particularly Greek sculpture, to assert the aesthetic legitimacy of her feminine display. She dressed in a Grecian-style toga, alone on a bare, classically draped stage, and danced to music by the great composers of the nineteenth century, including Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Chopin, Schubert, and Wagner.

Duncan’s liberating philosophy of modern dance extended to refusing to wear corsets – or even shoes – when dancing; she claimed that “if my art is symbolic for any one thing, it is symbolic of the freedom of woman and her emancipation from the hide-bound conventions that are the warp and woof of Puritanism. I would rather dance completely nude than strut in half-clothed suggestiveness as many women do today” (qtd. in Roseman 44). Duncan’s quite conscious opposition to “suggestiveness” in contemporary clothing, as well as her outspoken denunciations of jazz, to which I will return briefly at the end of this chapter, helped temper the perceived radicalism of her calls for women’s emancipation and dissociate her dance from sexuality; as Sally Banes notes, the liberation she advocated was very much a product of her historical moment, and her association “of women’s identity with nurture and nature” (Banes 75) allowed North American society to accept aspects of her dance philosophy.

Many of her fervent supporters simply ignored the sexual aspects of dance, claiming that Duncan transformed dance into something holy; even Levinson, who often spoke against Duncan’s style, argued that “one cannot so stir masses, heretofore indifferent to dance, solely

by modifying types of steps or certain habits in costume...her coming responded by necessity to some kind of anticipation, some expectation. Everything in her became for the audience the living symbol of their most secret aspirations” (541). While Duncan was an admitted atheist, she often danced and spoke of resurrection and redemption, and described her dance as a spiritual healing; she maintained that she came “to bring about a great renaissance of religion through dance, to bring the knowledge of the beauty and holiness of the human body, through its expression of movement” (qtd. in Roseman 66). As Au observes, Duncan had no use for the complicated and overtly sexual stories of the prevalent ballets of the time, but wanted her dances to speak directly and intimately to her audience.

One way in which Duncan was able to stage her dancing without the censure that was accorded to ballet was to turn to the Greeks. In 1899, Duncan went to England with her mother and siblings, and found inspiration in the Elgin Marbles at the British Museum. She later travelled to Greece, noting in her autobiography that when she and her brother Raymond first arrived, they knelt down and kissed the soil, proclaiming, “Prepare, O ye Muses to dance again!” (qtd. in Cass 32). As Susan Foster points out, classical Greece had served as a model for choreographers both during the court dance period and in the eighteenth century, but Duncan’s vision relied less on Greek culture or mythology than on her conception of the Greeks’ ideas about the soul and the body. After a 1903 performance in London, the actress Ellen Terry leapt to her feet and turned to the audience, saying, “Do you understand this is the most incomparably beautiful dancing in the world? Do you appreciate what this woman is doing for you – bringing back the lost beauty of the old world of art?” (Bradley 83); Duncan’s aim of revitalizing a “lost art” of dance from a legendary golden age was understood by audiences from an early date.

This Grecian emphasis was not created from nothing by Duncan; rather, she was building on a Victorian American ideal of the Greek system. Peter Kurth explains that “to be ‘Greek’ in Victorian America was to be pure, clean, simple, virtuous, serious of purpose, and devoted to the humanist principles of science, literature, philosophy, and art” (21). The Greek ideal of beauty had much in common with Anglo-Saxon notions, “tall, slim, proportioned” (Bradley 87), an ideal that could describe the tall, stately heroines of Montgomery’s fiction, or Duncan herself. The emphasis on physicality in Greek statuary and art underpinned acceptance of well-proportioned and healthy North American bodies. Patricia Bradley argues that the Greek ideal of physical beauty contributed to the success of the Delsartian school, one of Duncan’s direct influences, about which more will be said later. Physical education classes promoted the necessity of exercise to gain a healthy, beautiful body; accepted clothing for such classes vaguely resembled Greek tunics, much like Duncan’s trademark chiton. The power of the Greek ideal in American culture meant that Duncan, as an embodiment of the admired Grecian values, was socially sanctioned to dance in ways that would have been strictly condemned in earlier theatrical dance.<sup>2</sup>

L. M. Montgomery was born into the ferment of this modernist dance moment, in Clifton, Prince Edward Island in 1874, only three years before Duncan. Montgomery’s mother died of tuberculosis when she was still a baby; she was raised by her maternal grandparents in Cavendish. After attending Prince of Wales College and Dalhousie University, Montgomery worked as a teacher in several island schools, as well as for local newspapers *The Chronicle* and *Echo*. Her short stories were published in several magazines,

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<sup>2</sup> The Greek influence on Montgomery’s fiction, besides the use of physical culture classes, can be seen particularly in the Emily novels. For example, Emily is proud that “Dean says I have a good profile – ‘pure Greek’” (26), and she wears her hair in a distinctive “soft ebon ‘Psyche knot’” (264).

newspapers, and journals; in 1908, her first novel, *Anne of Green Gables*, was published. A writer of over 500 short stories, 500 poems, 20 novels, and posthumously published journals, Montgomery was the first Canadian woman writer to be made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in Great Britain, and was also appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire. As Irene Gammel notes, “no other author has come to be associated so forcefully and emotionally with the nation’s cultural heritage” (“Making Avonlea” 3).

In the first literary examinations of twentieth-century Canadian authors, literary critics were reluctant to allow Montgomery a place in the Canadian canon; the first serious examinations of Montgomery’s work did not emerge until the mid-1960s. Today, however, there needs to be no apology for Montgomery, as testified by scholarly organizations such as the L. M. Montgomery Research Centre at the University of Guelph, the L. M. Montgomery Research Group, sponsored jointly by Ryerson University, the University of Alberta, and the Osborne Collection of Early Children’s Books, and the L. M. Montgomery Institute in PEI; there are frequent international conferences focused solely on Montgomery research, as well as hundreds of articles in scholarly journals.

Montgomery’s novels, like Duncan’s dancing, privilege female autonomy, the natural world, and a focus on health in childhood. In the *Anne* and *Emily* series, as well as in Montgomery’s adult novel, *The Blue Castle*, the female protagonists must forge their own healthy communities; both Anne and Emily are orphans, and Valancy Stirling has only an unloving mother. All three lonely girls turn to nature – and movement within nature – to find both health and companions, and all three are rewarded by finding love in nature. While it is unlikely that Montgomery saw one of Duncan’s performances – her journal never mentions such an incident, though Duncan was performing in New York when Montgomery visited – it

would have been nearly impossible to avoid hearing about Duncan's philosophy; Helen Thomas notes Duncan's "enormous influence" on the North American public, which reached even to the corners of Prince Edward Island, whether welcome or not. We can see this influence in Montgomery's characters, as they embody Duncan's nature-based movement theories.

Let us begin with Montgomery's most famous, and first, dancing girl – Anne Shirley. Anne is always in motion; from the moment she is introduced, her tongue and imagination whirling, she is contrasted with the static, conventional members of Avonlea society. Marilla, the dry spinster who adopts Anne, typifies the viewpoint of the culture, as she is "always slightly distrustful of sunshine, which seemed to her too dancing and irresponsible a thing for a world which was meant to be taken seriously" (12). Sunshine, as an element, is considered "irresponsible" by its very "dancing" nature. When Marilla takes in the orphan Anne, whose "dancing feet" (63) dominate the text, her life is changed. Anne moves about Green Gables, "bound[ing]" (65) across the kitchen, "fly[ing]" (50) to Marilla, and "danc[ing] up" (62) to objects. She recognizes and is comfortable with her chosen form of motion, announcing that "I'll fly over to Mrs. Lynde's garden and set the flowers dancing" (76). Anne understands that her movement is swift enough to be called "flying"; her flight is also intimately connected with both nature and dance, as her swift passage will "set the flowers dancing."

Indeed, Anne is deeply linked with the natural world. Elizabeth Epperly, in "The Visual Imagination of L. M. Montgomery" (2002), points out Montgomery's Romantic worldview, noting that, like Wordsworth and Emerson, "she lived with nature and was transported by it. She focused on nature as a way to understand and to illustrate the human heart and as a way to commune with those who were also inspired by natural beauty" (85).

Like Duncan, Montgomery's art was highly influenced by her perception of nature as both inspiration and comfort. And although her fictional landscape is informed by her love of the Prince Edward Island community in which she grew up, it is not confined to that island; Janice Fiamengo observes that "Montgomery's landscape description is highly portable...proved by her descriptions of Ontario, which reveal the same interests, emotional responses, and habits of language familiar from the Anne books. From first to last, Montgomery's primary focus is the magical spell exerted by nature" (231). This magical spell allows Anne to find "in trees, flowers, and streams a substitute family claimed in the absence of parents or other blood relatives" (Fiamengo 232). This "substitute family" of nature never leaves Anne's heart, even when she has gained the love of a human family.

Trees, in particular, are Anne's closest friends, and they appear in the text as animate beings themselves; it is a common occurrence for the birches in the hollow to "wave joyful hands as if watching for Anne's usual morning greeting from the east gable" (95), among other references to mobile and highly conscious entities. Anne herself is described with reference to the movement of her beloved trees, as Charlotta the Fourth points out "that fashion of walking as if you were a bough swaying in the wind" (*Anne of Avonlea* 324). Charlotta is enraptured by Anne's movement, and finds it both distinctive and graceful; even young Yankees can see Anne's intrinsic connection to nature and its movement. It is interesting that the trees are almost always depicted as female; like Duncan, Montgomery is primarily interested in women's experiences, an interest which seems to extend to viewing nature as an exclusively feminine entity.

It is worth noting these moments of figurative language about dance, as well as scenes of literal dancing; in Montgomery's work, the metaphoric use of dance imagery as significant,

as it is based on the philosophy articulated by Duncan which argued that the universe was literally dancing. The spiritual movement of the universe was thought to be made manifest in everything, including trees, stars, and waves, and one's connection to the dance of the natural world indicated a unity that was intrinsic to the growth of one's soul. These are not mere clichéd phrases, but convey more than just conventional description; due to the connection with Duncan, Delsarte, and the Theosophist ideals about nature's movement, Montgomery's figurative dance language is pertinent for analysis.

In the first few days after Anne's arrival, Marilla is "thoroughly worn out trying to follow the gyrations of Anne's thoughts" (75). Anne's tongue, indeed, is never still, and Marilla sees her young charge's thoughts as circling endlessly, rather than staying within well-grooved patterns. In fact, Marilla seems to distrust Anne's innate need for movement, in thoughts, words, and physical actions; she conceives "it to be her duty to drill Anne into a tranquil uniformity of disposition as impossible and alien to her as to a dancing sunbeam in one of the brook shallows" (166). Here, again, we have Marilla distrusting sunshine, and again due to that natural element's "dancing" nature, as she believes her "duty" lies in eradicating that part of Anne's character. This time, we see Anne's point of view, as she finds Marilla's desired "tranquil uniformity of disposition" to be both "impossible" and "alien" to her innate personality. Anne is linked to that sunbeam as it plays in the water, and the narrator makes it clear that Marilla is not malicious in her attempts to quiet Anne's actions and reactions, but merely incapable of understanding.

The "uniformity" Marilla wishes for is the antithesis of both modernity and nature. She tries to keep Anne firmly tied to the earth, and to earthly practicality. The young girl's movement, so linked to her emotions, gyrates as wildly; Marilla warns her, "for pity's sake,

don't fly up clean into the air," in a warning the narrator deems "not unnecessary, so uplifted and aerial was Anne's expression and attitude as she sprang to her feet" (137). The "uplifted and aerial" nature of Anne is emphasized throughout the series; her movement is consistently upward, and light, and her imagination is also often described in terms of flying. Her spirit is often "in some remote airy cloudland, borne aloft on the wings of imagination" (38), as opposed to resting quietly in the earth-bound dreams of her friends. Anne informs Marilla that "If I wasn't a human girl I think I'd like to be a bee and live among the flowers," to which Marilla responds dryly that "Yesterday you wanted to be a seagull" (61). Bees, birds, and other airy aspects of nature are all more familiar to Anne than the plodding beasts of the ground.

Anne, as "the outsider representing the world of the imagination, and the beauty and life associated with nature" (Sorfleet 182), changes the insular community of Avonlea villagers, expanding their horizons and allowing them access to her imaginative landscape. Anne's childlike movement, so like Duncan's ideal, brings the outdoor world into a community which had rejected the joyousness of its life. Anne comes "dancing in with her arms full of gorgeous boughs" (114); the significance here is that she is dancing *in*, literally moving indoors carrying the beauty of nature with her. Her dance gives those who remain inside an innocent and carefree reminder of what lies outside. Anne also comes "dancing home in the purple winter twilight across the snowy places" (137), having gained a "home" to which she can dance. And her dance has changed her audience; the placid and practical Diana has "black eyes dancing with merriment" (211) when she is with Anne. As a grown woman, Diana demonstrates the influence of Anne by naming her daughter "Anne Cordelia." We see Anne's effect on Marilla, when "the spring was abroad in the land," and even that woman's

“sober, middle-aged step was lighter and swifter because of its deep, primal gladness” (196). Marilla succumbs to the gladness of spring, and her own movement echoes the childlike motion of Anne’s.

Although Anne’s exuberant movement is intuitive, she does take some movement technique lessons, in a Duncan-like style, at school. Miss Stacy’s “physical culture exercises” (175) are an innovation about which Avonlea is unsure; Mrs. Lynde claims that she has “never heard of such goings-on and it all comes of having a lady teacher” (175). The town assumes that Miss Stacy’s gender affects her teaching style, but Mrs. Lynde’s proclamations are intended to portray only the mistrustful, negative viewpoint, as the narrator makes it clear that “Miss Stacy was a bright, sympathetic young woman with the happy gift of winning and holding the affections of her pupils and bringing out the best that was in them mentally and morally. Anne expanded like a flower under this wholesome influence” (176). The “wholesome influence,” which includes both intellectual and “moral” growth, is linked to a natural blooming, as of “a flower.”

As in Duncan’s schools, Miss Stacy’s exercises are intended to encourage children’s good physical health. Anne announces to Marilla that the exercises “make you graceful and promote digestion” (177). A healthy girl, then, is both to be “graceful” in her movement, and to have an understanding of basic self-health care; no wonder the Victorian Mrs. Lynde is shocked by these classes, as they discuss the details of the inner body, down to “digestion.” As in Duncan’s schools, these classes would have been performed outside as often as possible, in part to claim the space that a one-room schoolhouse would not have accommodated, and in part for the health benefits of movement in nature. Miss Stacy tells her young pupils at the end of the school year to “Have the best time you can in the out-of-door world and lay in a

good stock of health and vitality and ambition to carry you through next year” (226). The youthful exercise of being outdoors can “carry” one’s “health and vitality” through the long school year.

Physical culture classes might be mistaken for regular gym classes by today’s reader, but Montgomery’s audience would have understood that these classes were dance classes, based on an international movement of physical education. A wide-ranging and popular development, physical culture included physical training such as gymnastics and calisthenics, as Kaija Pepper notes, along with “the belief that fitness, posture and physical poise affect a person’s emotional and spiritual state” (18). Indeed, the word “gymnastics” is itself misleading for current readers; “aesthetic gymnastics” or “Delsartian gymnastics,” which swept North America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, were very different from today’s gymnastics. François Delsarte (1811-1871) was a music teacher and movement analyst from France who created a new system for analyzing movement based on the belief that human physicality directly manifested human spirituality. Susan Foster explains that Delsarte’s system was used in the growing physical culture movement “to inspire self-expression by cultivating relaxation, equilibrium, and flexibility – the attributes of a natural body – so that the body would immediately make clear a person’s sentiments” (*Reading Dancing* 156). The Delsartian system stressed freedom and harmony of movement, but it was essentially a system designed for actors and musicians; the American disciples of Delsarte expanded the philosophy into a woman-centred, health-based dance class.

Deborah Jowitt claims that the physical culture movement aligned itself with other movements concerning the liberation of women: liberation from corsets and tight, heavy clothing, from unbalanced diets, and from a lack of fresh air and exercise were all part of its

emphasis on a wholesome moral climate. More like rhythmic improvised calisthenics with musical accompaniment than like a rigidly disciplined ballet class, the physical education curriculum was the model for women's colleges, public schools, and girls' schools like those of Isadora Duncan. Most commonly taught by women – like Miss Stacy in *Avonlea* – these classes were felt to integrate the capabilities of mind, body, and spirit. They were also closely related to expressive techniques such as elocution and oratory, as well as tableaux vivants, or “living statues,” that were a popular pastime for women; Anne's success in these realms mirrors her abilities in the movement classes.<sup>3</sup> In 1894, the young Montgomery recorded going “with Perle to the Assembly room to watch the calisthenics exercises” (*Selected Journals I* 144), and Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston note that the Montgomery scrapbook has a cartoon of this gymnastic physical culture class, labeled “Vassar, '94, doing calisthenics” (*Selected Journals I* 404) – of two girls exercising, to the horror of an elderly aunt.

With the increasing emphasis on the health of children and women came a corresponding emphasis on healthful and aesthetic dance as part of education. Private schools of oratory and elocution, as well as women's colleges, adopted Delsartian content and techniques in the late nineteenth century. Wagner observes that advocates of the Delsartian system of physical culture urged its healthful advantages; the new century's concept of a healthy, athletic woman, enlarged by popular journals and the new psychology cultivated by G. Stanley Hall, stressed the critical importance of regular exercise. Hall, in 1904, maintained that “right dancing can...serve both as an awakener and a test of intelligence, predispose the

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<sup>3</sup> Anne is gifted at elocution; her recitations, untrained though they are, are considered to be almost of professional quality. At the White Sands Hotel, the “professional elocutionist, Mrs Evans” (249), compliments Anne on her interpretation of her selections, and the night is considered a triumph.

heart against vice, and turn the springs of character toward virtue” (qtd. in Wagner 236). The combination of physical and metaphysical worlds allowed dance to transcend its late descent into disrepute; leaving the music hall behind, dance as imagined by Duncan and the Delsartian system seemed to offer women an escape from the Victorian handicaps of femininity.

Duncan absorbed the message of Delsarte’s work, specifically the connection between body and soul; although she later denied any influence from him, it would have been difficult, Jowitt notes, for a “bright serious young person with theatrical aspirations growing up in America in the 1880s and 1890s *not* to have been influenced by Delsarte” (*Time and the Dancing Image* 89). Most historians of dance take for granted Duncan’s exposure to Delsarte, based on her own system of movements and her early recorded comments, including to the *New York Herald Sun* in 1898, that “Delsarte, the master of all principles of flexibility, and lightness of body, should receive universal thanks for the bonds he has removed from our constrained members” (qtd. in Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image* 78).<sup>4</sup> Delsarte had given the public a framework in which to consider new forms of dance; Isadora stretched that framework, while still working with the heart of Delsartian science: “strength at the centre; freedom at the surface” (Jowitt, *Time and the Dancing Image* 81). The combination of spirituality and science held a strong appeal for Duncan, as emphasized by the American interpretation of Delsarte by Steele MacKay and Genevieve Stebbins, that a woman’s body was not to be repressed.

Anne takes the lessons she learned in Miss Stacy’s class with her as she leaves childhood behind; she retains her innate connection to the natural world, and with it the

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<sup>4</sup> Duncan also preferred to omit any mentions of her ballet training; although she claimed in her autobiography to have taken only two lessons and then left in disgust, there is evidence that she studied with Katti Lanner in London and Marie Bonfanti in New York.

practice of allowing her soul to manifest itself in her body's movement. She still sees flowers, wind, and abstract ideas in terms of dance, whether in a "dancing splendour of red poppies" (*Avonlea* 1), "hope...like a dancing fountain" (*Avonlea* 48), or "the night winds with their wild dances beyond the bar" (*House of Dreams* 40). Anne understands Marilla's advice, however, and adds practicality to her outbursts of feeling; in what could be seen as a thoroughly Duncanesque dance scene, Anne and her friends perform a nature-based dance in the woods of Avonlea. "'Let us dance around it like wood-nymphs,' cried Anne, dropping her basket and extending her hands. But the dance was not a success for the ground was boggy and Jane's rubbers came off. 'You can't be a wood-nymph if you have to wear rubbers,' was her decision" (*Avonlea* 135). Anne recognizes the natural desire to "dance...like wood-nymphs," born out of a spontaneous connection to nature and the physical joy of being young and alive, but also sees the peril in being overly romantic; the amusing picture of Jane in rubber boots in a boggy dance tones down the sentimentality of the dancing, and allows Anne – as well as the audience – to accept the impulse without having to condemn the frivolity of the gesture. As Laura Robinson points out, Anne's development must combine agency with conformity, and she appears to recognize her ability to negotiate these two forces when she "reassures her adoptive mother Marilla that she has not changed; she is only 'pruned down and branched out'" (35). It is worth noting that, even here, Anne uses a nature metaphor to describe her ability to combine both the practical and the imaginative.

In *Anne's House of Dreams*, Montgomery delineates the significance of dance as freedom in no uncertain terms. Anne goes down to the shore one lonely night, and is inspired by her own happiness to

‘dance and sing...There’s no one here to see me – the sea-gulls won’t carry tales of the matter. I may be as crazy as I like.’ She caught up her skirt and pirouetted along the hard strip of sand just out of reach of the waves that almost lapped her feet with their spent foam. Whirling round and round, laughing like a child, she reached the little headland that ran out to the east of the cove; then she stopped suddenly, blushing crimson; she was not alone; there had been a witness to her dance and laughter. (87)

Anne’s definition of the dance as “crazy,” and her blush upon being seen in her dance do depict the dance as something out of the ordinary, but the description of her childlike behaviour does not evoke shameful images. Unlike references in texts to ballet, there are no indications of sexuality, depravity, or illness, only the recapturing of a youthful innocence.

Indeed, Anne’s only defense to Leslie, the “witness to her dance and laughter,” is to laughingly admit that the sea “seemed so free – so untamed – something broke loose in me, too, out of sympathy. That was why I danced along the shore in that wild way” (89). Leslie’s captive life as wife to a mental invalid prevents her from expressing a clean joy, instead turning her pleasure in nature into a sick jealousy of others’ freedom; although she says she does not find Anne’s dancing “crazy,” she cannot mimic Anne’s movements until she is free from her cage. In case her audience did not properly absorb the lesson of Anne’s dancing in *Anne’s House of Dreams*, Montgomery takes the opportunity in the next Anne novel, *Anne of Ingleside*, to reiterate the point. At a Ladies Aid quilting session, the gossiping women discuss others’ foibles; when Myra Murray says, “I used to dance and sing...on the shore, where nobody heard me,” she is told, “Ah, but you’ve grown wiser since then” (203). The women associate dancing with childhood and thus something to be put aside, but Myra disagrees, saying, “No-o-o-, foolisher...Too foolish now to dance along the shore” (203).

Unlike Anne, who retains her ability to access the interior rhythms of the ocean, Myra has lost her childlike innocence, but is at least wise enough to regret that loss.

Anne's dancing by the sea would have evoked strong images of Duncan; by 1917, when *Anne's House of Dreams* was published, Duncan was at the height of her career, performing everywhere from New York to France and Russia. She was described as "young, slender, very pretty with her vivid red hair and Irish button nose" (Gottlieb 545), a description that fits Anne almost perfectly; when the red-haired young woman dances by the shore in an excess of spirit, responding to a wildness in the sea's movement, and momentarily letting go of her earthly ties to husband and home, it would have been difficult for readers not to have seen Duncan in the picture. Duncan sought a natural movement in harmony with "the motion of the universe" (Bradley 84); Anne's description of the rhythm of the ocean affecting her own movements is a perfect example of modern dance's valorization of the instincts that allow a body to express the rhythm of the natural world. Indeed, Duncan's obsession with the ocean might have struck a chord with Montgomery; in a 1902 notebook Duncan wrote that "as a child, I danced on the sea beach by the waves...the sun danced on the waves...the movement of the waves rocked with my soul...could I dance as they – their eternal message of rhythm and Harmony" (qtd. in Terry 9). Like Montgomery, she was born by the sea, and she noted in her autobiography that "all the great events of my life have taken place by the sea" (*My Life* 10).

Another young girl whose natural instincts of movement and artistic expression echo Duncan's is Emily Starr; Margaret Steffler calls her "the most obvious and pure inheritor of a Wordsworthian temperament" (88) due to Emily's deep love of nature. Emily's receptivity to the mysterious forces of the universe, as evoked often by the Wind Woman, has been noted by

several critics, as have the intriguing issues surrounding Emily's health as the daughter of a consumptive. What many have missed is the connection between Emily's physicality and her health; the more Emily is attuned to the natural movements of an outdoors and innocent Duncan-style dance, the healthier she grows. While several critics have observed the depiction of nature in the *Emily* series, noting its significance for ecocritical and feminist approaches, my interest here is not in the depiction of nature itself, but in its relation to the language of dance.

Like Anne and Isadora Duncan, Emily relates the beauties of the natural world to dancing; the three novels of the *Emily* series are replete with references to "the dancing friendliness of well-known stars" (*New Moon* 57), rain "like fairies' feet dancing over the garret roof" (*New Moon* 180), and waves "dancing over the harbour" (*Quest* 210). In all of these cases, and literally dozens more, we can see that Emily, like Anne, recognizes the connection between nature and dance. Further, as in Duncan's and Delsarte's philosophies, Emily understands the link between her interior soul and external nature, and seems to be unable to resist expressing that connection through movement. In utter happiness over finding paper for her writing, she comes "dancing down the garret stairs," crying that "I feel as if I were made of star-dust" (*New Moon* 94); her desire for artistic expression – in the form of writing – seems also to require a physical outlet of "dancing" down the stairs. It is significant, as well, that her happiness manifests not only as childlike dancing but also as a connection to the world of nature, as Emily feels as if she were "made of star-dust."

Furthermore, Emily displays what Duncan describes as the natural desire for freedom of all living things; running from her punishment of being locked in the spare room, she says, "I feel as if I were a little bird that had just got out of a cage," and "she danced with joy of it

all along her fairy path to the very end” (112). As we have seen, Duncan believed that it is “only when you put free animals under false restrictions that they lose the power of moving in harmony with nature, and adopt a movement expressive of the restrictions placed about them” (qtd. in Kurth 104). Emily is responding to the situation with what Duncan would consider an appropriate response – an escape from that restriction, and then an expression of her “joy” through her “danced” movement. Montgomery’s heroines, as a general rule, chafe against the restrictions and constraints of their rural community; in Emily’s case, such restrictions are exemplified by her Aunt Elizabeth. Carole Gerson points to this trend, and argues that by creating “both her major heroines, Anne Shirley and Emily Byrd Starr, as orphans, Montgomery implicitly frees them from overbearing patriarchal interference” (“Fitted to Earn” 27). When they rebel against the strictures of their overbearing and elderly guardians, these young heroines are seen as natural and courageous, rather than as in need of discipline.

Emily’s connection with dance is not that of the early Emily Montague in Chapter One; she has not been instructed in any form of dance, and when asked, “Can you dance?” in the schoolyard, flatly answers “No,” in addition to the questions “Can you sew?” and “Can you cook?” (*New Moon* 80). But formal instruction in partner dancing, to which the young girls refer, is not necessary for Emily to move to the natural rhythms of her body. Like Duncan, she is primarily a solo dancer; while she does later dance with partners at the respectable “dinner-dances,” she is known for her solitary movement. By the time Emily is a teenager, it is “whispered that she had been seen dancing alone by moonlight among the coils of a New Moon hayfield... she loved a twilight tryst in the ‘old orchard’ better than a dance in Shrewsbury” (*Quest* 99). These “whispers” denote Emily’s difference from the placid young girls of Shrewsbury; like Anne at this age, she thinks less of finding a male partner at an

indoor event than of expressing her inner soul. Whether in the “New Moon hayfield” or the “old orchard,” Emily seeks some connection with nature, conveyed through movement, that most of her peers cannot understand.

Emily’s only partner in many of her youthful, natural dances is her best friend Ilse Burnley, whose kindred spirit responds to the same instinctive desire; their childlike, feminine dance is very unlike Montgomery’s depictions of mature partner dancing. When the children are still very young, Teddy draws “pictures of Ilse and Emily dancing hand in hand around it [the fire] like two small witches” (*New Moon* 144); the magic inherent in their innocence, which Teddy sees when he depicts them as “witches,” or in Emily’s many references to “fairies dancing,” is clear to the reader, even if not to Emily’s aunts. Emily retains the sense of wonder at her surroundings, and the need to express that wonder through dancing, as an adolescent; she informs her Aunt Ruth that “there is nothing more wonderful than dancing around a blazing fire” (*Emily Climbs* 158). The hide-bound and prim Ruth is scandalized by the thought, but Emily only feels sorry that Ruth will never hear the call of the wild rhythms evoked by the fire.

In another episode, when the two girls are much older, but – like Anne on the seashore – still tempted by the beauty and movement of the ocean, Emily and Ilse go bathing in their petticoats in the moonlight. Ilse points out that there isn’t a soul for miles and “I can’t resist those waves. They’re *calling me*” (*Emily Climbs* 75). Emily admits to her diary that

I felt just as she did, and bathing by moonlight seemed such a lovely, romantic thing...we undressed in a little hollow among the dunes – that was like a bowl of silver in the moonlight – but we kept our petticoats on. We had the loveliest time splashing and swimming about in the silver-blue water and those creamy little waves, like

mermaids or sea nymphs...Ilse took my hands and we danced in rings over the moonlit sands. (75)

Emily, like Anne and Isadora Duncan, has a deep connection with the sea, and is drawn by its powerful rhythms into physical movement. Both Ilse and Emily feel the “call” of the waves, and strip down to a light Duncanesque costume appropriate to the occasion; their hand-in-hand dancing “in rings” evokes images of playful children, not of sexually mature dance partners. Thus, even as she is growing up, Emily retains her spirit of innocence and wonder at the world around her, and feels bound to express her exuberance in dance.

Nature in the *Emily* series is seen not only as inspiring, but as healing, both spiritually and physically. Montgomery is explicit about its cleansing powers for the soul; after an experience with “the flash” Emily feels “a wonderful lightness of spirit – a soul-stirring joy in mere existence. The creative faculty, dormant through the wretched month just passed [when she has been quarreling with Ilse], suddenly burned in her soul again like a purifying flame. It swept away all morbid, poisonous, rankling things” (*Emily Climbs* 133). Here, we see nature not only reviving Emily’s “dormant” creative abilities, but “purifying” her soul, sweeping away the doubts about Ilse. Emily feels bound to express this spiritual connection to nature through her art; she feels compelled to write when seeing “the flash” – a moment of connection with the universe – when she is attuned to the rhythms of the world, and life seems “like a wonderful instrument on which to play supernal harmonies” (*Emily Climbs* 177). In language reminiscent of Duncan’s discussion of natural “harmonies,” Emily is moved by Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoting full passages of his poetry in *Emily Climbs*,<sup>5</sup> and wondering if

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<sup>5</sup> “The gods talk in the breath of the wold, / They talk in the shaken pine, / And they fill the reach of the old seashore / With dialogue divine; / And the poet who overhears / One random word they say / Is the fated man of men / Whom the ages must obey” (10).

she could “dare try to carry some of the loveliness of that ‘dialogue divine’ back to the everyday world of sordid market-place and clamorous street” (177). The focus on the artist’s goal of accessing some secret wisdom hidden in nature, and translating that “flash” into art intended to remind the urban “everyday world” of what they have lost, is common to both Duncan and Montgomery. Indeed, Emerson’s philosophies, as quoted by Emily, can be strongly linked with the emergence of modern dance; Myron Nadel and Marc Strauss explain that the expression “of a new self-awareness in all the arts, influenced by religions and philosophies such as Christian Science, Theosophy and spiritualism” (“Currents” 116), charged the spirit of modern dance. Ideas from Eastern philosophies such as naturalism and transcendentalism, professed by thinkers such as Henry David Thoreau and Emerson, were influential in the choreographic vision of dancers from Duncan to St Denis and Graham.

In fact, a source even closer to home provides a connection to both Duncan and Montgomery: Bliss Carman was one of the poets who was both influenced by dance, and helped to shape dance philosophies. Montgomery notes her admiration for Carman in her journal, and mentions the Canadian poet by name in *The Blue Castle*; she acknowledges him in her journal as “the foremost American poet of the present,” although she cynically adds that “that, to be sure, is not a dizzy elevation. There are no master singers nowadays” (*SJ II* 35). However, she is much taken with the “very beautiful book” that he wrote with Mary Perry King, *Making of Personality*. Montgomery describes this as “one of the most helpful books I have ever read and has done me a vast amount of good – I feel better, braver more hopeful, more encouraged, more determined to make the best of myself and life since I have read it” (*SJ I* 347). The essay that is intriguing for our purposes is on the meaning of personality, with which Montgomery engages in her journal. It is worth quoting her meditative passage in full:

Carman insists on the tri-une cultivation of soul, mind, and body – and he is right. The great lack of Christianity – its cardinal mistake – lies in the fact that it has over-emphasized the spiritual – taught that the body must be mortified – or at best, disregarded as of no importance – a false and ugly – yea, and a blasphemous doctrine – blasphemous because it lowers the ‘image of the Creator’ below the brutes. Mind and soul can express themselves only through the body and therefore we should try to make it and keep it as perfect an instrument for their expression as possible. (347)

Carman’s theory of personality is strikingly like that of Delsarte, with its emphasis on the cultivation of the trinity of “soul, mind, and body.” Montgomery agrees with Carman that the body, as an “instrument for expression,” is not unholy or base, but an essential part of the human soul.

This “very beautiful book” reads like many of the American Delsartian treatises; more interestingly, Carman’s work with Mary Perry King did not stop at theories of the body, but extended into actual dance creation. With King, who was a devotee of Delsartism herself, he cowrote *Daughters Of Dawn: A Lyrical Pageant or Series Of Historic Scenes For Presentation With Music and Dancing* in 1913, and *Earth Deities: And Other Rhythmic Masques* in 1914. These two books expressed the theories of unitrinianism, the principles of which are remarkably similar to Delsarte’s movement theories; the dances depicted in the texts are Greek in sentiment, and clearly influenced by the tenor of Duncan’s performances.

If nature in the *Emily* series is cleansing spiritually, it can also be seen as possessing physically healing properties. Critical attention has focused on Emily’s position as the daughter of a consumptive; Susan Meyer, in “The Fresh-air Controversy, Health, and Art in L. M. Montgomery’s *Emily Novels*” (2008), sees a connection between the imagination and

health. Meyer points out the strong link between Emily's well-being and her creativity, noting that the *Emily* novels "repeatedly associate Emily's bodily and artistic health...a threat to one is a threat to the other" (213). Emily must contend with the forces of narrow-minded conventionality, from her well-meaning but elderly Aunt Elizabeth, to her Aunt Ruth, who is suspicious of all things she cannot understand. Like Anne, Emily must teach those around her to embrace the imaginative powers of nature; as in Duncan's educative philosophy, healthy movement out of doors is essential for both a healthy body, and a healthy artistic capacity.

Meyer examines the "fresh-air controversy" in Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in which "physicians advocated exposure to fresh air as a means of combating rampant and deadly airborne diseases, particularly pneumonia, influenza, and tuberculosis" (209). Leaders of this public health movement had to contend with earlier beliefs about the dangers of night air; Aunt Ruth typifies this outdated mode of thinking, telling Emily that she "can air it [the room] in the daytime but *never* have the window open after sundown. *I* am responsible for your health now. You must know that consumptives have to avoid night air and draughts" (*Emily Climbs* 97). Meyer argues that these hygiene rules were "already beginning to be outdated by the 1880s, and, from the perspective of the 1920s, they looked distinctly and lethally outdated...as Emily is believed to be consumptive, and, indeed, has had a lot of opportunity to contract the disease, Aunt Elizabeth's closed windows and airless room, seen from the perspective of the 1920s, threaten her very life" (212). By the 1920s, Victorian ideas about "night air" were overturned, and advocates of fresh-air treatment for tuberculosis moved into the mainstream; inhabitants of Prince Edward Island, which had the highest rate of tuberculosis in Canada, were certainly aware that patients

with tuberculosis were instructed to rest in the fresh air, sleeping outside in exterior porches. Indeed, Dr Burnley recommends fresh air for Emily, overruling Aunt Elizabeth; he argues not only that Emily “ought to be in the open air all the time,” but also that “she ought to sleep out of doors” (*New Moon* 219).

But it is not merely fresh air that benefits Emily; Meyer’s argument regarding the significance of the fresh air debate as a metaphor for the enclosure and suffocation of Emily’s creative talent can be extended to encompass the need for movement in that air. Emily’s artistic creativity, borne on the wings of the Wind Woman, necessitates her own movement; she cannot sit idly waiting for it. Dr Burnley’s recommendation is that Emily not only be exposed to fresh air, but remain active in it, as he orders Aunt Elizabeth to let Emily go skating. While Emily retains the awareness of her position as a prospective consumptive, she rebels against the label and refuses to sit still. She rambles on long walks with her friends, noting wryly that “I shouldn’t have: I should have come right home to bed, like any good consumptive” (*Emily Climbs* 217). When visitors comment that “she probably won’t live through her teens. She looks very consumptive” (*Emily Climbs* 68), she responds furiously in her diary that “I believe in myself...and I’m not consumptive, and I can write” (76). As Meyer notes, Emily links her own physical and creative vitality; this vitality is expressed not only through Emily’s writing, but also through her movement. Her instinct is to dance, to “dance and sing and laugh through the old parlour as no Murray, not even her mother, had ever ventured to dance and laugh before” (*Emily Climbs* 81). In the same way that Anne brought new life and imagination to Avonlea through her movement, Emily’s role in *New Moon* is to break through the cobwebs of convention; even her own mother would not have “ever ventured to dance and laugh” in the parlour, and Emily is brave enough to do both.

The change between the Victorian depiction of the consumptive feminine invalid and the modernist depiction of the healthy woman dancer, as we have seen, owes a debt to the women's movement of health and activity fostered by thinkers such as Delsarte and Isadora Duncan. Like Emily, Duncan rebelled against the idea of woman as weak; Mark Franko notes in *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics* (1995) that Duncan's "demonstration of physical vitality flatly contradicted the late-nineteenth-century cult of invalidism and anorexia nervosa leading to the 'consumptive sublime'" (10). Neither Duncan nor any of Montgomery's heroines would succumb to the balletic disease as Elfrida Bell did; Duncan believed firmly that her own dancing addressed "not only a question of true art, it is a question...of the development of the female sex to beauty and health, of the return to the original strength and to natural movements of women's bodies" (qtd. in Sparshott 14). Audiences around the world responded to Duncan's display of vigor, with one critic going so far as to say that "she was physician to the spirit" (Bradley 84). John Dos Passos wrote about her that "a great sense of health / filled the hall / when the pearshaped figure with the beautiful great arms tramped forward slowly from the back of the stage. She was afraid of nothing; she was a great dancer" (qtd. in Mazo 38). It is interesting that fear and health are linked here; Emily is in good health because of her courage and determination not to be afraid of her relatives, unlike her mother before her.

Montgomery explores the connections between emotion and health even more fully in *The Blue Castle*. Valancy Stirling is another heroine who has the instinctive need to move in nature; however, that instinct has been denied and repressed even more than Anne's or Emily's. *The Blue Castle*, written in 1926, is Montgomery's most intimate look at the connections between illness and outdoors activity. Valancy has been considered sickly all her

life, locked up in her widowed mother's house with her elderly cousin; desperately afraid of her family, her overbearing uncles and hypochondriac aunts and her pretty, popular cousin, Valancy only comes alive in her imaginary Blue Castle. As imaginative and sensitive as Anne or Emily, Valancy has none of their outlets nor any hope of romance at age 29. She has no real access to movement or the natural world, and is fading away.

Valancy's delicate nature is common knowledge in her family; while she has "never had mumps – or whooping cough – or chicken-pox – or measles – or anything she should have had," she has "horrible colds every winter...and bronchitis in June" (15). She herself hates the oppressive "minute, persistent, mosquito-like questions" (2) about her health, and is "seething with rebellion" (21) against strictures such as being forced to wear flannel petticoats when her pretty cousin Olive never has to do so. In fact, her "scrawny" (6) body could be blamed partly on genetics and partly on her mother's stingy nature with both nourishing food and healthy living conditions. Valancy's extended family still whisper that "the late Frederick Stirling had caught the cold which resulted in his death during Valancy's first year of life because Mrs. Frederick would not have a fire on the twentieth of October" (12). In case the reader has missed the implications of Valancy's stifling life on her health, we are provided with the example of her Uncle James, whose "favourite amusement was to write controversial letters to the Christian Times, attacking Modernism" (53); his wife died young, and Valancy thinks bitterly that "he had killed her – quite legally. She had been smothered and starved" (53). This fate, of starvation and smothering, is Valancy's own, unless she can summon the courage to escape.

The rest of the Stirling clan provide amusing foils of supposed ill health; while Valancy is suffering from real pain "around the heart...not to speak of an occasional dizzy

moment and a queer shortness of breath” (9), her morbid cousin Georgiana insists on recounting “dolorously the names of all relatives and friends who had died since the last picnic and wonder ‘which of us will be the first to go next’” (7). Valancy’s cousin Gladys has neuritis, “or what she called neuritis. It jumped about from one part of her body to another. It was a convenient thing. If anybody wanted her to go somewhere she didn’t want to go, she had neuritis in her legs. And always if any mental effort was required she could have neuritis in her head” (53). The Stirling family never challenges Gladys’s patently false self-diagnosis, even refusing to see Dr. Trent again after he tells Gladys that “her trouble was entirely imaginary and that she only had it because she liked to have it” (25). Like Dr. Trent, Valancy sees through her poor cousin’s martyred pose, thinking “what an old humbug you are!” (53).

Valancy’s own ill health triggers the plot of the novel, as Rubio and Waterston point out; it is the doctor’s prognosis of a “fatal form of heart disease – angina pectoris – evidently complicated with an aneurism” (35) that precipitates Valancy’s escape. The knowledge that she has only one year to live “frees Valancy from the bounds of social propriety” (Rubio and Waterston, *Writing a Life* 79). Kylee-Anne Hingston, in “Montgomery’s ‘Imp’: Conflicting Representations of Illness in L. M. Montgomery’s *The Blue Castle*” (2008), examines Montgomery’s treatment of Valancy’s ill health, focusing on the way in which literature uses the disabled body and mind to express cultural anxieties. Hingston points to the much-noted “double voice” in *The Blue Castle* that challenges the dominant view of social and literary conventions, as a secondary voice behind the primary that “undermines the conventional representations and narrative prosthesis of illness in literature and culture. This voice favours difference over conformity, and ridicules those who equate physical or psychological

disability with social deviance” (195). Valancy’s clear-eyed rejection of the Stirlings’ hypocrisy allies her with this secondary voice.<sup>6</sup>

Hingston observes the novel’s reversal of the conventional assertion that health is normal and disability deviant; in this case, health is equated with rebellion and disability with compliance. The “oppressive watchfulness” (Hingston 202) of the Stirling clan prevents Valancy from leading a healthy life. As her body – and mind – are given freedom, her health is restored.<sup>7</sup> In fact, Valancy’s first rebellion, in the week after her diagnosis, involves rejecting false medical claims. She flatly refuses to be dosed with Redfern’s Purple Pills, as well as firmly saying that “I won’t be rubbed with Redfern’s Liniment...horrid, sticky stuff! And it has the vilest smell of any liniment I ever saw. It’s no good. I want to be left alone, that’s all” (37). Valancy’s refusal of her family’s medicine implies her refusal of their diagnosis of her as an incurable, sickly old maid; her next rebellion is to move in unfamiliar and childlike ways. She is caught by her shocked Cousin Stickles “sliding down the banister” (47). The latter is such an outrageous action that Cousin Stickles never divulges the “terrible thing” (47) she has seen.

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<sup>6</sup> Hingston also notes how the secondary voice reverses the stereotype of the powerless female invalid who has had forbidden sexual knowledge, in this case poor Cissy Gay, who dies of tuberculosis after the death of her illegitimate child; Cissy does not die as a direct result of her “fallen” state, but more from grief at her baby’s death, and Valancy’s fury at the smug congregation emphasizes Cissy’s good character. Carole Gerson observes that this representation of a dying unwed mother was so sympathetic as to cause “several vigilant parents to forbid their daughters to read it” (“Fitted to Earn” 25).

<sup>7</sup> I disagree with Kate Lawson’s reading of *The Blue Castle* as portraying a “Victorian” sensibility of illness; Lawson claims that “the challenge for Valancy is to make the sickroom a ‘Victorian’ one, to explore the idealist possibilities for transformation, power, pleasure, and selfhood that the sickroom offers” (238). Given the date of the novel’s publication in 1926, and Valancy’s rebellion against the Victorian morality of disease, it is unlikely that she advocates a Victorian sensibility to sickness; Hingston’s reading of health as rebellion, and disease as conformity is much more convincing.

When Valancy escapes the stifling atmosphere of her mother's house into the wilds of the "backwoods" of Muskoka, she dances; she and Barney – the man to whom she proposes marriage as part of her desire to live a full life – go to "a masquerade dance in the pavilion at one of the hotels up the lake, and had a glorious evening, but slipped away in their canoe, before unmasking time, back to the Blue Castle" (152). This brief reference to dancing proves several points; firstly, Valancy is quite capable of social dancing, despite her previously shut-in existence, enjoying herself on a "glorious evening." She is also not removing one set of conventions merely to don another, as she and Barney "slip away" in their canoe before "unmasking time"; she has no desire to stay and be part of the glittering hotel society, preferring her rustic life. The final point in this reference indicates Valancy's disregard of Dr. Trent's orders to "be careful to avoid all excitement and all severe muscular efforts" (35). Instead of remaining safely tucked into an invalid's bed, Valancy is canoeing to the hotel, dancing all evening, and canoeing home. The fact that she has no ill effects from this sort of regime speaks to the benefits of the lifestyle; although Valancy was given the wrong diagnosis, her own heart pain "bothered her very little" (150) once she is in the backwoods. Where she once had excruciating pain after a simple dinner party, her active life with Barney only strengthens her.

And her life in the backwoods is very active; Abel visits their small home, and they "dance to old Abel's fiddle" (206). Valancy and Barney go on long walks through the woods, so long that "once or twice night overtook them, too far from their Blue Castle to get back" (156), as well as canoeing, fishing, and even swimming; after Barney teaches her to swim, Valancy "sometimes put her bathing-dress on when she got up and didn't take it off until she went to bed – running down to the water for a plunge whenever she felt like it" (157). It is not

only summer days that provide evidence of Valancy's new health; she "liked to be out in the rain and she never caught cold" (155). In the winter in their Blue Castle, she is healthy and strong; the narrator takes pains to point out the change, noting that where she used to hate winter, with "endless colds and bronchitis – or the dread of it" (160), she "had not even had a cold...Valancy's colds seemed to have gone where old moons go" (160). Like Emily, Valancy goes skating, and seems "to have a natural knack of it...glorious were the hours she and Barney spent skimming over the white lakes and past dark islands" (163). Her instinctive "knack" for this sort of outdoors physical activity highlights Montgomery's promotion of natural movement. Valancy's physical appearance reflects her improving health, as "her eyes were bright, and her sallow skin had cleared to the hue of creamy ivory...she was really fat at last – anyway, no longer skinny" (150). Now that she is happy, loved, and moving freely in nature, her body responds.

In her drab existence at her mother's house, Valancy found hope only in reading the fictional author John Foster's books, which contain echoes of Emerson's philosophy of self-reliance and a deep connection to nature. Well before her own escape into the Muskoka backwoods, she is educated in the healing benefits of nature, as it soothes her soul. She feels "vaguely that if she had come across John Foster's books years ago life might have been a different thing for her. They seemed to her to yield glimpses of a world into which she might once have entered" (8). She guiltily reads passages of Foster's *Thistle Harvest* when she can snatch a few minutes alone, and feels "the strange exhilaration of spirit that always came momentarily to her when she dipped into one of John Foster's books" (18). At the beginning of the novel, when she is considering going to the doctor "about that queer pain around the heart" (9), it is Foster's words about fear that send her to Dr. Trent, forcing her out of the

fearful “spider’s web of steel” that binds her to her family; he writes that “*fear is the original sin...almost all the evil in the world has its origin in the fact that some one is afraid of something*” (25), and Valancy is motivated to change her own life. Foster’s texts already speak to her of the healing power of a life lived out of doors: “then the immortal heart of the woods will beat against ours and its subtle life will steal into our veins and make us its own forever” (18). Even before she has a chance to live Foster’s advice, Valancy’s reading foreshadows the healing transfusion from the “immortal heart” of the forest into her own “veins.”

Valancy’s previous experience with dancing is as limited as her familiarity with nature, but she is as instinctively capable of dancing as Anne and Emily; she has simply not been given the chance to prove herself, either with partners or on her own. Unlike the previous heroines, she attends dancing school when she is young; she is thrilled with the prospect, and devastated by the result, remembering “How she had looked forward to it! And how she had hated it! She had never had a voluntary partner. The teacher always had to tell some boy to dance with her, and generally he had been sulky about it” (44). Valancy’s excitement for the dance lessons shows her general desire for movement, which is stifled until her active life with Barney, but the lessons depend more on popularity than on skill. Like Anne and Emily, Valancy is more suited to solo movement than to the partner dances; the “sulky” boys who partner her do not suit her. The narrator points out the significant fact, however, that despite her lack of popularity, “Valancy was a good dancer, as light on her feet as thistledown. Olive, who never lacked eager partners, was heavy” (44). Here, again, we have our heroine dancer described in floral terms, this time as “thistledown”; Valancy’s light, airy, natural quality is contrasted with Olive’s “heavy” style. While Montgomery does not

argue against dancing schools in general, Valancy's experience suggests the superficiality of partner dancing.

Indeed, not all dancing is appropriate or healthy; Montgomery's inclusion of the dance at Chidley Corners emphasizes the danger of incorrect dancing. This dance "up back" in the country is not a nature-based expression of one's interior soul, but a rowdy, lower-class assembly. Roaring Abel, engaged as one of the fiddlers for the dance, suggests that Valancy come to the dance with him, claiming that "It'll do you good – put some colour in your face. You look peaked – you want something to liven you up" (104). Abel is on the right track concerning Valancy's movement and health, noting that dancing will "put some colour in your face," but he is wrong about Valancy's level of experience regarding these dances. Valancy, with her ideas of dances "fashioned on the correct affairs that went by that name in Deerwood and Port Laurence" (104), has no idea what to expect. At first the dance is "quiet enough" and Valancy enjoys herself, even dancing "twice herself, with a couple of nice 'up back' boys who danced beautifully and told her she did, too" (106). For a newly freed Valancy, this feels like a triumphant closure to her past life, in which "people in Deerwood had long since given up inviting Valancy to dances" (45); no longer a wallflower, Valancy is thrilled to be dancing at all, let alone to be complimented on her movement.

But as the evening wears on, she changes her mind. A new crowd arrives at the dance by eleven o'clock,

a crowd unmistakably drunk. Whiskey had begun to circulate freely. Very soon almost all the men were partly drunk...the room grew noisy and reeking. Quarrels started up here and there. Bad language and obscene songs were heard. The girls,

swung rudely in the dances, became dishevelled and tawdry. Valancy, alone in her corner, was feeling disgusted and repentant. (106)

This scene highlights the dangers of mixed-sex, lower-class dancing when combined with alcohol; while Valancy does not object to Abel's cursing, the "obscene songs" offend her ears. The dancing is specifically unsafe for the female dancers, as the girls become objects to be "swung rudely," and end up looking "dishevelled and tawdry." The dance turns hostile, and Valancy is "pestered with invitations to dance...and some of her refusals were not well taken" (107). Valancy realizes what a mistake she has made when one drunkard threatens her, claiming that "You've got to give us each a turn and a kiss to boot" (108). Now, threatened both physically and sexually, Valancy tries to free herself; she is "dragged out into the maze of shouting, stamping, yelling dancers" (108). But all is not lost – Barney Snaith saves her with a show of competent masculinity. He knocks down Valancy's abductor, and takes her out of the "maze" of savage dancers.

These dancers are not dangerous merely because of their lower-class drunkenness; they represent a style of dancing that was beginning to penetrate even the reaches of Prince Edward Island in 1926 – jazz. Montgomery makes a reference to these dancers elsewhere in the text, as Valancy sees with despair "the station with the same derelicts and flirtatious flappers" (204), representatives of the new feminine degeneracy. Isadora Duncan, too, raged against jazz music and jazz dance; as part of her conscious dissociation of the female body from sexuality, she made several strident attacks on jazz toward the end of her career. In her most famous denunciation of the movement, Duncan describes her vision of America dancing:

It would have nothing to do with the sensual tilting of the Jazz rhythm...No more would this dance that I visioned have any vestige of the Fox Trot or the

Charleston...which will contain no Jazz rhythm, no rhythm from the waist down...It seems to me monstrous for anyone to believe that the Jazz rhythm expresses America. Jazz rhythm expresses the South African savage...Long-legged strong boys and girls will dance to this music – not the tottering, ape-like convulsions of the Charleston...And this dance will have nothing in it either of the servile coquetry of the ballet or the sensual convulsion of the South African negro. It will be clean. (“I See America Dancing” 265)

As in Montgomery’s description of the primitive, savage nature of the “shouting, stamping, yelling dancers” at Chidley Corners, Duncan’s contempt for jazz stems from its African roots.

Koritz points to the racial subtext that underpins Duncan’s ideology; jazz dancing is “monstrous,” “ape-like,” and dirty, as opposed to a “clean” rhythm that does not involve movement below the waist. Indeed, Duncan completely ignored modernist inspiration by “primitive” cultures; Bradley points out that Duncan’s view of America was “as an elite, white, Europeanized monolith without a hint of the social, racial, and economic diversity” (92) that existed by the 1910s.<sup>8</sup> The necessity of Duncan’s rejection of sexuality in dance made her condemn both ballet and jazz; she links both to the distortion of the female body and mind, claiming that “toe walking deforms the feet; corsets deform the body; nothing is left to be deformed but the brain and there is not much of this in the women who dance modern dances” (qtd. in Terry 27). While ballet creates decadent and diseased dancers, jazz dancing “deforms” the brain, and turns the best flappers into savages. Valancy’s experience at Childley Corners supports this view.

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<sup>8</sup> There is a significant body of research in literary dance studies regarding American jazz; there is a great deal of work to be done in Canadian literature with regards to this fascinating phenomenon.

Fighting both Victorian ideas about decorous movement and the encroaching danger of the jazz age, Montgomery utilizes Duncan's philosophies of dance to articulate how her heroines can obtain health. Anne, Emily, and Valancy all prove that dancing can be beneficial, mentally, physically, and morally; they show that movement – particularly in nature – can free the soul. Indeed, as a footnote to Anne's dancing story, Leslie Ford – the stifled and caged witness to Anne's innocent shore dance – has her own triumph and release in dance: called by the song of Captain Jim's fiddle, Leslie "danced like one inspired; the wild, sweet abandon of the music seemed to have entered into and possessed her. Anne watched her in fascinated admiration. She had never seen her like this. All the innate richness and colour and charm of her nature seemed to have broken loose and overflowed in crimson cheek and glowing eye and grace of motion" (*House of Dreams* 133). The "innate" power of Leslie's physical health is strengthened by uncomplicated and "wild, sweet" childlike dancing.

Montgomery's vision of a creative, empowering nature is expressed through the language of Duncan's dance, drawing on contemporary ideas about the return to nature in dance. Modern dancing, with its emphasis on the expression of one's interior soul, and its focus on women's bodies, allows the young dancers of Canada access to new ideals of health. With modern dance, the discourse about dance and health, shifting in emphasis throughout Canada's history, comes full circle; as in *The History of Emily Montague*, dance is once again seen as a means to create a healthy and strong community, this time by creating healthy female bodies and minds.

## Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation is not only to provide a new look at some of early Canadian literature's most canonical texts, but to point to a new branch of research that bears examination. The connection between dance studies and literary criticism can be enriching for both sides; I believe that critics of Canadian literature need to become aware of the potential in studying the dance aspects of texts, aspects that have never been brought to light before. By understanding the moments, the language, and the metaphors of dance in these texts, literary critics can access a historically rich and culturally significant method of critical analysis.

As a dancer and a literary scholar, I feel a connection to both materials, but a good researcher need not be familiar with the mechanics of dance itself to investigate its impact on a literary text; there is a great body of primary archival materials to aid scholarly research, from dance manuals and ballet scores to film footage of more contemporary dancing. Since what the dance signifies in its cultural moment is integral to this kind of research, contemporary accounts of the dance can prove useful, particularly eye-witness accounts and critical reviews. One need not know how to reproduce the actual steps of the Viennese waltz in order to understand its impact on British society in the nineteenth century, nor know the jazz movements of the Lindy Hop to discern the cultural anxieties surrounding the African-based rhythm – although such knowledge makes for a more personal analysis. Relying on the historical accounts, and aided by dance studies, a literary critic can illuminate a text in intriguing new ways.

While dance itself changes, in both its movements and its role in society, the method of analysis can remain coherent. Using this method, this dissertation considers several major canonical texts in Canada's early literary history; in each case, dance in the text is a significant factor in the author's literary creation of a community. From *The History of Emily Montague*, the earliest North American novel, up to L. M. Montgomery's fiction of the early twentieth century, dance has played a fascinating role as the vehicle for assessing the young nation's health. In the early days of the colony, British social dance was considered essential for determining one's proper marriage partner, crucial for constructing a new society. Dance could help weed out the unwanted, maintain a healthy physicality, and allow a woman access to coded information about her partner's sustainability as a husband. It also played a role in monitoring the proper mixing and integration of the disparate peoples in the new colony. Frances Brooke and Rosanna Leprohon utilize the language of dance to portray the difficulty of choosing one's partner in the new colony, while William Kirby and John Richardson examine the dance practices of the French and Natives respectively in order to argue for the necessity of a British presence in Canada.

As the colony of Canada became a young nation, Canadian authors began to reject Old World dancing; the evolution of dance through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century changed the discourse surrounding dance practitioners in Europe. Where dance had been considered a solid foundation for and index to character, it was now seen as a questionable display of female sexuality. Nineteenth-century ballet was associated with prostitution, degeneration, and the spread of disease; Sara Jeannette Duncan utilizes the trope of the syphilitic contagion of the ballerina in order to represent the problematic nature of New World dependence on British and French models. The North American anxieties surrounding

European dance helped to create a new form of dance that spoke to a modern, healthy dancing body; L. M. Montgomery's texts emphasize the necessity of this sort of healthy movement in order to create a strong young nation.

This dissertation was originally intended to be a project with a much larger scope; I had hoped to write a survey of dance across Canadian literature, from the pre-Confederation period to the late twentieth century. This overly ambitious idea was quickly checked by the reality of time constraints, but I believe that a summary of the original chapters will give an indication of how much interesting material is still left to consider in Canadian literature. In each of these sections, I profile several canonical texts that call out for an in-depth examination of their dance facets; a critical consideration of any one of these texts would enrich the new combined field of Canadian literature and dance studies.

### **The Primitive Modern: Jazz as a Pathological Phenomenon**

While Isadora Duncan was creating an inspiring new form of modern dance, another aspect of modern dancing was coming to the fore: jazz dancing, as a phenomenon, swept both North America and Europe, exciting some and causing deep fears in others because of its African origins. As we have seen, there are clear indications that "Isadora tried to distance her improv from 'primitive improvisations of Negro jazz dance'" (Jackson 44) for good reason. The history of white anxiety about black dance is a long one, beginning in the colonial slave period, and finding its greatest expression in the concern over dance fever in the early twentieth century.

An abundance of dance-related texts articulate these anxieties; in particular, Morley Callaghan's *Strange Fugitive* (1928), Mordecai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy*

*Kravitz* (1959), Margaret Laurence's *This Side Jordan* (1960), Timothy Findley's *The Butterfly Plague* (1969) and *The Piano Man's Daughter* (1995), Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), and Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees* (1996) engage in the discourse about the pathological, contagious nature of jazz dance. In these novels, it is clear that jazz dance is a cultural symbol of primitivism; while it can potentially be freeing, it is also inherently dangerous. Harry's violent racial attack in the Arcadia Dance Hall in *Strange Fugitive* is echoed in the films produced by Duddy Kravitz, with their echoes of African dancing and aggression, and in the tensions found in *This Side Jordan's* Highlife dancing in segregated clubs. The other novels place the focus on insanity instead of violence, although murder, suicide and assault are found in all of the texts. Bully Moxon, in *The Butterfly Plague*, who dances under the train, Buddy Bolden, in *Coming Through Slaughter*, who goes "mad into silence" (106), and the two Lilys, of both *The Piano Man's Daughter* and *Fall on Your Knees*, whose forms of madness are inexorably linked with the music and movement of the times, are all associated with contemporary fears about jazz. The period's discourse of jazz includes fears of sexuality and madness, similar to the debate about ballet in the previous century, but with a specific racially inspired fear of the primitive African as connected with concerns about modernity. These fears, articulated in the 1920s and 1930s, remain in the cultural subconscious, and are reiterated throughout the century.

It would be necessary to begin such a study with the association of dance with slave resistance in North America and the Caribbean; scholars such as Walter Rucker and Myron Nadel will be helpful here, with their research on the historical dance styles of juba and ngolo as precursors of jazz dance. It would also be interesting to consider major figures of black stage dancing, from the touring members of "Jim Crow" shows to the famous Josephine Baker

in the *Revue Negre* in 1925. The “jungle music” (Burt 63) of jazz dance, combined with traditional African rhythms, manifested fears of the primitive and modernity, and the novels reflect and comment on these infection-based anxieties.

### **The Man Leads, The Woman Follows: The Problems of Gender and Dance**

Social dancing, as we have seen in the pre-Confederation British era, has been used partly as a courtship ritual, a mating dance among peers. This function of social dancing remains well into the twentieth century even as the dancing itself changes; in the modern period, gender problems arise in the dance. While the predominant narrative of social dancing to find one’s mate is still strong, it is complicated as gender roles are played out and contested. As Tullia Magrini notes, dance is “often concerned with the representations of relationships of power, dominance, defiance, and equality” (7), and representations in contemporary novels show this concern.

To aid an examination of twentieth-century gender disquiet, it would be fascinating to look at any one, or a combination, of Martha Ostenso’s *Wild Geese* (1925), Morley Callaghan’s *Strange Fugitive* (1928), Sinclair Ross’s *As For Me and My House* (1941), Robert Kroetsch’s *The Words of My Roaring* (1966), Margaret Laurence’s *The Stone Angel* (1964) and *The Diviners* (1974), Carol Shields’s *The Stone Diaries* (1993), and Margaret Atwood’s *The Robber Bride* (1993). Through a survey of canonical twentieth-century Canadian novels, one could explore dance as a sexual signifier linked all too often with impotence, misogynistic fears, and violence. The conventional demands of the dance, what Caroline Picart calls “the illusion of conventional gendered roles be[ing] played out...men lead[ing] and women

follow[ing]” (90), are frequently unmet in the literature.

Male impotence is strongly marked in *Strange Fugitive*, with Harry’s inability to Charleston in the Arcadia dancehall provoking a disastrously violent outburst begun on the dance floor. Martin Gare has a similar problem in *Wild Geese*; while the free Mark Jordan and Lind Archer can dance together in a symbol of their mature sexuality, Martin has been too repressed by the domineering Caleb to learn to assert his own masculinity. Philip Bentley continues this trend in *As For My and My House*; as Terry Goldie notes, the one occasion at which the Bentleys perform conventional gender roles is the cowboy dance, but “this moment when Mrs. Bentley is feminized and Philip masculinized is only a moment” (46). In fact, there is an earlier attempt at dance in the novel, which also fails, due to Philip’s inability to perform his masculine role.

Anxieties about sexual performance and dance, whether about impotence or loss of propriety and control, continue throughout the century. In Kroetsch’s *The Words of My Roaring*, Johnnie Backstrom, fabled dancer and hyper-masculinized male, is almost torn apart by wild Maenad-like women on the dance floor. In *The Diviners*, the tawdry dances at The Flamingo with the airmen, Eva’s abortion, and “Princess Eureka Snake Dancer” (314) all blend into a portrayal of dance as a dangerous sexual initiation for women, while *The Stone Angel* shows how male dancing can mislead and entrap the woman. Barker Flett, in *The Stone Diaries*, like Philip Bentley, is unable to dance, while *The Robber Bride* has multiple examples of the dangers of dancing with partners who cannot match one’s performance.

These novels prove the importance of examining the nature of gender and dance in literature; as Ana Sanchez-Colberg notes, “Given the recent surge of feminist analysis within

various fields of art, particularly film, theatre, and literature, it does not come as a surprise that dance has finally come under scrutiny. Considering that dance is a field about and of the body...what does come as a surprise is that this did not happen earlier” (151). Through a close analysis of these novels, we could learn how twentieth-century Canadian literature implicates social dance in the problematic construction of gender, and how this construction often fails, as partner dances serve to highlight the tensions involved in the narrative of gender roles.

### **How to Dance “Canadian”: The Language Barrier in Ethnic Dance**

Naomi Jackson claims, in *Right to Dance: Dancing for Rights* (2004), “Dancing, as one of the most popular activities in a society, as well as a highly refined art form, exists as one of the ‘cultural rights’ that is viewed as part of human rights. Historically, one can find instances in Canada when the right to dance was severely limited, as in the restriction of dancing among Native people under the *Indian Act*” (8). This historical background of oppression and miscommunication has not, by any means, succeeded in stopping the growth of any culture’s dance, although it has certainly altered cultural views of what is acceptable in dance, what kind of dance is valid, and who is allowed to dance.

In novels that tell the stories of Canada’s multi-ethnic backgrounds, dance is evidently a site of contested communication. Misunderstandings and language barriers arise in dance in the same way as they do in spoken language. I would suggest looking at several contemporary Canadian novels to see how different Canadian ethnic groups use dance as a means to search for their place in Canadian culture, either by rejecting their own form of dance, trying out a new language of dance, or integrating both into their lives. To this end, the most intriguing examples of dance can be found in Austin Clarke’s *The Bigger Light* (1975),

Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981), Jane Urquhart's *Away* (1993), Wayson Choy's *The Jade Peony* (1995), Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees* (1996), Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (1998), and Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischief* (1999).

There is, fortunately, a great deal of literary research on the problems of identity in the novels, and a substantial amount of dance studies research on the issues of cultural identity in dance; while the two have not been studied in tandem, there will be more than enough scholarly sources to help this investigation. An in-depth analysis of the implications of the presence of foreign dance forms or dancers in some of the novels, such as Shirley Temple in *The Jade Peony*, or the conflict between ballet and native dancing in *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, would be needed. In other novels, such as *The Bigger Light*, we could examine the rejection of one's own cultural form of dance in an attempt to integrate with a dominant white culture, and the effects and success (or failure) it brings. Alternatively, dance could be interpreted as a means of retaining identity in a society that denies the validity of that identity, in *Obasan* and *Fall on Your Knees*. Finally, it would be fascinating to look at *No Great Mischief* and *Away* to see how dance can reach across cultures to communicate in ways that verbal language cannot.

### **Coyote Dancing: The Sun Dance as Structure in *Green Grass, Running Water***

Following the discussion of ethnic dance in the previous chapter, and building on the pre-Confederation views of Native dancing examined earlier, one could focus on Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993). King, in his characteristically and cryptically erudite fashion, has left yet one more puzzle for the reader to uncover; in a novel full of literary and cultural jokes and cues, the significance of the Sun Dance to the structure of the novel has

gone unremarked by literary scholars. While many critics have analyzed King's fictions in terms of their narrative structures, it could be argued that *Green Grass, Running Water* uses the Sun Dance as a central structure for the novel.

The Plains Sun Dance lies at the heart of religious Native ritual for many nations across America and Canada. As Clyde Holler notes, "Before the reservation period, when Lakota cultural autonomy had not yet been seriously threatened and Christian missionary influences were as yet unknown, it was the central religious ritual of the Lakota" (xx), and this assertion applies to many other Native peoples, from Cherokee to Cree to Crow nations. The Sun Dance is an annual, communal festival that traditionally takes place in the summer; it is "celebrated outdoors, in a ritual space defined by a tree, which is cut and replanted for the purpose, forming the center of a circle" (Holler xxi). Originally a war dance, it involved a variety of forms, as it differed from one nation to the next, and even varied from year to year; however, the main structure of prayer, sacrifice, and acts to maintain the continued cultural stability of the nation remained the primary focus of the ritual. After the ban on the Sun Dance in both America and Canada in the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, the focus changed from a martial one to a "search for stability and cultural continuity" (Ellis 11).

In *Green Grass, Running Water*, King uses the structure of the Sun Dance, from its physical construction to its ritual pattern of community affirmation and identity formation, as a central figure. Using the exhaustive research available on both historical records of the Sun Dance and contemporary accounts of the ritual today, I suggest that King's novel enacts textually a Sun Dance itself. The unnamed narrator functions as the traditional emcee, telling jokes and confirming Native myths and legends in a didactic and subversively humorous manner, while Alberta's passage to motherhood (foretold in the command implicit in the name

of the Sun Dance's location: Blossom, Alberta) highlights the way in which dance is seen to birth identity, spirituality, and community. As James Cox points out in his chapter on the novel, Coyote's journey to the Sun Dance, and the freeing of the water that will nourish the cottonwoods that the Blackfoot community will need for the ritual, brings about "not doom, but a balance of destruction and creation, with a primary focus on the restoration of life" (97).

### **"The Gruelling and Ghastly Experience": High School Dance as Rite of Passage**

This chapter could bring the focus full circle, from the earliest Canadian views on social dancing to an examination of similar issues in current literature, this time in the guise of the High School dance. In Alice Munro's *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1968) and *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* (1974), Guy Vanderhaeghe's *Homesick* (1989), and Lynn Coady's *Saints of Big Harbour* (2002), the High School dance becomes the site which has long been ascribed to ballrooms, in which adolescents enter the sexualized world of adult relationships. The dance, as it has always been, is a place to find a partner; now that the focus is on the High School dance, however, it is clear that finding a mate is not the only issue. Here, there is also a liminal quality of socialization and maturation, and the consequent fear that accompanies such a passage. It is a social rite fraught with danger and tension, and is never seen as anything less than terrifying though necessary.

Barbara Cohen-Stratyner argues that, "One of the assumptions about social dance is that it serves a social purpose. In the ethnographic model, it is generally seen as a form of social organizer, reinforcing societal norms within the contexts of celebrations or mating rituals" (121). This anthropological definition of dance can be seen to a certain extent in the literature, as the young dancers bow to the conventions put in place by the High School dance

even when they do not agree with them. Guy, in *Saints of Big Harbour*, is frustrated by the divergence between what is “supposed” to happen at the dance and what he desires, realizing that “She has to be on one end of the gym with her own little gang, and I’m supposed to be off somewhere with mine. Every once in a while, we’re supposed to come together, dance, then separate until the next ballad. It’s a pile of crap” (23). But, though he rebels, wondering “*Why do we all have to be such fucking freaks*” (79), he becomes accustomed to it, succumbing to the pressures of the rite.

The fear – legitimate or over-exaggerated – of the young dancer is picked up in all of the novels. Whether the fear is of being rejected, of being unasked, of realizing that the dance will put one past “the boundaries of childhood” (*Dance of the Happy Shades* 151), or of being unable to participate properly in an adult ritual, the characters in the fiction, both male and female, recognize the overwhelming significance of the dance, even though their parents might miss it. Margaret Laurence, in her autobiography, *Dance on the Earth*, calls it a “gruelling and ghastly experience” (79), but as Vera in *Homesick* understands, it is an “obligation” (171) to the fabric of society. The High School dance, the last relics of a pre-Confederation-era insistence on codified dance for ritualized courtship, mimics its predecessor while altering its focus.

\* \* \* \* \*

Because I have been a dancer for the past thirty years, and a dance teacher for the last sixteen, a significant part of my life has been focused on movement in various forms. It seems only natural for me to find dance in literature; if anything, I am startled at how long these canonical texts have been read without any reference to dance. I hope that this dissertation opens new avenues of investigation for my two greatest loves: dance and Canadian literature.

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